

**LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY AND STUDENT IDENTITY IN MAINSTREAM HIGHER  
EDUCATION COURSES: (RE)PRODUCTION AND RESISTANCE**

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Language ideology and student identity in mainstream higher education courses: (Re)production and resistance

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## **Abstract**

Despite educators' efforts to create open-minded and welcoming environments for students of all kinds, hegemonic language ideologies are still widespread among students and instructors in institutions today (Briggs & Pailliotet, 1997; Cho, 2017; De Costa, 2016; Séror, 2008). Students continue to experience discrimination and gatekeeping on the basis of perceived language competencies through the enactment of language ideology throughout their educational careers. Furthermore, even students who adhere to dominant discourse practices are often perceived as deviating due to racial bias (Flores & Rosa, 2015). This multiple case study examined how five English language learners (ELLs) encountered hegemonic language ideologies in their mainstream courses at a North American college and how those encounters impacted their identities. Data from interviews, classroom documents, and reflective journals was analyzed utilizing discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989; Gee, 2014b), drawing on a critical post-structuralist theoretical framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to conceptualize significant concepts such as discourse, power in language, ideology, and identity. The participants in this study encountered hegemonic language ideologies predominantly through assessment practices and explicit instances of Othering. As a result, they often suffered inequitable grading practices which led to lower grades, and many expressed a lack of confidence in their language competencies. While many students took up these oppressive ideologies and reproduced them through how they positioned themselves and others in interactions in and outside of class, some participants resisted hegemonic language ideologies. The implications of these findings highlight the need for educators and educational institutions alike to recognize hegemonic language ideologies as a significant contributing factor to institutionalized racism. Thus, this study reaffirms the need for language awareness or language diversity training for mainstream

instructors and students to examine both their own ideologies and exactly what constitutes equitable pedagogical practices (Bucholtz, 2010; Gee, 2014a; Lippi-Green, 2012; Wolfram, 2009). In particular, the use of critical language awareness which informs students about language ideologies in comparison to linguistic facts may help empower them to resist the hegemonic language ideologies they encounter throughout their educational career (Fairclough, 1989; Siegel, 2006).

## **Lay Summary**

This multiple case study explored how English language learner students experienced language ideologies, or discriminatory attitudes and practices regarding language, in their college-level courses and how those ideologies impacted them. Data was collected primarily through interviews spanning over a three-month term as well as reflective journals kept by the participants and documents from their courses such as graded assignments, syllabi, and rubrics. Findings indicated that the participants experienced a wide range of oppressive practices in their classes ranging from grading practices that placed an inequitable emphasis on unrealistic grammar accuracy to explicit instances of racism. The participants often reproduced these ideologies by referring to themselves as less competent than native speakers of English. However, one participant in particular exemplified how students can resist inequity and oppression they experience in their academic careers.

## **Preface**

This thesis is the original work of the author, Danielle Burrell-Kim. Ethics approval was required for this research and approved by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) on December 20, 2019. The BREB number is H19-03195.

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## List of Symbols

<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
(1.0)	Timed pause
[words	Overlapping utterances
@	Laughter
#	Unintelligible word or syllable
#word	Uncertain word
((word))	Supplemented word to maintain participant confidentiality

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## **Dedication**

To the many students who inspired this study.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Despite educators' efforts to create open-minded and welcoming environments for students of all kinds, students experience discrimination based on many aspects of their perceived identities, including language. Students experience oppressive language ideologies throughout their educational careers, often resulting in detriment to their grades, educational opportunities, and/or identity (Briggs & Pailliotet, 1997; Cho, 2017; De Costa, 2016; Séror, 2008). Yet, mainstream instructors receive little to no training regarding language ideologies, linguistics, or language variation (Bucholtz, 2010; Gee, 2014a; Lippi-Green, 2012). Thus, this situation warrants a closer examination of language ideologies within higher education mainstream courses.

Language ideology, as Philipson (1992) describes it, is “ideologies, structures and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources.” (p. 47). That is, hegemonic ideologies are widespread beliefs, with little to no empirical support, that work to empower dominant discourse communities. Language ideologies are embedded with cultural, moral, and political values and extend to beliefs regarding individuals' identities and worth based on their use of language; they are also deeply intertwined with issues of race (Woolard & Schieffelin, 1994). Two examples of this that are frequently discussed in research (Holliday, 2015; Lippi-Green, 2012; MacSwan, 2018) and prevalent in this study are native speakerism and standard language ideology (which will be discussed in greater detail along with other language ideologies in chapters 2, 4, and 5). Native speakerism is founded on the belief that native speakers of standardized English do not make grammatical errors and that their language never deviates from the standardized variety of English. However, in reality,

no speaker maintains a singular register or variety, as language naturally changes over time and space (Lippi-Green, 2012).

Within education, standard language ideology often manifests in the glorification of grammatical correctness and of so-called “non-accented” speech (an ideology within itself) and results in the devaluing of the ideas and intellectual abilities of students that speak marginalized varieties of English. Early conceptions of deficit theory went as far as to frame those who do not speak standardized English as handicapped (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 84). For example, bilingual speakers who are perceived as deviating from the standardized varieties of one or all languages they speak may be labeled as semilingual, or as only having partial knowledge of multiple languages (MacSwan & Rolstad, 2008). While such beliefs regarding language and dialect have been challenged by some scholars, deficit attitudes remain, positioning students only in terms of what they (supposedly) cannot or do not do, while ignoring the legitimacy and sophistication of their own language varieties and intellectual property (Lippi-Green, 2012). The emphasis on academic English can act as a vessel for these ideologies since this register is regarded as closely resembling varieties that the upper class is perceived as speaking, further privileging the privileged while denigrating marginalized variations of English by labeling them as improper or out of place in educational settings (Gee, 2014a; Gee, 2015; MacSwan, 2018; Siegel, 2006).

These beliefs are then mobilized to further oppress marginalized groups, often Othering them by treating and marking them as “different and inferior from the dominant social group” (Griffin, 2017). As a result, ELL students may experience isolation from their peers, inequitable treatment from their instructors, and unfair grading practices, all of which can impact their academic careers in the long term (Séror, 2008).



However, language ideology may not always be enacted by subject teachers consciously or intentionally; part of the problem may lie in myths and misconceptions about language, language acquisition, and the learners themselves. Many subject teachers receive little to no training in working with linguistically diverse populations and have little to no multicultural or multilingual experience themselves (Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013). To exacerbate the problem, in-service and pre-service teachers are typically unexposed to the concept of language ideology or how to be aware of it. When they do learn about language ideology, instructors are not always responsive and require ongoing support and training (Weaver, 2019; Wolfram, 2010).

## **1.2 Research Purpose and Questions**

Through this research, I hope to contribute to a body of knowledge that will aid future researchers and instructors in fostering more equitable and inclusive environments for ELLs. I aim to explore the enactment of language ideology through a critical perspective with the goal of understanding and disrupting the status quo of inequity in education. I have chosen to examine language ideology in college-level mainstream courses specifically because of the lack of language awareness training provided to mainstream instructors (Wolfram, 2010; Gee, 2015; Lippi-Green, 2012); the strong impact mainstream courses have on students' academic careers such as by influencing their grade point average (GPA) and/or progression in their areas of study; and the entrenched nature of language ideology in education (Wolfram, 2010).

Educational institutions widely disregard linguistic fact in favor of hegemonic language ideologies despite the role of fact-based sciences in education (Wolfram, 2010). Wolfram (2010) refers to the abundant misinformation about language varieties in educational institutions as “entrenched mythology”, emphasizing the role of education, or lack thereof, in promoting the tolerance of unfounded claims regarding language, and especially standardized English (p. 132).

In order to change the status quo, the issue of language ideology in intuitions must be addressed with continuous support and training for instructors, based on empirical research, to build awareness and critical perspectives (Wolfram, 2010; Weaver, 2019). Therefore, the impacts of entrenched language ideologies in higher education must be further examined to identify ways in which hegemonic language ideologies may be disrupted.

Furthermore, I seek to examine student identity in relation to language ideology so as to give instructors and researchers insight into how to better support students, whether through critical pedagogy or interpersonal interactions. As oppressive language ideologies have perceivable impacts on students' education, so too they may react to language ideologies and hegemonic treatment they experience in their classes through shifts in their identities (Shen, 1989). It is my hope that in light of this, instructors and institutional powers, such as policy makers, deans, and presidents, in educational institutions may see the urgent necessity to examine the language ideologies promoted within educational contexts.

While much work has examined language ideology in secondary education (De Costa, 2016; Lippi-Green, 2012; Weaver, 2019), often in countries in which English is taught as a foreign language (Cho, 2017), there has been a call to increase critical understandings of language ideology in North American contexts (De Costa, 2016; Siegel, 2006; Weaver 2019). Thus, this qualitative multiple case study aims to explore the following questions: 1) How do ELL students narrate their experiences with their instructors' practices in mainstream courses, particularly with regard to hegemonic language ideologies? 2) What is the impact of these language ideologies on English language learner students?

### **1.3 Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis is organized in six chapters. In the first chapter, I introduce the topic of hegemonic language ideologies in educational institutions and presented the research questions. In chapter 2, I discuss the critical, post-structuralist theoretical framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018) used throughout this study as well as review literature related to the research questions. Chapter 3 addresses the research methods used in this study. In chapter 4, I present my findings addressing how students encountered language ideologies in their mainstream courses. Then in chapter 5, I discuss how hegemonic language ideologies impacted the participants and their identities. Lastly, in chapter 6, I further discuss the findings in light of related research and present the implications of these findings, specifically for educators and institutions.

## **Chapter 2: Theory and Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This study draws on a critical, post-structuralist theoretical framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to conceptualize significant concepts such as discourse, power in language, ideology, and identity. In this chapter, I will discuss how I approach language and identity as a social practice (Bucholtz, 2010; Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Fairclough, 1989; Gee, 2014a) as well as the implications of approaching this study from a critical perspective. Furthermore, I will review a variety of studies on language ideologies in education which exemplify both how language ideology may be enacted (e.g., Briggs & Pailliotet, 1997; Subtirelu, 2015) and some of the implications of experiencing oppressive language ideologies for students' identities and academic careers (Cho, 2017; De Costa, 2016; Séror, 2008; Shen, 1989).

### **2.2 Discourse, Ideology, and Power**

From a sociolinguistic perspective, communication is rarely literal or straightforward; rather, multiple levels of meaning are construed through the contextualization of social life and discourse practices. Discourse, as defined by Fairclough (1989), is “language as social practice determined by social structures” (p. 17). ‘Discourse’ may be used to refer to the texts produced, how they are produced, and the larger sociocultural contexts within which communication occurs (Bucholtz, 2010; Gee, 2014a; Fairclough, 1989; 2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). These discourses extend beyond the production of language and include social practices and influence how people understand and interact within the world around them (Bucholtz, 2010; Gee, 2014a; Fairclough, 1989; 2003). As a social practice, discourse is both influenced by society and in turn changes society. As Bucholtz (2010) states:

For many scholars outside of linguistics...the notion of discourse is often broader than it is for linguists, referring not simply to particular instances of speech or writing but more generally to the way in which a topic (such as race) is conceptually framed at a particular historical and cultural moment, especially within powerful institutional contexts like government, medicine, law, or education. Such cultural discourses are akin to ideologies in that they are culturally shared sets of beliefs that are often understood as simply “the truth” yet in fact bring social reality into being (p. 7).

Throughout this study, I regard ideologies and discourses as related yet separate, as discourses bring about and maintain ideologies through social practice and interaction (Bucholtz, 2010; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Thus, meaning is established within social contexts, and the same text may be understood differently between contexts. Furthermore, in any text, there is an intermingling of different discourses and genres, also known as interdiscursivity (Alford, 2015; Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 2014a). Understanding these complexities, discourse analysts examine the linguistic details of texts (as I describe in more detail in the next chapter) in relation to their larger social contexts to uncover deeper meanings within said texts.

Power, then, becomes a central concern in critical theorizations of discourse. Power comes from a variety of sources and is embedded within discourses and larger social institutions. Dominant discourses refer to the prevailing discourse communities with their social norms and practices that hold more power over the social world as well as grant more power to people who are recognized as belonging to dominant discourse communities (Fairclough, 1989; Gee, 2014a). In any interaction, people draw on and negotiate existing power relations, institutional or personal, influenced by factors such as class, race, social role, and gender. These power imbalances influence interactions and individuals’ identities within discourses. Interpersonally,

power influences the boundaries of interaction and the social practices deemed acceptable within the interaction. At the institutional level, power pertains to who can shape and change discourse communities and the social practices within them. Thus, dominant discourses are continually shaped by the powerful to maintain their own power. However, that is not to say power cannot be resisted or removed; power is always a site of struggle, and all social development must come from power struggles (Fairclough, 1989).

Thus, hegemony is essential to understanding the process of constructing ideology. As Hammar (2017) states, hegemony “refers to the process through which the dominant ideology is reproduced in political and discursive processes, subordinating others and granting consent to the dominant ideology” (p. 374). Hegemony gives way to the erasure of marginalized people and their social practices, including language (Hammar, 2017). And through hegemony, ideologies are maintained to empower dominant discourses.

From Fairclough’s (1989) perspective, power and hegemony are maintained through the coercion and/or consent of marginalized groups; dominant discourses are often internalized by marginalized people to varying degrees and thus often cause marginalized people to indirectly consent to their own oppression. Eagleton (2007) describes this as “how people come to invest in their own unhappiness” (p. 21). Throughout this study, and others (Cho, 2017; De Costa, 2016), this is reflected through instances in which ELLs take up and reproduce language ideologies which are oppressive to them.

Fairclough (1989) originally conceptualized coercion as using threats, mainly of physical harm, to control people. While through the lens of linguistic imperialism, which often occurred with the support of militaristic colonization (Philipson, 1992), physical threats may be used, contexts such as higher education can coerce marginalized students to accept hegemonic or

oppressive language ideologies through non-physical means such as through threat of academic failure, expulsion, or the revocation of funding (such as in the case of scholarships) as well as obscuring vital information, resources, or services from particular student groups (Kubota, 2002).

Consent, as opposed to coercion, is the process whereby marginalized people accept and/or take up hegemonic ideologies even where they disadvantage them. Consent may be full or partial, also referred to as acquiescence or reluctant compliance. In part, consent is achieved through the naturalization of oppressive language ideologies deeply entrenched in educational institutions (Fairclough, 1989; Wolfram, 2009). Oppressive language ideologies, such as prescriptivism and standard language ideology, are framed as normal and essential parts of instructor and students' experiences in higher education (Curzan, 2016; Gee, 2014; Lippi-Green, 2012; MacSwan, 2018). And as such, students come to view their encounters with hegemonic language ideologies as normal or even justified experiences throughout their academic careers. In turn, they then internalize and reproduce hegemonic language ideologies through the ways they view and position themselves and others (Cho 2017; De Costa, 2016). As a result, hegemonic language ideologies become more cemented in educational institutions (Fairclough, 1989; Wolfram, 2009). Coercion and consent are critical to the maintenance of ideologies. As Bourdieu (1991) argues, a language's power is dependent on people recognizing it as powerful. Thus, standardized varieties of English are not inherently legitimate, but become viewed as legitimate when people in dominant discourses recognize them as such.

Critical views of ideology define ideology as pertaining to all beliefs, not as bad or good ideologies exclusively, but rather ideologies which may result in more or less equitable outcomes (Alford, 2015; Burns, 2005; Gee, 2015; Woolard & Shieffelin, 1994). Ideologies fluctuate over

time and space in reaction to and in interaction with social contexts; rather than being linear, one's ideology is complex and often contradictory. Even when conscious ideologies are those which aim for equity and inclusion, unconscious and/or enacted ideologies may result in less equitable outcomes (Burns, 2005; Woolard & Shieffelin, 1994). Thus, it is imperative for researchers to investigate all ideologies being enacted and communicated through a variety of social contexts.

Woolard and Shieffelin (1994) define oppressive ideologies as “the promotion of the needs and interests of a dominant group or class at the expense of marginalized groups, by means of disinformation and misrepresentation of those non-dominant groups” (p. 58). This is particularly relevant to this study as it highlights the role of disinformation and misrepresentation in maintaining and reproducing ideologies and therefore existing power relations. Gee (2015) states that oppressive ideologies are often built on generalizations and second or even third-hand knowledge, leading to inequitable and incomplete understandings of larger social issues. These misunderstandings, as they are established through tacit knowledge, are easily spread to establish disinformation (Gee, 2015). Dominant discourses may maintain ideologies through the naturalization of them by framing ideologies as logical or normal regardless of their legitimacy (Fairclough, 1989). Therefore, ideologies are deeply entrenched within discourses. As Wolfram (2010) explains, even when attention has been brought to hegemonic ideologies, those within a discourse community may continue to disregard claims for reform and overlook the hegemonic assumptions underlying their social practices.

Language acts as both a vessel for and a site of ideology. Bourdieu (1977) asserts that an integral part of gaining power occurs through language, particularly through the recognition of legitimacy as a speaker and as a language user. Legitimacy is often attributed to those who



participate or are perceived as participating in discourse practices according to social norms of that community. Even with linguistic competence to produce any number of texts that can be understood, without knowledge of when to produce which kinds of texts, speakers will not be recognized as legitimate; in order to gain power, speakers must be familiar with all social practices involved in a particular discourse, not just the linguistic production expected of them (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Being recognized as a legitimate speaker is a prerequisite not only to being allowed to speak but also to being heard and regarded with authority and to gaining and/or maintaining power (Bourdieu, 1977).

### **2.3 Student Identity**

My framework for understanding identity combines Norton-Peirce's (1995) conception of identity with Bucholtz and Hall's (2004) theorization of identity as socially constructed within interactions through acts of "positioning of the self and other" (p. 1). That is, identity does not reside wholly within or outside of the individual; it is constantly being formed and performed in interaction between and in reaction to individuals and discourses in the social world (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). By contrast with essentialist conceptions of identity as rigid or fixed, from this perspective and from Norton-Peirce's (1995) perspective, identity is multiple and constantly fluctuating as it is collaboratively constructed in interaction (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Thus, identity is complex and "must be understood with reference to larger, and frequently inequitable social structures which are reproduced in day-to-day social interactions" in which identity is being constructed and reconstructed (Norton-Peirce, 1995, p.13).

Discourse communities, or groups of individuals with particular sets of norms, practices, and status associated with them, are essential to how individuals view themselves, perform their identities, and access the world around them. Wenger (1998) asserts that participation and non-

participation equally define an individual's identity and belonging in a discourse community, or community of practice. Membership in a community, and therefore legitimacy, may only be granted to those with access to "information, resources, and opportunities for participation" in discursive practices valued by that community (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 100, as cited by Norton, 2001). Thus, inequitable social structures and power imbalances may lead to barring individuals from dominant discourse communities on the basis of oppressive ideological standards, as discussed in the findings and discussion of this study.

As identity is multiple and a site of struggle (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Norton-Peirce, 1995), students may grapple with both prescribed identities and their own subjectivities, the latter of which may be a resource for resisting oppressive ideologies (Masuda, 2012; Norton-Peirce, 1995). As Masuda (2012) explains, "our subjectivities enable us to take up or resist particular subject positions, along with identity constructions constituted through available discourses" (p. 224). That is, despite power imbalances, students may resist dominant discourses by asserting their agency and subjectivities. However, this is not to say that students do not have conflicting or sometimes contradictory notions of themselves. As identity is constantly being constructed and reconstructed, students may accept oppressive ideologies at some times while resisting them at others (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Masuda, 2012; Norton-Peirce, 1995).

In part, identity is established through positioning. Bucholtz and Hall (2004a) refer to this as tactics of intersubjectivity through which identity work is done to establish various social relations, including distinction, adequation, authorization, and illegitimation. Distinction occurs when people's similarities are disregarded in favor of focusing on differing factor(s) as to Other or separate people from dominant discourses. Hall and Bucholtz (2004a) state "difference does not exist as a social reality prior to its deployment for social ends" (p. 384). Rather, distinction

comes into being through social interactions, often to be used a tool of domination. Conversely, adequation “involves the pursuit of socially recognized sameness” through which differing factors are disregarded to emphasize similarities (p. 343). Bucholtz and Hall (2004a) describe the processes of positioning oneself to grant or remove the recognition of legitimacy as tactics of authorization and illegitimation; together, these tactics “involve the attempt to legitimate an identity through an institutional or other authority, or conversely the effort to withhold or withdraw such structural power.” (p. 386). Tactics of authorization and illegitimation may work to give speakers more or less power and are not limited to the use of dominant discourses (Hall & Bucholtz, 2004a)

## **2.4 Language Ideology**

There is a large variety of language ideologies, including prescriptivism (Curzan, 2014), linguistic imperialism (Philipson, 1992), and monoglossic ideologies (Kim, 2017). This section will discuss standard language ideologies, native speakerism, and prescriptivism as a starting point as they are some of the most prevalent English language ideologies throughout this study. However, additional ideologies will be defined as they occur in chapter four, the findings section of this thesis.

As touched upon in the introduction of this paper, standard language ideology valorizes one supposedly homogenous variety of English over the natural variations of English and the many varieties of English. Standardized English is thought to most closely resemble the variety spoken by upper-class White individuals and is thought to have no grammatical errors. However, in many ways standardized English is a hypothetical variety of English; the ideological standards of standard language ideology cannot be met even by those who perpetuate them (Lippi-Green, 2015). Fairclough (1989) describes the spread of standardized English as a result of a need for a

common tongue among merchant classes. As a variety of English now known as standardized English began to be used more commonly, it became embedded within social institutions such as formal education, government, and thus became associated with culturally and politically powerful discourse communities. As a result, any varieties which deviate from or are perceived as deviating significantly from the standard, and those who use them, are labeled as inferior, improper, and deficient, with lower class or marginalized people suffering the most (Fairclough, 1989). Lippi-Green (2015) describes the process whereby standard language ideologies maintain hegemony as “first, devaluation of all that is not (or does not seek to be) politically, culturally or socially marked as belonging to the privileged class, and second, validation of the social (and linguistic) values of the dominant institutions” (p. 68). As discussed above, language varieties outside of the privileged class are barred from being recognized as legitimate and therefore are stripped of authority and power (Bourdieu, 1977). Furthermore, Standard language ideologies go beyond beliefs about which variety of English is “more complex” or “more appropriate” and include beliefs about what varieties are seen as “normal” or unmarked. Personal descriptors such as intelligence or moral value often become associated with language variety, resulting in stereotyping and misrepresentation.

Prescriptivism deviates from standard language ideology in that prescriptivist ideologies often draw on concepts of situational appropriateness to promote the strict adherence to different discourses (rather than just a standardized variety) depending on the context of the speaker (Curzan, 2014). Within academic contexts, as this study focuses on, prescriptivism overlaps with standard language ideologies in that one standardized and grammatically “perfect” variety is valorized over the rest. Prescriptivists are concerned with the preservation of English in its current or hypothetically “correct” form and adherence to grammatical rules. Thus, language is

often regarded as dichotomously “good” or “bad,” labels which can extend to characterize language users as well. Furthermore, through the lens of prescriptivism, language is stable and unchanging (Curzan, 2014; Lippi-Green, 2012). As Curzan (2014) states, “even when the natural progression of language over time is recognized, it is disdained,” and modern shifts in language are frequently regarded as “ruining” the language (p. 3). Modern prescriptivist movements, whether in media or educational institutes, seek to identify and berate language use perceived as inappropriate and/or grammatically inaccurate (Curzan, 2014).

In part, prescriptivism and standardized language ideologies are built on meritocratic ideologies. That is, they are formed under the belief that if speakers work hard enough, they will be able to produce “perfect” language. Beyond the linguistically inaccurate nature of such claims, meritocratic ideologies are problematic in that they neglect the unequal distribution of opportunities and resources available to speakers. Meritocracy often frames merit through intelligence or talent that is innate rather than built through the use of resources which may be more readily available to privileged classes. As a result, those who do not meet ideological standards may be positioned as unintelligent and/or lazy. Additionally, meritocracy fails to address the reality of prejudice and inequity which result in the exclusion of many people from dominant discourses (Littler, 2017).

Native speakerism extends unrealistic language expectations like so-called “perfect” grammar to include what Holliday (2015) calls “cultural disbelief”. Cultural disbelief refers to the disbelief, or denigration, of cultural experiences of non-native English speakers (NNESs). Native speakerism is an ideology which glorifies so-called native or native-like language production. Through the lens of native speakerism, NESs are often given higher authority in educational and language related contexts, regardless of their experience or backgrounds, due to

cultural disbelief and/or racial biases (Aboshiha, 2015; Amin, 1997; Amin, 2000; Bae, 2015).

Native speakerism also draws deeply from a perception of so-called non-Western cultures as deficient and extends to criticism of cultural practices, particularly in educational institutions in which non-Western approaches to practices like logic and writing may become labeled as inefficient or inferior (Amin, 1997; Holliday, 2015; Yamachi, 2015).

Holliday (2015) explains that native speakerism and cultural disbelief are often expressed through neo-racism, as “native speakerism is an ideology that thrives on excluding an imagined and culturally deficient ‘non-native speaker’ subaltern” (p. 20). That is, through ideologies of native speakerism, the English “West” and “non-West” are positioned as incompatibly dichotomous. Inaccurate representations of the non-West are normalized in neo-racist discourses to position them as lesser and deficient to the West; while neo-racist discourses often seem like polite discussions about culture, they obscure reality and marginalize non-Western and non-native English speakers as the deficient Other (Holliday, 2015).

The concept of the NES has often been framed as dichotomous to NNEs. Through valorized and idealistic perspectives, NESs are often regarded as a homogeneous group that is linguistically superior to NNEs (Creese, Takhi, and Blackledge, 2014; Doerr, 2009; Holliday, 2015). Creese, Takhi, and Blackledge (2014) expand on this, stating the NES is perceived as “the authentic embodiment of the standard language” (p. 939), though this perception is often dependent on the speaker’s race and variety of English (Lippi-Green, 2012; Flores & Rosa, 2015). Amin (2000) expands on this to assert “the native speaker concept is embedded in nativism” (p. 43). That is, these perceptions are not dependent on actual language competency, but rather on the social relationships between two groups; the perception of NES status is thus closely related to being a citizen of a nation-state and speaking the national or dominant

language (Amin, 2000; Doerr, 2009). ELL students often look to native speakers as a model or at least a point of comparison regarding their language use, regardless of their own linguistic capability (Cho, 2017).

Fairclough (1989) describes the devaluation of non-Western knowledge and cultural experiences as a form of gatekeeping by dominant discourse communities. As social practices are not explicit or made clear, members of the dominant discourse often evaluate others based on hegemonic ideologies which both belittle divergent social practices and also neglect to recognize cultural differences between social groups. Thus, when so-called “perfect” grammatical accuracy, “native-like” accents, and/or knowledge of occluded discourse practices are precursors to participation, ELLs that do not adhere to ideological norms are prevented from entering discourse communities that may grant them positions as legitimate speakers, often resulting in damage to ELL students’ long-term academic careers (De Costa, 2016; Lave & Wenger, 1991; S  ror, 2008). Additionally, even when they do adhere to ideological and linguistic norms, students still may not be perceived as producing “appropriate” language because of their race. As Flores and Rosa (2015) explain, language is often racialized; people of marginalized races are often perceived as deviating from the standard language not because of their linguistic practices, but because of their race (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Fritschner, 2000; Mello, 2010).

## **2.5 Language Ideology within Formal Educational Settings**

In this section, I review research on language ideologies—particularly language ideologies surrounding academic English—in higher education. ‘Academic English’ is an ideological term often used to describe the register of standardized English used in educational institutions. Academic English is defined by a variety of characteristics including sentence types or grammatical structures (such as nominalization and high syntactic density), organization and

function of the text, and vocabulary (Nation, 2008). These work together to make it highly specific and, ideally, concise. As writing makes up a large portion of assessment tasks in higher education, vocabulary is a significant aspect of academic English. Vocabulary can be divided into two categories: academic vocabulary and discipline specific vocabulary (Coxhead, 2016). Academic vocabulary is a corpus of word commonly used in academic texts across disciplines that are perceived as more formal, often of Graeco-Latin origin and/or morphologically complex (Nation, 2008). Discipline-specific language is unique to the field is used in and may have different meanings outside of that particular context (Coxhead, 2016). Both general academic vocabulary and discipline-specific language are significant in a language user's development of their academic skills; the use of academic language, and specifically discipline-specific terms, can signify membership to a discourse community and knowledge within a discipline (Hyland, 2008b). While academic English is required for students' academic success, and mastery over academic English is one way students may gain power in educational settings, if we are to view language and literacy critically, the language ideologies deeply entrenched in educational institutions and academic English must be addressed (Luke, 2018).

Academic English is inextricably intertwined with race, class, and western conceptions of logic. As Gee (2015) explains, the discursive features of academic English heavily overlap with the language patterns of White, upper-class English speakers in north American contexts. MacSwan (2018) calls academic English a standard language ideology which "positions the language of the educated classes, often called Academic English, as a more advanced and more complex version of varieties of English used in non-school settings." (p. 29). Academic language is often referred to as more cognitively taxing than casual registers of English (Cummins, Baker & Hornberger, 2001); however, there are criticisms that this framing of academic English is a



form of oppressive language ideology (MacSwan, 2018). While academic English may lend itself to precision, often, perceptions of speaker's knowledge and intellect become contingent on adherence to rigorous discursive norms. And registers or varieties outside of academic English are disregarded as overly simplistic or incapable of conveying complex thought. Instead of viewing academic English as a register to use within particular contexts, the glorification of westernized academic practices, including but not limited to writing, speech and social practices, contributes to a further marginalization of non-standard language varieties and the people groups which use them (Gee, 2015; Lippi-Green, 2012; MacSwan, 2018; Turner, 2008) such as through the implementation of English-only spaces within universities (Cheung, 2019) or the treatment of AAVE as inappropriate in the classroom (Gee, 2015; Lippi-Green, 2012; MacSwan, 2018).

While mastery over dominant discourses, such as academic English, are vital to students' long-term academic success, the reproduction of dominant discourses without criticality in language education works to reify oppressive language ideologies (Janks, 2004; Luke, 2018). Janks (2004) refers to this as the access paradox, stating, "if you provide more people with access to the dominant variety of the dominant language, you perpetuate a situation of increasing returns and you maintain its dominance. If, on the other hand, you deny students access, you perpetuate their marginalization in a society that continues to recognise this language as a mark of distinction." (p. 9). Bourdieu (1991) asserts that many educational institutions do not provide access to dominant discourses and rather teach student only to recognize what is or is not perceived as legitimate.

Within education, academic writing often serves as fertile ground for the spread of standardized language ideologies. Educational institutions largely approach academic writing by relying on formulaic patterns of writing in class assignments which constrict writer expression

and limit the inclusion of marginalized language varieties (Turner, 2018; Yamchi, 2015). Dominant discourse practices found in western writing styles, such as the five-paragraph essay and linear writing, are valorized as pragmatic and logical while portraying the opposite of non-western writing styles. In reality, while approaches to academic practices may be different in varying cultural groups, all are equally fit to convey complex information logically and pragmatically (Yamchi, 2015). However, these hegemonic language ideologies are perpetuated and maintained through the neutralization or normalization of standardized English. De Costa (2016) describes this as monoglot ideology through which people are systematically categorized as “normal” or Othered depending on their perceived adherence to dominant discourses. For example, Davila (2018) found instructors referred to linguistic features of standardized English as normal or lacking in error rather than referring to standardized English as another variety like African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Many regard standardized English as a basic or innate way of speaking and writing. In failing to label standardized English ideology, it goes largely unnoticed, and any deviation from the standard becomes viewed as an error (Davila, 2018). In conjunction with the racialization of language, non-conforming varieties of English which are labeled as ‘wrong’ or ‘problematic’ are also associated with race. This goes as far as to call any social practices associated with or perceived as belonging to non-dominant discourses ‘improper’ (Davila, 2018), building on Holiday’s (2015) concept of cultural disbelief. Similarly, Yamchi (2015) found that when instructors spotted what they considered to be weaknesses in ELL students’ writing, they attributed them to cultural deficiency, despite those weaknesses being common among all ‘novice’ English writers regardless of first language or cultural background. It is through these implicit enactments of language ideology that acts of neo-racism occurs. Neo-racism refers to discrimination on the basis of cultural differences which often

occurs overtly and/or indirectly and may be disguised as respectful observations of difference rather than an attempt to marginalize people (Holliday, 2015; Yamchi, 2015). Non-western students may become targets of neo-racism through Othering, problematizing, and categorizing students based on a perceived NNES status.

Briggs and Pailliotet (1997) interpret instructors' enactment of standard language ideology and prescriptivism by examining power relations and the treatment of grammar in fifty pre-service teachers' grammar correction feedback on error analysis tasks. In response to demands by the dean to create a grammar test for pre-service teachers, Briggs and Pailliotet (1997) aimed to develop a contextualized and meaningful test which would help students question the common valorization of grammatical accuracy in higher education institutions. In one task, a role-play response to student writers, Briggs and Pailliotet (1997) found that pre-service teachers repeatedly wrote from a position of power over the students. In nearly all role-play responses, pre-service teachers referred to grammatical variation describing it as a "problem". Furthermore, they repeatedly described ways in which students "need" to change without examples or explicit instructions to assist the writer to learn the "needed" writing conventions. Briggs and Pailliotet (1997) state "The phrases and tone of our informants' responses were consistently hierarchical, monologic, and even haughty. They wrote as if they viewed errors as deeply rooted in individuals, and as if they themselves were the ones with the answers the writers needed" (p. 51). Yet, at the highest position of power in education, they observed stakeholders using language ideologies against instructors, enforcing policies of standardized testing for students that glorified the role of so-called "perfect" (i.e., standard) grammar as a requirement for legitimate communication within academia. For example, the dean requested the test against Briggs' urging. As a result, instructors took up these ideologies to enact

on pre-service teachers, who enacted them on students as each group attempted to gain power in their positions. The same cycle of ideology can be observed in the previously mentioned studies (Cho, 2017; De Costa, 2016; Séror, 2008), indicating that on a broader level, grammar, or the judgement of language, whether written or oral, becomes weaponized as the tool through which language ideologies are justified. Thus, student language competency is often regarded as a set of “problems” and “tendencies” that permeate all aspects of their writing and must be corrected, rather than contextualized mistakes or part of the trajectory of their growing language repertoires (Briggs & Pailliotet, 1997, p. 52).

However, language ideology in education is not limited to written instances of language. Accent is often a target of oppressive language ideologies. Subtirelu (2015) found that accent was often negatively framed in student reviews of mathematics instructors on [ratemyprofessor.com](http://ratemyprofessor.com) (a popular website where students can anonymously evaluate their professors at American colleges and universities). Despite the numerical rating of a professor, students frequently commented on their accent and intelligibility with statements varying from extremely negative and exaggerated like “Don’t take him unless you know Chinese. Because he obviously can’t speak English” (Subtirelu, 2015, p. 53) to seemingly benign “He does have an accent but it’s not hard to understand him” (p. 54). However, the perceived need to comment on accent frames it as a negative, marked attribute and communication as the L2 speaker’s sole burden. Lippi-Green (2015) asserts that the term ‘accent,’ and therefore commenting on a speakers’ accent, is used to Other individuals. Standardized language ideologies imply the existence of a non-accent, or accentless speech, which constructs a false dichotomy between those with accents and those without when in reality, all speakers have accents and there are simply different types of accents. When speakers position themselves as non-accented speakers,

they comment on accents that differ from their own in order to identify those they consider Other, and in many cases, the language of those they Other is marked as wrong or problematic (Lippi-Green, 2015). Furthermore, ideas about intelligence or linguistic competency may be ideologically connected to L2 accents, as exemplified in Subtirelu's (2015, p. 53) data, such as when a student said "he obviously can't speak English," when in fact it would be very nearly impossible for a professor to get a job teaching math in America if they can't speak English. Though this example showcases instructors' encounters with language ideologies regarding accent, this judgement may be bidirectional with both NNES students and teachers experiencing discrimination based on accent or perceived NNES status.

## **2.6 The Enactment of Language Ideology**

Language ideology is enacted in education through a variety of forces, including policymakers, instructors, and students themselves. Séror (2008) uncovered prevalent ideological beliefs about ELL students among university professors in his doctoral thesis work on instructor feedback. Through interviews, he found instructors' beliefs varied from viewing ELL students as burdens, as the case with one instructor who mentioned she believed "certain countries" produced unreliable TOEFL scores to place students in classes that were too advanced for their abilities, to purposeful discrimination enforced through inequitable grading practices (p. 97). One instructor reported that a PhD student was purposefully given a failing grade to expel her because another instructor believed she did not belong in the program due to her language struggles (Séror, 2008). Regardless of her intellectual and research capabilities, the student was labeled as incompetent by her instructor. Her instructor regarded her struggles as inherent problems that were not his responsibility to aid her with. Séror (2008) refers to Severino's (1993) term "assimilationist stance" for the ideologies in which writers are expected to conform to

dominant discourse practices in their writing (p. 187). From this perspective, in order to be recognized as part of the dominant discourse community, and in this case as a legitimate student and academic writer, the student must conform to dominant discourse practices; by making grammatical errors not characteristic of native speakers or using writing conventions uncommon in the dominant discourse, such as different forms of logic or organization, they are then rejected from the dominant discourse and positioned as an outsider (Gee, 2014). The assimilationist stance Severino (1993) describes is just one way standard language ideology and native speakerism are perpetuated in education. Though writing is an integral part of students' success in education, they are just as likely to face the same oppressive ideological reception of their L2 speaking or listening skills that can impact their academic careers permanently.

When teachers believe in ideologies like native speakerism, students who do not conform to their expectations often suffer in the way they are positioned in the institution. De Costa (2016) examines language ideology in an English school in Singapore through interviews with instructors and students and essay analysis. Through a strict policy that regarded standardized academic English as the only legitimate form of communication in the school, students who struggled with academic genres were positioned as intellectually inferior by instructors. An English teacher revealed that in staff meetings, one student, Daphne, was largely regarded by her language and humanities teachers as deficient and lazy due to her struggles, regardless of her adamant effort to expand her English skills. This belief was reflected in how she was positioned within the classroom. For example, at one point, the instructor emphasized a minute error Daphne made, causing her classmates to laugh at her. Her papers also often were marked with curt feedback from instructors without positive reinforcement. In an interview with Daphne, De

Costa (2016) found that she had adopted these views as well, and viewed herself as deficient when writing essays, a subject of many of her teachers' criticism.

## **2.7 Hegemonic notions of Learning and Cultural Disbelief**

Cultural disbelief may also be enacted through assessment practices that rely on hegemonic notions of learning. One area of this that I will explore further in the findings of this study is the use of participation points as a prevalent assessment practice. The concept of participation, and what may or may not constitute it, is somewhat embedded in cultural or institutional norms. Fritschner (2000) examined student participation in undergraduate courses and students' perceptions of participation through classroom observations and exit interviews and found that students and teachers differed widely in their definitions and expectations for participation. Many instructors consider participation to occur primarily through answering or asking questions or making comments in front of the class. Other definitions of participation may extend to participating in classroom activities from small group discussions or to taking notes. When instructors do grade based on participation, many define participation in vague terms, stating that it involves taking part in the class, but neglecting to provide a clear, accountable or quantitative measuring system (Crosthwaite, Bailey, & Meeker, 2015).

Students' verbal participation in class is also dependent on a variety of factors including context, knowledge of the topic, personality, and learning style. Morita's (2004) multiple case study of ELL students' discourse socialization explored how students negotiate identity and participation in mainstream courses. When discussing the topic of participation and non-participation, Morita (2004) found that in addition to cultural norms surrounding participation, some students reported feeling more confident learning without engaging in class verbally. In one example, a participant reported that one of her students made her feel involved despite her

lack of verbal participation which positively impacted her learning. Crosthwaite, Bailey, and Meeker (2015) found no significant correlation between participation and end-of-term test scores. While these correlations may vary depending on classroom subject, such findings do highlight that classroom participation is only one learning method that does not benefit all students equally.

Additionally, students that are outgoing, have background knowledge in the topic or process information verbally may be more likely to speak up, often leading to disproportionate verbal participation. When examining verbal participation, Fritschner (2000) found that 18% of students attending a class “accounted for 79% of all of the students' comments in class” (p. 345). Thus, a small percentage of students dominated classroom conversations. This indicates that if participation points are truly distributed in a quantitative manor (rather than based on instructor’s perceptions of student participation), only a small percentage of students would receive full points for verbal participation. However, as Mello (2010) points out, participation grades are rarely assigned based on quantitative measurement and often result in instructors assigning participation grades based on biases and other inconsistent factors.

## **2.8 Impacts on Student Identity**

Due to rigid policy and instructor behavior, students often come to subscribe to the ideological beliefs constructed to oppress them. Cho (2017) explores this phenomenon in an English translation major in a South Korean university. The program put immense amounts of pressure on students due to its standards, including a policy that immediately expelled any student who failed a class. Students reported studying up to twelve hours a day. In interviews, Cho (2017) found that both students that learned English through early childhood immersion (haewaepa) and those that learned English in Korea (guknaepa) glorified the other group with



ideological beliefs of native speakerism. In the case of *guknaepa*, they positioned their English speaking abilities as lacking because they believed they were not as natural sounding or idiomatic as the *haewaepa* students'. Many *guknaepa* regarded sounding like ELLs as insufficient and devalued their own competency because it wasn't that of a "native speaker", regarding the *haewaepa* as the ultimate authorities (Cho, 2017). *Haewaepa*, on the other hand, believed that due to a lack of formal English training, they were unable to translate written or spoken Korean accurately, displaying contrasting ideological beliefs in which both groups of students viewed themselves from a deficit perspective. However, conformity to oppressive language ideologies is not the only option for students; as Siegel (2006) describes, while speakers may conform to standardized varieties and therefore shunning their first languages or dialects, others rebel against standardized dialects by refusing to appropriate them or by adopting the dominant variety while maintaining their own through style shifting or code switching. Still, resistance to dominant discourses may be viewed as deviant or uneducated, specifically in subject, or mainstream, courses where instructors may be less likely to understand second language acquisition (SLA) processes and the ideologies they may enact (Cho, 2017; De Costa, 2016; Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013).

Beyond accepting oppressive ideological views of oneself, when faced with hegemonic ideologies, many students feel they must change their identities to succeed academically. Shen (1989) describes his journey as a Chinese international student studying in the United States and the common cultural disbelief he experienced associated with non-western writing styles. Shen (1989) found his writing was constantly reprimanded for what he described as Chinese cultural practices embedded within his papers. He was expected to adhere to unstated writing conventions, and when he strayed from the cultural norms, his writing was labeled "weak" or

deficient. In reaction, Shen's (1989) instructors pushed him to "be himself". However, Shen (1989), as writing from his cultural perspective, was being himself. Rather, instructors wanted him to express individualistic Western ideologies through the limited number of dominant discourse practices instructors perceived as appropriate in their class. In order to gain recognition as a legitimate student, Shen (1989) describes creating a new identity, as his Chinese identity had been denied, which entailed having to "wrestle with and abandon (at least temporarily) the whole system of ideology which previously defined me in myself" (p. 461). This extended beyond simple writing conventions to the ideologies through which he argued his ideas and constructed his voice with regardless of his personal feelings on such matters. Shen's (1989) experience illuminates both the native speakerism and cultural disbelief engrained in academic writing conventions and the common intolerance for diverse cultural practices in academic institutions.

## **Chapter 3: Methods**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I describe my methodological approach to this study. Qualitative multiple case study methods have been used to approach the study. I collected data over a three-month period at a small college in Washington state. I selected a total of five ELL participants in mainstream college classes and conducted semi-structured interviews. I also collected documents such as assignment descriptions, graded assignments, and rubrics. Finally, I asked students to keep reflective journals throughout the term. I coded data using a mixture of inductive and deductive coding, using my understanding of the literature discussed above as a basis to develop several beginning codes, such as *cultural disbelief*, *authority*, and *Othering*. The data was further analyzed using discourse analysis, borrowing methods from multiple approaches to discourse analysis (e.g. Gee, 2014a; Gee, 2014b; Fairclough, 1989; Fairclough 2003).

### **3.2 Multiple Case Study**

I have approached this study as a qualitative multiple case study. Case studies offer closer examinations of a particular case or bounded system. A case may vary from one individual to a social group, institution, or entire community. Case studies, then, can offer insights into larger cultural phenomena, social issues, or problems within their “real-life context” (Duff, 2008, p. 22). In this study, I have selected several participants, each one representing a case that can speak to the issue of how ELL students experience language ideologies in their mainstream courses. Additionally, in order to gain a more thorough understanding of phenomena, case studies typically involve a variety of data collection methods, most commonly including interviews, document analysis, and observation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Duff, 2008).

Mitchell (1984) asserts case studies are best approached with a strong understanding of the social and institutional context in which the case occurs. This is especially significant considering the theoretical grounding of this study which defines discourse as social action, unable to be separated from social contexts, and influenced by dominant discourses. As I will elaborate on in section 3.5, my positionality within the contexts of this multiple case study has allowed me to become very familiar with social and institutional powers that the participants act within.

The goal in analyzing cases is not just to describe the context but to connect theory to events so as to shed light on previously hidden phenomena, such as language ideologies or students' constructions and co-constructions of identity. While results are not applicable to all contexts, they help researchers understand one way a phenomenon may occur. Reliability, from a qualitative standpoint, does not depend on the representativeness of a case. Rather, it is more significant to consider how a case or cases can contribute to a deeper understanding of the social issue at hand (Mitchell, 1984). As Mitchell (1984) states, "From this point of view, the search for a 'typical' case for analytic exposition is likely to be less fruitful than the search for a 'telling' case in which the particular circumstances surrounding a case, serve to make previously obscure theoretical relationships suddenly apparent" (p. 239). Thus, just one or two case participants may speak volumes to a social issue even if they are not statistically representative of the larger society.

### **3.3 Context of the Study**

The site of this study was a small community college in Washington state that I will refer to as "Fir College" (pseudonym), where I currently hold a position as a program assistant, tutor, and instructor. Fir College offers only a few four-year degrees, primarily serving to prepare

students to transfer to larger universities after obtaining two-year degrees. This is significant as a majority of students at Fir College are new and inexperienced in their academic careers; many courses at Fir College aim to prepare students for the first time with the academic skills they will need to succeed in the future. Students most often come to Fir College with the goal of completing a degree or certificate program at Fir College. A very small percentage of students attend Fir College through exchange or short-term programs.

Fir College is located in a small predominately white town of around 35,000 people and is the only college in the surrounding area. At the time of this study, Fir College had approximately 5,700 students, with 77 classified as international students from a variety of countries and contexts, including China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Russia, Ukraine, France, and Mexico. ELL students that are not considered international students, such as immigrants and refugees, are also common at Fir College, though their exact numbers are unknown; as some students may be undocumented, many are not tracked or asked to report their status in the U.S. Additionally, the estimated numbers of immigrant and refugee students at Fir College were not available to me. When ELL students enter Fir College, they must either test into mainstream courses or take courses in the EAP program to prepare to enter mainstream courses. The EAP courses focus on academic language skills as well as college success skills, including two adjunct courses connected to mainstream courses. A majority of international students take at least one EAP class before they fully enter mainstream courses.

From a critical perspective, it is important to consider the sociopolitical context which Fir College is situated in and how that may impact students. Over the past decade, the number of international students at Fir college has been steadily declining. International recruitment at Fir College has decreased the most over the past four years, with the U.S.'s national international

recruitment rates dipping 8% in 2018 and 10% the year before, largely attributed to the neo-racist, and often blatantly racist, rhetoric and policies abundant in the current U.S. government (Anderson & Svrluga, 2018). The EAP program alone has experienced a 34% enrollment rate reduction in the past five years, shifting from having over 100 students in 2015 to 33 this term. A combination of complexities such as the steep cost of tuition in the United States, political uncertainties, and a declining number of visas granted to students (with about half of the students accepted to Fir College being denied visas in the Fall 2019 term) all contribute significantly. As mainstream classes have fewer ELL students, attempts to increase inclusivity at Fir College have largely neglected issues of neo-racism and language discrimination as irrelevant or the responsibility of EAP instructors exclusively.

### **3.4 Participants**

#### **3.4.1 Recruitment Process**

As the purpose of this study is to examine how students are experiencing language ideology in mainstream classes, I selected participants that are no longer in EAP classes (thus, taking mainstream courses). Students at Fir College range in age from sixteen to middle age. I selected participants who were a minimum of eighteen years old to ensure all participants are adults able to consent and participate of their own accord. Though there was no maximum age limit regarding who I recruited, and several middle-aged students were invited to participate, ultimately all participants were between the age of eighteen and twenty.

To recruit participants, I utilized snowball sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018), beginning by contacting students that I knew fit my criteria and had previously discussed with me experiencing oppressive language ideology in their courses (Irina and Linh). Students then

shared information with other students they thought might be interested in participating. While a variety of ELL students were invited to participate, including international and immigrant students of different ages, genders, nationalities, contexts, and experience as students, only international students who are women agreed to participate in the study.

### **3.4.2 Participant Profiles**

A total of five students participated in the study, Irina, Linh, Daiyu, Li, and Hirono, all of them women between the ages of eighteen and twenty (see Table 1). The participants come from varying backgrounds and countries including Japan, Vietnam, and China. To maintain participant confidentiality, I gave participants the option to choose pseudonyms for themselves, and for those who did not choose a name, I selected pseudonyms for them. Furthermore, as noted in the chart, I have not specified which country Irina is from. I have chosen to keep her country of origin unspecified to maintain her confidentiality as there is a low number of European students at Fir College.

Three students, Li, Daiyu, and Hirono, were in their first term in mainstream classes while two, Linh and Irina, were preparing to graduate with their associate degrees by summer. Each participant was taking a variety of classes, though Li, Daiyu, and Hirono were all in the same English class. In addition to English, Li took a math class, Daiyu took a communications class, and Hirono took a sociology class. In the previous quarter, Li, Daiyu, and Hirono all took an advanced EAP class with an adjunct mainstream course which was below the college level.

At the time of this study, it was Linh's last quarter at Fir College. She was initially taking psychology and communication classes but later dropped her psychology course as it was not required for her graduation. Irina was also an experienced student in her second to last quarter at

Fir college. She was taking biology and psychology courses at the time. Linh and Irina, in particular, were considered high performing students, highly praised by most of their instructors. Both reported receiving high grades, and Irina was recommended to be an on-campus tutor by several of her instructors in varying subject areas.

All participants began classes at Fir College in the EAP program, each taking at least a full school year of EAP courses. They all began at Fir College before finishing their high school diploma in their countries of origin, as is common with many students at Fir College, international or domestic. In doing so, credits from college-level classes typically apply to both students' high school and college diplomas, though some may choose to pursue a General Educational Diploma (GED) from Fir College in place of their high school diplomas. Furthermore, all participants were attending Fir College with the plan to obtain an Associate's degree and transfer to a four-year university. Several participants also indicated an interest in pursuing graduate degrees.

**Table 3. Participant Profiles**

Name	Age	Origin	Number of Years at Fir College
Daiyu	18	China	1.5
Li	18	China	1.5
Hirono	18	Japan	2
Linh	19	Vietnam	2.5
Irina	19	Eastern Europe	3

### 3.5 Researcher Positionality



At the time of this study, I had worked at Fir College for nearly seven years, taking on a variety of roles and working in multiple departments located within a single faculty. Prior to working at Fir College, I was a student there for the first two years of my college education. I am currently the EAP program assistant and tutor as well as an English Language Acquisition (ELA) instructor. Fir College divides its English language courses into two departments: EAP and ELA. EAP is an intensive set of courses for students who explicitly plan to get a college degree. They take a total of five courses preparing them for mainstream classes, including two adjunct classes paired with mainstream courses. ELA courses are more tailored to adult learners who may have full-time jobs or family responsibilities and might not plan to get college degrees. ELA courses are also funded by the government and only available to students that are residents or immigrants. As I am an ELA instructor, the students involved in this study never have been and never would be my students. However, I did know them prior to this study through EAP tutoring. As a tutor, I meet with students one-on-one in thirty-minute blocks to assist them with any assignments they may have. Students in EAP or mainstream courses may sign up to see me. Though I help with any type of homework, including presentations or reading comprehension, students most often come to me for help with writing related questions or homework. At the beginning of each participants' academic career at Fir College, I saw them around once a week for tutoring sessions. As Linh and Irina are further in their studies, I saw them approximately once a month before the beginning of this study. I continued to tutor the participants at approximately the same frequency throughout this study.

I have known each of the participants since the time they arrived at Fir College and regularly interacted with them over the years with varying levels of familiarity. This can be seen as both a strength and a weakness mitigated through reflexivity on my part as a researcher. My

positionality as a former student at Fir College and current graduate student allowed me to relate to their experiences, often taking on the role of an empathetic interviewer. And while I knew some of the participants well, and this may have contributed to some level of comfort and openness with me, they also saw me as an educator; the power imbalances between us in terms of age, roles in the college, experiences as students, and status in the U.S. among other factors must also be taken into consideration when viewing how students positioned themselves and performed their identity in relation to me. At times, the lines between my position as a tutor and researcher seemed to blur for students, such as instances in which they brought homework to be checked before interviews or when some of them would ask me for writing advice during interviews. As Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane and Muhamad (2001) explain, positionalities are always multiple, and no researcher is fully an insider or an outsider. Rather, they are able to, and often subconsciously, position themselves differently depending on the context of the interaction. For example, at times, I was able to sympathize with the participants by sharing my experiences as a student at Fir College. Other times, when positioning myself as a critical researcher or graduate student, I was sometimes able to see students' responses to my own language ideologies in instances in which I invoked linguistic facts in response to hegemonic ideologies or promoted critical perspectives of language.

My positionality within the college allowed me to become familiar with some of the hegemonic ideologies which ELL students often face. As a tutor and program assistant, I often interacted with mainstream instructors regarding the language of their students; on several occasions, I received emails from mainstream teachers about their ELL students with sentiments such as 'they need a translator,' 'they can't even speak English,' and 'they don't understand anything' (though I knew those students to be fully capable and competent English speakers and

students). While working as a tutor for many years, I have often heard students' complaints about grading practices and saw inequitable grading scales, unclear assignment descriptions, and teacher feedback relying heavily on oppressive language ideologies. I have had students sit in my office and cry because of their peers and instructors Othering them and saw some lose faith in their language and intellectual competencies to the point they doubted they could complete a degree at Fir College.

As a student, I had many similar experiences as the participants in this study. I began at Fir College as a Running Start student, or a high schooler taking college classes which applied to both my associate degree and high school diploma. As a new college student, I had yet to master the dominant discourse. I struggled with unstated expectations, unclear grading practices, and oppressive language ideologies, especially in my introductory courses which focused heavily on writing. While at the time these experiences were damaging, both to my self-confidence and my GPA, they later aided me as I began to develop interview questions, as I had an idea of what the common language ideologies at Fir College may look like.

### **3.6 Data Collection**

Data collection took place at Fir College over a three-month period from January 2020 to mid-March, 2020 utilizing semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews, reflective journals, email communication, and fieldnotes on casual conversations and encounters with students outside of interviews. As Fir College runs on a quarter system, this was the entirety of the winter quarter.

#### **3.6.1 Data Sources to Examine Language Ideology Enactment**

To investigate the enactment of language ideology, I relied on a variety of data collection methods, including student interviews, journal reflections, and document analysis. The

perspectives of students are vital to understanding how language ideology is enacted. Thus, I conducted a series of two to four audio-recorded interviews with each participant throughout the term.

Opting to approach interviews through a semi-structured method allows me to direct the conversation toward relevant topics, while allowing participants to expand on their own, possibly identifying significant topics I have not considered yet (Roulston, 2010). I developed the first set of questions based on established research on language ideology (See Appendix A). I then developed additional interview questions that were specific to individual students based on their responses in the first interview and any themes I identified in preliminary data analyses.

Students provided me with materials such as rubrics, assignment descriptions, and graded assignments with teacher feedback, which I used to identify varying types of language ideologies students encountered in and out of their classes. These additional materials often contain text that displays ideological beliefs and offer a deeper understanding of the power imbalances at play (Alford, 2015; Séror, 2008). For example, in Séror's (2008) examination of feedback practices in higher education, he found teachers often displayed ideological beliefs through written feedback relying on deficit language to evaluate international students' language use rather than commenting on the ideas communicated in their essays. Additionally, rubrics and assignment descriptions can display ideological beliefs in the form of inequitable grading practices, such as an over-emphasis on grammatical accuracy or spelling in unrelated fields, as Zappa-Hollman (personal communication, April 4, 2019) found when conducting research on teacher collaboration between ELA and mainstream science instructors.

### **3.6.2 Data Sources to Examine Student Identity**

I primarily investigated student identity through interviews, although I also draw on secondary data sources, including reflective journals kept by focal students, fieldnotes, and email communication. Semi-structured student interviews occurred every three to four weeks depending on student availability. I also requested that students write reflective journal entries throughout the term so they could write about their experiences in class, especially focusing on language and their student identity. As I am an EAP tutor at this campus, casual conversations and optional tutoring sessions between myself and focal students also were used, recorded through my reflective fieldnotes. Emails and casual conversations were also considered for data, reflexively recorded through my fieldnotes.

The participants were asked to keep reflective journals once every 2-3 weeks, submitted through email. In our initial meeting to discuss the details of the study, I talked with each participant about what language ideology is, highlighting oppressive language ideologies by giving some examples from the literature such as instructors making direct comments about students' language or the glorification of grammatical accuracy. I then asked students to use journal entries to reflect on their experiences in class such as how the feedback on their assignments affected them, moments of doubt about their language proficiency, comments from instructors about their language, grading practices as they relate to language, acts of neo-racism and/or any other experiences which were formative to their English studies. Most students only submitted two journal reflections, with all of them responding at the end of the quarter to the questions: 1) What do you think of yourself as a student in your country? 2) What do you think of yourself as a student at Fir College? Has the impression changed during the time that you have been studying at Fir College? How? 3) What are your strengths as a student? What makes you think those are your strengths?

Reflective journaling allows students to express their thoughts and emotions in a private setting. Where students may not feel comfortable voicing their opinions in interviews, whether due to pressure, time constraints, or personal feelings, writing may offer a more comfortable environment for some. Furthermore, Bashan and Holsblat (2017) state, “Through reflection, students become aware of their thoughts, positions, and feelings in relation to learning and to the learning community” (p. 2). Thus, journals can offer deeper insight into the shifting identities of students and their positioning in relation to the dominant discourse community, as well as capturing the non-linear nature of identity as students write about and reflect on “the past, the present, and the imagined future” (Phelps, 2005, p.39).

As the participants often did not engage in journal writing, journal reflections became a secondary source of data throughout this study. I often used journal data to formulate questions for interviews, prompting participants to expand on the themes and incidents they reported in their journal responses. In this way, interviews and journal data worked in conjunction as a form of member checking information given in journals. Interestingly, topics arose out of journals that students had initially hesitated to talk about. However, in later interviews, they were able to expand on the topics written in journals. Additionally, email communication was considered a viable source for data, and in some cases, I emailed participants to member check or for clarification on specific topics that we discussed in interviews.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

During the data collection period of this study, I preliminarily coded and transcribed data from interviews, journals, and class documents utilizing a combination of inductive and deductive coding. Based on my literature review, I deductively developed a small number of codes to begin my analysis with, such as cultural disbelief, standard language ideology,

authority, Othering, and resistance. However, upon analyzing the data, I used inductive coding methods in which codes are developed based on repeated patterns or themes within the data. Inductive coding is most common in qualitative studies, often combined with deductive coding, and is particularly beneficial as it allows for emic terminology and topics to emerge that may initially be outside of my focus, yet are significant to the study (Roulston, 2010). As I continued examining the data, I used inductive coding methods to add more codes, such as *lack of instruction, competence, and accessibility*, to a larger code list with specific definitions so as to keep coding consistent. During this phase of analysis, I made notes about my preliminary analysis of the data. The themes and observations made during this phase were used to further explore topics in interviews until the data collection period was completed.

After the data collection period, I went through the data again, expanding and refining my coding process and more thoroughly transcribing relevant data. At each stage of analysis and coding, I made memos about my observations about individual instances in the data and the data as a whole. Once initial coding was completed, I utilized thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2013) to identify patterns across the data set and compile codes into a smaller set of themes which explore important elements of my research questions. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), “A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set.” (p. 82). These themes are reflected in the headers of this thesis (e.g. academic language, grading practices).

I selected excerpts from the data to analyze in depth using discourse analysis. The goal of critically motivated discourse analysis is not only to describe meaning and social practices but also to “[draw] attention to and possibly [rupture] the status quo where it leads to inequity”

(Alford, 2015, p. 15). When I refer to critical discourse analysis here, I am not exclusively referring to critical discourse analysis methods such as those described by Fairclough (1989). Rather, critical discourse analysis, alternatively called critically motivated discourse analysis or critical discourse studies (Wodak & Meyer, 2001), refers to a common theoretical lens through which various methodological approaches to discourse analysis may be conducted (Chun, 2020; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). From this perspective, all discourse analysis must be critical as language is always political, and language is always at the center of the distribution of social goods, or capital. Through language, relationships with the social world, institutions, and interpersonal relationships are established and negotiated. These relationships are shaped by and shape who receives social goods based on power and the ideologies embedded within discourse communities. Thus, language is not neutral, but always involved politically through how it is practiced and performed in varying contexts. Descriptive analyses lacking in criticality thus serve to maintain the status quo, oppressive ideologies, and current power imbalances that result in inequity. It is the discourse analyst's role to investigate contexts or cases and identify these imbalances and inequities with the goal of identifying ways in which the status quo may be disrupted or altered in order to achieve more equitable outcomes (Alford, 2015; Chun, 2020; Fairclough, 1989; Gee, 2014a; Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

Discourse analysis as a tool is used to bring attention to the linguistic details of the text in relation to the larger sociopolitical contexts the text occurs within (Fairclough, 1989; Gee, 2014a). Discursive and textual analyses work together to offer deeper insight into the text. Larger theoretical concerns rooted in discourse analysis are significant to understanding the text, such as authority, power, assumptions, implications, ideologies, significance, discourses, and intertextuality. In addition, based on Gee (2014b) and Fairclough's (1989) guidebooks, I have



selected a variety of linguistic details to highlight for analysis including modals, subject positions, qualifiers (with a particular focus on qualifiers describing language), nominalization, formality and tone markers, pronouns, conjunctions, hedges, boosters, and sentence type and mode. These linguistic details can help shed light on the above-mentioned concepts when analyzing texts.

When initially approaching this study, I had intended to investigate what kinds of language ideologies were held by mainstream instructors. I planned to interview the instructors of participating students and conduct classroom observations to get a thorough understanding of the types of language ideology which influenced students and instructors from both perspectives. To do this, student participants shared letters of initial contact with their instructors, inviting them to participate in the study. A total of nine instructors were contacted this way. When none of them responded, provisos were made to the plan, and I directly emailed an additional fifteen instructors from varying departments in the college using the publicly available information on the Fir College website. No instructors responded. Eventually, one instructor who was contacted via the first form of recruitment responded very late in the study. While I was able to interview her, classroom observations were made impossible due to school shutdowns in response to the COVID-19 virus. Therefore, I decided to exclude her interview data from the study as I felt it was not sufficient to address my previous research questions and did not contribute to a deeper understanding of my revised research questions. Without participating instructors, this study was limited to investigating only how students encounter language ideology from their perspectives, rather than how language ideology may shape students' interactions with instructors in and out of class.

## **Chapter 4: Findings: ELL Students' Encounters with Language Ideology in their Mainstream Courses**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I will discuss my findings and address my first research question, examining the ways in which students experienced language ideologies in their mainstream classes followed by how those language ideologies impacted their student identity in the next chapter.

Based on my analysis of interview data, participants' reflective journals, fieldnotes, email communication, and class documents, main themes I identified in the data point to participants experiencing a number of language ideologies as I will explore below. In participants' discussions about writing, for example, prescriptivism and standardized language ideologies were prevalent. Perceptions of academic language, particularly its perceived necessity, impacted both how students reported understanding their classroom documents as well as how their writing was regarded by instructors. Furthermore, grammar-based assessment was a significant theme that all participants reported being impacted negatively by. Unclear grading practices and hegemonic notions of learning often resulted in students being graded through the lens of cultural disbelief. I also found that ELL students, and Irina in particular, experienced instances of explicit Othering from both instructors and their peers.

I have presented some of the data below, largely through transcribed excerpts from interviews and classroom documents. I have selected excerpts which I believe are representative of the larger main themes I identified throughout the analysis process. I then elaborate on these excerpts using discourse analysis.

### **4.2.1 Academic Language**

As discussed in relation to previous studies (Gee, 2014a; Lippi-Green, 2012; Séror, 2014), standardized English for academic purposes was used as an exclusionary variety of English, both in a variety of texts across modes used in participants' mainstream courses and in how students' texts were viewed by instructors. Through the lens of standard language ideologies, varieties of English which are perceived as formal, such as academic English, are framed as the most prestigious. However, as discussed in section 2.6, academic English and other standardized varieties of English are not inherently superior varieties. Rather, they are perceived through an unrealistic lens of language with strict and elaborate social norms (Curzan, 2014; Fairclough, 1989; Gee, 2014a; Holliday, 2015; Lippi-Green, 2012). Fairclough (1989) states the valorization and perception of formality in standardized varieties "is a contributory factor in keeping access restricted, for it makes demands on participants above and beyond those of most discourse, and the ability to meet those demands is in itself unevenly distributed" (p. 65). Thus, as reflected in this study, academic English is often used as a gatekeeper, preventing marginalized people from entering dominant discourses in academic institutions, and also preventing marginalized speakers from being perceived as having mastered dominant discourses even when they have done so (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

#### **4.2.1.1 Instructors' Discourse and Academic English in the Classroom**

Participants at varying levels in their academic careers reported facing challenges with inaccessible or unfamiliar discipline-specific language use in class materials. Daiyu initially reported this problem in our first interview, explaining that assignment descriptions, lectures, and rubrics in her English course were often unclear to her because they used "academic words." It is

worth noting, while this was her first term in college-level mainstream courses, she had previously taken an under college-level English course and EAP classes.

**Excerpt 1.** Daiyu, Interview 1/0:08–1:00

- 1 DANIELLE; Okay, so (5.0) I guess my first question was just, like, in general like how  
2 are- how are your classes going so far?  
3 DAIYU; It's hard actually because the teachers- it's not like EAP teachers [that  
4 DANIELLE; [Mhm  
5 DAIYU; The teachers say a lot of like aca- academic words a lot. That I'm- I'm  
6 confused. And so- so, usually ((our English teacher)) will like say some  
7 words that he, um, to some words that we don't understand, and then he  
8 will explain it, but when he explains and there also have a lot of words that  
9 we don't understand.  
10 DANIELLE; Mhm  
11 DAIYU; So, we usually use our phone to check.  
12 DANIELLE; Right

As Daiyu explains, even when instructors attempt to explain vocabulary they perceive as challenging or new to their students, they rely on language which is still unfamiliar to students without checking student comprehension, thus, rendering it inaccessible for many students.

While my access to classroom content and documents was limited, in separate interviews, Li and Daiyu pointed out the same phrases in their assignment descriptions that they reported having troubles with. On their first summary assignment on the components of an essay in their English course, both Li and Daiyu reported needing to translate the term “debatable claim” in the sentence “Like an arguable thesis statement, the topic sentence is a debatable claim that requires effective evidence”. Similarly, on a quiz early in the term, Li and Daiyu both reported struggling with the term “salient details” in the sentence “describe two salient details about one of the main characters we've been reading about in ((book title))”.

While jargon, or discipline-specific language, is present in all classes and important for students to learn, many of the participants described becoming exposed to discipline-specific language when their full comprehension was vital to their academic success, such as in tests or assignment descriptions rather than in classroom conversations when instructors can further clarify term definitions. In many cases, discipline-specific language was never defined by instructors, indicating an assumption that students had the same background knowledge to recognize discipline-specific terminology. In this way, discipline-specific language acts as what Janks (2004) calls “domination without access” (p. 6). As dominant discourses (the use of discipline-specific terminology in this case) are required of students yet they are not taught about discipline-specific language, it works as an exclusionary or gatekeeping mechanism.

Irina also discussed this topic, stating she often felt teachers overcomplicated texts by relying on heavily “academic wording” to explain concepts she later had to relearn using what she called “easy language”. Additionally, Irina stated that she felt instructors relied on unclear or nearly synonymous wording in timed quizzes. This is particularly problematic as it leads students to fixate on language choices rather than the theoretical concepts they are being tested on.

Standard language ideologies valorize the use of what is perceived as more complex language, thus perpetuating the perception that all texts within academic contexts, be it published papers or instructions for students, should be produced in what is perceived as highly formal registers regardless of student comprehension. While Irina experienced this in many of her classes of varying levels, Daiyu and Li reported struggling to clearly understand class documents in their introductory-level class, which included many students who had never been in higher education contexts before. While instructors might expect upper-level students to be familiar

with and understand texts with discipline-specific language, introductory classes at Fir College are aimed toward preparing students for their academic careers.

As standard language ideologies are deeply entrenched within academic institutions (Fairclough, 1989; Gee, 2014; Lippi-Green, 2012), many instructors may not recognize the exclusivity of the register or variety of English they use and may not know how to make the necessary changes to create more accessible texts. Irina explained that when she requested help from instructors after finding tests to be unclear, they did not recognize the underlying problems. Instead of changing the language used in class documents, instructors treated her and other ELL students as special cases, as Irina described below:

**Excerpt 2.** Irina, Interview 1/28:50– 29:30

- 1        IRINA:        Me and my friend, we would- we're both international students, would  
2                        come and ask (1.0) 'I'm sorry we kinda suck at this thing. We might just  
3                        not get what you're talking about. Could you like give us some feedback  
4                        or can we have like extra time on the test?' because the test had like 75  
5                        questions. It was [huge.  
6        DANIELLE:                        [Oh, wow  
7        IRINA:        Yea, and (2.0) when you struggle with language, you're kind of like 'oh  
8                        my god, oh my god, can I skip that or that?'  
9        DANIELLE:    Mhm  
10       IRINA:        So, he would just give us like two points extra, you know, just because  
11                        we're international students. He would understand that.

While her instructor may have been well-meaning, offering students extra points based on a perceived language disadvantage or deficiency only serves to Other ELL students further and neglects the underlying problem. Offering ELL students extra points because they speak a different first language than other students communicates a native speakerist perception that they are linguistically deficient and less capable than other students. Irina mirrors this sentiment in her

statement “we kinda suck at this” (line 2) despite maintaining high grades in all her classes. The fault of the miscommunication is, then, fully put onto Irina and other ELL students for not being NESs.

Standard language ideologies extend beyond a valorization of word choice or syntactically dense sentence structures to include the speed and cadence of speech (Lippi-Green, 2012). Similar to how instructors approached language in their classroom documents, many students encountered instructors that were unwilling to change their lecture speed in response to student struggles. Unanimously, in interviews all the participants reported facing difficulties with listening to lectures at the beginning of their time in mainstream classes. As Linh said, each quarter she had to take some time to adjust to a new instructor’s speed and style of speech. I asked each student if they had asked instructors to slow down their speech before. While Li reported asking instructors to repeat at times, other students felt uncomfortable making similar requests due to their perceived status as NNEs (Fieldnotes, February 19, 2020). When I asked Linh what she struggled most with in her mainstream classes, she reported it was initially listening to instructors:

**Excerpt 3.** Linh, Interview 1/4:25–4:56

- 1 DANIELLE; If you had teachers that were talking very fast, did you ever, like, ask them  
2 to slow down?  
3 MAI; (5.0) I- (1.0) all the professors I have taken, they- at the beginning of the  
4 class, they admit that they speak quickly. So-  
5 DANIELLE; Mhm  
6 MAI; Like, I don’t ask them to speak slowly because there are American  
7 students who understand him or her. But I- sometimes I ask again later  
8 like in their office.  
9 DANIELLE; Oh, yea.

Instructors' recognition of their lecture speed as possibly problematic (e.g., "they admit that they speak quickly") despite neglecting to adjust it expresses a similar disregard for the accessibility of classroom materials for students of varied backgrounds. Instructors, intentionally or not, put the full communicative burden on the students. The communicative burden refers to the amount of work a participant in a conversation is willing to put into understanding and being understood by their conversation partner (Lippi-Green, 2012). Often, the communicative burden is placed fully on ELLs as due to native speakerist ideologies, they are perceived as being deficient in some way due to their lack of understanding and being fully responsible for said misunderstanding. Linh reflects this sentiment as well when she explains she does not ask instructors to slow down "because there are American students who understand" (lines 4 - 5). This comment implies that only ELLs (or non-Americans) would have troubles following the instructors' speed of lecture. Yet, many students, ELL or not, often struggle to follow class lectures. Furthermore, even when ELL students did request that instructors slow down their lectures, their struggles were dismissed as a lack of effort on students' part. Linh elaborates on this issue in one of her reflective journal responses, as shown below:

**Excerpt 4.** Linh, Journal Response 1

1        On my first day, I was lost and could not catch a word when the professor was teaching.  
2        Compared to EAP teachers, my professor's speaking speed was way faster. I almost  
3        missed some assignments because I could not hear what I was supposed to do for the  
4        homework or misunderstood the instructions. Once, our international student group asked  
5        her if she could slow down her speaking, but she encouraged us to pay attention to her  
6        lesson instead because she did not talk fast compared to other college professors.

As reflected by Linh's experience, when students fail to fully grasp all the information given to them, teachers might attribute students' lack of understanding to language deficiency or laziness, as is common in prescriptivist and standard language ideologies (Curzan, 2014; Lippi-Green,



2015). These sentiments are rooted in a meritocratic view of language which attribute students' discursive difficulties to a lack of effort, as indicated by Linh's instructor's instructions for them to "pay attention" in line 5. Yet, many students, ELLs or not, may struggle with rushed, unclear, or particular language utilizing previously undefined jargon in lectures and/or class documents.

As illustrated above, students' reports of their experiences suggest that both written and spoken language in the classroom were framed according to standard language ideologies. None of the participants reported instructors adjusting their language use, content, or lecture speed to accommodate the needs of the participants. Rather, student comprehension of classroom content was often subordinated to adherence to the dominant academic standardized English. Students who could not understand particularly dense language or fast-paced speaking were marked as deficient for failing to keep up with dominant discourse practices.

#### **4.2.1.2 Perceptions of Student Writing**

Standard language ideologies also impacted how teachers viewed students' writing. Both Linh and Irina expressed concerns over how their language was perceived by their instructors. Linh stated she was unsure if she would be taken seriously because her writing was not "academic enough". Irina, on the other hand, was confident of her ability to write academically but reported her preferred writing style, which she characterized as "easy language" (see excerpt 5 below), was often criticized by instructors. When discussing in an interview how she felt NES students sometimes received higher grades than her despite having worse essays, she brought up the issue of academic English:

**Excerpt 5.** Irina, Interview 3/41:01–41.57

1        IRINA;        I still prefer to use, uh, easy language,

- 1 DANIELLE; Mhm  
2 IRINA; more than academic English because people are able to understand, right?  
3 DANIELLE; Mhm, yea.  
4 IRINA; For me, the like- the most important part is being understood more than  
5 sound cool or, like, scientific- I mean, what's the- what's the thing if I  
6 start using fancy words, and nobody can understand me, right? There's no  
7 purpose, even for the essay. And I would, like, say 'oh, well this guy did  
8 that and blah blah blah'. (1.0) And the teacher would say 'well, use more  
9 academic words.' I'm like 'well, you're not gonna understand me if I- if  
10 I'll start using them, right? I'll make it fancy sentence, and you will just  
11 not get it what I'm taking about'.  
12 DANIELLE; Mhm  
13 IRINA; But you make it simple- it makes it easy to understand.

Standard language ideologies valorize a vague concept of academic language over intellectual content of the essay. Instead of valuing the students' intellectual contributions, Irina's instructor focused on the form of her language, and her work is trivialized in favor of focusing on word choice or grammatical patterns.

Interestingly, Linh and Irina describe their language as "easy language", yet their writing and speaking utilizes a wide range of vocabulary terms and grammatical structures. For many instructors, academic English is an unclear concept, and few approach it through a critical lens. Thus, when instructors ask their students to use academic language, they often offer only vague descriptions of an imagined "superior" way of writing or speaking. And students are left to rely on their conceptions of academic language while instructors may have vastly different expectations.

As Rosa and Flores (2015) found, racialized and other marginalized people may be perceived as deviating from standardized language even when they do adhere to these practices; thus, regardless of their actual language use, ELL students may find their instructors identify their writing as informal or unacademic due to racial or ethnic bias. While some scholars

estimate that academic English takes between four to seven years to master (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000), and others may regard academic English proficiency as continuously developing (Lippi-Green, 2012), Irina and Linh both presented a strong grasp of academic English throughout their studies. In part, my understanding of their English proficiency is built on my long-term interactions with them. During their time in EAP classes, both Irina and Linh received outstanding student awards from the EAP faculty, largely due to their academic writing abilities. Since I first met Linh and Irina, I often tutored them, helping with essays they were writing in their EAP and mainstream courses. Though I was not able to obtain a copy of Irina's most recent essay (as a portion of it was written by another student for a group project), I was able to read it during one of our interviews. Likewise, I was able to read Linh's university application essay in addition to her written journal reflections. That is to say, based on the writing samples I have seen over time, Linh and Irina's writing displayed many of the hallmarks of academic writing (grammatical variation, nominalization, syntactic density, discipline specific and general academic vocabulary, genre-appropriate organization). Yet, Irina's writing was still directly characterized as deficient, suggesting that it is possible, if not likely, that more than just her language was influencing how instructors perceived her writing and possibly her abilities.

#### **4.2.2 Grading Practices**

One of the most prominent and common ways the participants experienced oppressive language ideology was through inequitable grading practices. All of the participants in this study reported some form of inequitable grading practices. In particular, grammar-based grading was common among a large number of their classes and was reported as being most prevalent in humanities and social sciences classes.

##### **4.2.2.1 Grammar-based grading**

The English class that Daiyu, Li, and Hirono were in relied heavily on grammatical accuracy to grade students on their written assignments. However, according to the syllabus and Fir College Website, the learning goals of the course, and all college-level English courses, focus on learning to organize and write an argumentative essay. Grammar is only a learning goal in under college-level courses, though, in my experience as an instructor at Fir College, some mainstream instructors may choose to teach grammar items in their courses (this was not the case for any of the participants' mainstream courses). However, according to their rubrics, written assignments were graded based on four categories, which were labeled "grammar and mechanics," "identifies the main idea," "conveys key supporting points," and "adequate contexts for clarity". Each of these categories were weighted equally with a total of 16 potential points. Thus, 25% of their grades on summaries and final papers were dependent on their grammar. The "grammar and mechanics" section of the rubric has been transcribed below, including the original wording and punctuation used.

**Figure 4.** Rubric 1

4 points	3 points	2 points	1 point
Contains no spelling, grammar, punctuation or formatting errors.	Contains less than three spelling, grammar, punctuation or formatting errors.	Contains more than three errors in punctuation, spelling, grammar, punctuation or formatting, but errors do not interfere with meaning.	Contains errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation, or formatting that interfere with meaning.

As displayed above, in order to get full points on an assignment, students would have to produce a paper with virtually no deviations from the standardized variety. Over the term, none of the participants received full points for their "grammar and mechanics". With the highest

grade, Daiyu received 3.7 points for grammar after taking her essay to several tutors. Upon examining her graded paper, I found that she received a deduction in points for her use of a comma after “even though” in the sentence “Even though, his family was deprived, ((author name)) remembers that he tried to understand the meaning of words by using his life experience”. Here, Daiyu places a comma after “even though” as if it were acting as a transition phrase rather than part of a dependent clause. Her comma use reflects a nuanced understanding of grammatical rules and practices as well as her complex and developing interlanguage. Furthermore, and most importantly, Daiyu’s comma use in no way detracts from the comprehensibility of her sentence. Her points and the value of her ideas are clearly communicated, and thus, the instructors’ reduction in her grade occurs due to a benign and miniscule deviation from dominant discourses.

This rubric, and many other similar grading systems, rely heavily on standard language ideologies and prescriptivist notions of language. The expectation that students must have no deviations from standardized English (or what are commonly framed as “errors”) in their essays draws on standard language ideologies which view standardized varieties of English, like academic English, as containing no errors (Gee, 2014; Lippi-Green, 2012). Yet, even instructors cannot meet these standards. No written or spoken English is perfect; through typos or contextualized mistakes, most texts have some level of inconsistency or minute errors in them. As if to exemplify this, the rubric above contains a typo (the repetition of “punctuation” in the third box); inconsistent use of the oxford comma; the use of “less than three spelling errors” instead of “fewer than” in the second box; and lastly, the four grading categories (“grammar and mechanics,” “identifies the main idea,” “conveys key supporting points,” and “adequate contexts for clarity”) deviate from the rule of parallelism, which states all words or phrases in a list should

have the same grammatical structure. When taking into consideration the portion of the grade determined by grammatical and spelling accuracy, it becomes clear that “perfect” grammar is being used as a precursor for students’ work to be recognized as legitimate and/or academic. In doing so, contextualized mistakes and the natural process of language acquisition are disregarded while grammatical patterns and spelling errors are framed as problems or “bad English,” as they are often pejoratively referred to in prescriptivist discourses (Curzan, 2014). Thus, students’ intellectual capabilities and the content of their papers may be disregarded in favor of focusing on grammatical accuracy.

By neglecting to take into account the natural variation of language in their grading practices, instructors falsely insinuate that academic texts must be free of errors to be regarded as legitimate, thus disregarding their own likelihood of making mistakes. This pattern among rubrics and student reports about grading practices is analogous with Briggs and Pailliotet’s (1997) findings. They stated pre-service teachers often responded to student texts, drawing on prescriptivist discourses “as if they viewed errors as deeply rooted in individuals, and as if they themselves were the ones with the answers the writers needed, but expressed few doubts about their own abilities or knowledge” (p. 51). Yet, NESs routinely make “mistakes,” or have grammatical variation, in their English (Lippi-Green, 2012).

Another rubric provided by Linh displayed a similar stress on grammar and punctuation in a communications class (again, in which grammar was not a learning objective or topic taught at all). About 16% of the students’ grade was dependent on the paper being “edited and proofread to eliminate sentence skill error”. Unlike the first rubric transcribed above, this one did not lay out the requirements for each point possibility but offered a total of five points for this category. The meaning of this criteria was not elaborated on in the assignment details or

syllabus. This lack of clarity is exacerbated by its ambiguous wording. When I asked Linh what she thought this statement meant, she said she had no idea; though she felt this was referring to the need to be grammatically correct, the phrasing confused her. She did not ask the instructor to explain this grading standard, citing nervousness over asking questions, nor was it explained in class (fieldnotes, January 27, 2020). Thus, the exact standards which students are being graded against are not clear, which often causes students to rely on cultural or experiential understandings of what “sentence skill error” may be, with possibilities ranging from spelling, punctuation, and/or lexical factors to stylistic preferences.

Even if students knew the exact criteria according to which they were being graded, this rubric item still relies on prescriptivist notions of language to frame perfect written accuracy as an achievable result of hard work. The rubric item does not ask that the paper be free of grammatical errors, but instead states it should be “proofread and edited”. The use of the definitive word “eliminate” to describe errors also insinuates a complete removal of grammatical inaccuracies compared to alternatives that allow for grammatical variation, such as “reduce”. Thus, it asserts that proofreading and editing are what is required to produce perfect writing. Beyond the standard language ideologies discussed earlier in this chapter, this statement also draws from prescriptivist and meritocratic ideologies which view language “imperfections” as a result of a lack of effort. From this perspective, everyone can obtain “perfect English” if they put in enough time to study and master all the necessary skills (Curzan, 2014). While this rubric exemplifies the perception of linguistic “perfection” as a result of hard work, others may attribute “imperfection” as a result of unintelligence or a lack of intellectual capability. For example, as Irina described in excerpt 2, giving ELL students extra points on a test due to a perceived linguistic disadvantage exemplifies a perception that their lack of comprehension is

due to linguistic inability rather than communication breakdowns in the instructor's language use.

#### 4.2.2.2 Grading Practices based on Cultural Disbelief

Grading practices also became a point of contention for many students as instructors relied on cultural disbelief to grade students on unstated expectations. To varying degrees, all students reported experiencing instructors supplying vague (at best) instructions regarding important assignments, suggesting they assumed all students had the same background knowledge required to adhere to unstated academic conventions. This typically occurred through instructors either claiming there were no criteria for an assignment or relying on misleading and unclear instructions, often resulting in ELL students receiving lower grades than NES students.

Throughout their academic careers, both Irina and Linh had experiences with unclear grading practices. Both of them described different English classes in which their instructors did not provide rubrics or specify the grading requirements of their assignments. In one interview, Linh told me about experiences of this kind. She prefaced this statement by explaining that she felt that the homework in her English class did not hone skills that applied to writing an essay:

**Excerpt 7.** Linh, Interview 3/3:54–4:12

- 1        MAI;            At that time, I didn't know what a research paper is. Like, I don't know  
2                        what I'm supposed to do. But I don't- I also didn't understand what she  
3                        wanted us to do too. I don't- I really didn't know what to do. (1.0)  
4        DANIELLE; Mhm  
5        MAI;            Yea, so, that- that makes things hard.



Without explicit instructions, Linh was left to rely on her perceptions of what an essay should be to fulfill the assignment. However, this left her feeling unsure about if she could write an essay at all by the end of the class.

**Excerpt 8.** Linh, Interview 3/5:25–6:15

- 1 DANIELLE; So, if you weren't sure how to write the research paper, how did you, kind  
2 of, go about figuring out how to do it?  
3 MAI; (4.0) That's a good question. [I-  
4 DANIELLE; @@  
5 MAI; I- (1.0) I still didn't know after class until- for a while. (1.0) Then, like I  
6 started- like, after ((that class)), I took other classes after that. One or two  
7 quarters later, I started thinking about that.  
8 DANIELLE; Mhm  
9 MAI; I thought 'ohh, that was what I supposed to do'. Like I just keep- keep-  
10 sometimes I just keep thinking about ((that class)) like 'that's what a  
11 research paper is.'

Both Irina and Linh did not receive the grades they had hoped for, leaving them to wonder what they did wrong since the assignment did not have clear criteria. In Linh's case, she did not receive feedback on her final paper. This is a somewhat common practice at Fir College, as final papers are often handed in on the last day of class via physical papers. Thus, students often do not have a chance to see why they received the grade they did or learn from their mistakes. It was not until much later in Linh's academic career when she was able to see examples from other teachers and students that she came to understand how instructors expected essays to be organized.

Linh referred to "a research paper" (excerpt 7 line 1 and excerpt 8 lines 10-11) using the singular article "a" despite mentioning multiple classes (excerpt 8 line 6), indicating the perception that one form of research paper is used across various disciplines. This idea is not

unique to Linh; many of the participants articulated the idea that there is one way to write an essay across disciplines. In my experience working at Fir College, I saw it is common among many instructors to view the role of introductory writing classes as to teach students one essay format, regardless of the fact different disciplines have unique and stringent writing practices. These perceptions are particularly problematic through the lens of genre pedagogy. As Hyland (2008a) puts it, genre pedagogy is “concerned with making explicit what experts produce when they write” (p. 543). That is, genre pedagogy is used to explicitly teach students about the discursive practices which are expected and used in various genres of writing in specific disciplines (as well as skills to analyze texts to identify patterns within genres). Thus, without explicit instructions, students are not only stunted from making informed decisions throughout the writing process, but the reality of variations in writing practices across disciplines as well as within a single discipline is often obscured for students, possibly resulting in further struggles as they continuously engage in written assignments in various classes and disciplines throughout their academic careers.

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Irina expressed experiencing a similar lack of instructions when approaching essay assignments as Linh, though she expressed more frustration regarding her grade. The English class she took was paired with a history class; the classes were co-taught by an English instructor and a history instructor in a ‘learning community’. This course format is extremely common at Fir College as students are required to take two learning communities in order to graduate. Most

often, learning community classes pair English with another subject. Ideally, one hour of the course is taught by one instructor and then the second hour by the other while both instructors remain present throughout the entirety of the class to assist as needed. However, as I observed as a student and faculty member, this format often causes contention between instructors from differing disciplines and discrepancies between grading systems. All written assignments receive individual grades from both instructors, often based on differing but overlapping grading criteria. As Irina explained, she received a high grade from her history professor and low grade from her English professor on her final paper. She describes the incident:

**Excerpt 9.** Irina, Interview 2/12:55–13:40

- 1        IRINA;        The English teacher, I had no idea how he was grading it. Really, I had no  
2                            idea. he would give us feedback, then I would change it the way he wanted  
3                            me to do, you know? Because for me it's kinda hard. I was never- I was  
4                            never in high school, and I don't know how you write essays in high  
5                            school here.  
6        DANIELLE; Mhm.  
7        IRINA;        'So- so, I still kinda don't know how you want me to write, how you want  
8                            me to build it.'

It is important to clarify line 11 in which Irina states she “was never in high school”. Irina had completed two years of high school in her country of origin before attending Fir College, however, she had never attended high school in the U.S; many of the participants gave similar statements when describing their struggles with unstated criteria or unclear instructions in mainstream courses. Yet, the function of introductory writing classes is to prepare all students, whatever their background may be, for their academic careers. Many of the students at Fir College have not completed high school, and even if they have, writing practices in high schools

and universities as well as different areas of study vary widely. Thus, a lack of clear instruction disadvantages all students.

While Irina mentioned instructor feedback in line 2, she also reported changing her essay repeatedly based on vague and indirect suggestions with no improvement to her grade. By the end of the quarter, she had three different versions of the same essay, each one adjusted to match her instructor's feedback, only to be marked as wrong or incorrect again.

**Excerpt 10.** Irina, Interview 2/15:05-15:25

- 1        IRINA;        I didn't want to talk to him because he would just say something like 'oh, I  
2                        wanted you to write like that', but then at the beginning of the class he  
3                        would say 'oh, I don't have any criteria how you write it.'  
4        DANIELLE; Mhm.  
5        IRINA;        I could write it like a story, I could write it like a first person, second  
6                        person, whatever I could write. He would still not like it.

Irina's account of her interaction with the instructor suggests that though he claimed there were no stated criteria for the assignment, he had a clear idea of what he expected from students. He was able to state what was supposedly wrong about her paper but did not give guidance as to how she could make it better. In a casual conversation, recorded in my fieldnotes, Irina elaborated on the feedback she did receive from her instructor. She reported that his correction often focused on the organization of her paper and was contradictory. For example, she described one of his comments about the level of specificity in her essay. At one point, she recalled he asked her to begin her introductory paragraph with a broad description of the issue she was writing on (women's suffrage) and then narrow down the topic throughout the essay, ending with a conclusion very specific to her research question. Later, she said he critiqued her essay, telling her to begin her introduction with her narrow, specific research question and end the essay with a

broad discussion of the topic. Later, this approach was also marked as incorrect by her instructor (Fieldnotes, February 10, 2020). Contradictory and continuously negative feedback communicates on some level an unattainable standard, as Irina said in line 6 “whatever I could write. He would still not like it.”

A lack of criteria is often framed in dominant discourses among educators as allowing students freedom to write what they want. Social practices within highly formal discourses, such as those in higher education, are very constricted (Fairclough, 1989). Though an instructor may assert there is no criteria for an assignment, there is a limited amount of variation that can occur within an essay while still being recognized as a legitimate, academic essay. By keeping the required writing conventions occluded, instructors are practicing a form of gatekeeping on the basis of discourse community and experiential background.

When examining Irina’s experience, it is important to consider her history teacher’s reaction to her paper. She received full points from her history teacher for the exact same paper. He did not focus on her grammar and took a more descriptivist approach to language, valuing the content of her paper and her intellectual contributions over formalities like grammaticality or formatting. Furthermore, he valued her language competency, as her history teacher personally recommended her to the school’s writing center as a potential English tutor where she later got a job.

At times, assignment criteria were also hidden through unclear or unrealistic descriptors. Below I have transcribed one of the points on a study guide Daiyu was given which describes the parts of an essay:

**Excerpt 11. Study Guide 1**

- 1 Claim: This is also called a topic sentence. This is your way of announcing the main
- 2 focus of your paragraph. Like an arguable thesis statement, the topic sentence is a
- 3 debatable claim that requires effective evidence. A claim cannot be a direct quote or
- 4 paraphrase. It must be your own idea and language.

Line 4 highlights that students are to use their own “language”, likely referring to their stylistic way of writing or voice. The sentiment that students should use their own language is similar to Shen’s (1989) confusing experience with instructors telling him to “be himself” when he wrote essays yet penalizing him when his writing practices and the ideologies communicated through his writing were perceived as deviating from the dominant discourse. As discussed in sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3, students’ language is often only viewed as legitimate when it meets the standards of the dominant discourse. While students may feel they are allowed to write with their own styles or competencies, and while criteria may purport to allow or even encourage this, their grades suffer when they are perceived as deviating from the dominant discourse, as Irina and Linh experienced.

Therefore, when instructors do not provide ample instruction, or when they present instructions in a way that frames the assignment as exceedingly flexible, students that are not familiar with dominant discourse practices often experience negative appraisals of their work.

#### **4.2.3 Hegemonic Conceptions of Learning: Participation Points**

Grading based on participation was a topic that came up with every participant as they all struggled with it; most of the participants felt uncomfortable participating in classes by asking or answering questions, and many did not know what did or did not constitute participation. In interviews, Hirono, Linh, and Li expressed anxiety over speaking in front of class, especially in front of their NES peers as I will discuss in chapter 5. Linh and Daiyu also brought up that in

their countries, volunteering answers or commenting on the discussed topics was not a common social practice in educational institutions. Linh elaborated on this, saying that she felt unsure if the way her peers participated was appropriate or not, as they often commented on the lecture or shared personal experiences in seemingly insignificant ways or addressed the professor casually.

Furthermore, many instructors approached participation grades as though they were a universally known concept, giving little to no information on them. As Daiyu and I were discussing participation points, I asked her what constituted participation by giving examples from my experiences:

**Excerpt 12.** Daiyu, Interview 1/6:02–6:55

- 1 DANIELLE; Sometimes I had teachers that sometimes there's a participation grade, but  
2 it just means paying attention in class.
- 3 DAIYU; Mhm.
- 4 DANIELLE; But then I had others where it meant volunteering answers which can be  
5 really difficult if you're shy @ I know I didn't- when I was in undergrad, I  
6 didn't like it at all @@@
- 7 DAIYU; I- I have no idea it's- like my teacher at the first class, and he didn't say  
8 we have participation points. Then, I just hear that, like, when people- no  
9 one answer the question he will say like 'this is a good opportunity to,  
10 like, have participation points'
- 11 DANIELLE; Oh.
- 12 DAIYU; And then we know there have participation points,
- 13 DANIELLE; Oh.
- 14 DAIYU; in this class.
- 15 DANIELLE; Was it on the syllabus maybe? [I wonder-
- 16 DAIYU; [No

Before several weeks into the class, she was unaware participation was part of their grade. Irina explained that it was common practice for instructors to mention participation points in class but never submit grades for it. When I asked Daiyu what constituted participation in her class, she was unsure aside from asking or answering questions. Upon analyzing her syllabus, I also found

this was not discussed anywhere. However, a few weeks into the class, her course website page showed that they would be graded for participation but gave no additional information. In later interviews with Hirono and Li, who were in the same class, I discovered neither of them were aware of the participation component of their grade at all. So, while participation points were not discussed or introduced as an integral part of the class, Daiyu reported that the instructor did mention participation points when students were not answering questions in class (lines 9 and 10). In this way, participation points, which ultimately result in a better grade, are used as a social good to influence students' actions. However, this exertion of power does not take into consideration variation in student personality, learning styles, or familiarity with Western concepts of participation and learning.

I would posit that grading based on participation, especially with a lack of explicit guidelines, is a form of cultural disbelief as it results in grading students based solely on a particular and limited Western perspective of learning. As instructors and students may have different concepts of participation, students may believe they are fulfilling class requirements while being perceived by instructors as not participating (Crosthwaite, Bailey, & Meeker, 2015; Fritschner, 2000). Additionally, as Mello (2010) pointed out, teachers may perceive students participating more or less due to racial, ethnic, or language backgrounds.

Despite the prevalence of participation grades in Western educational institutions, verbal participation is not always beneficial to students' learning (Crosthwaite et al., 2015). Rather, the need to participate verbally in class is a social practice engrained in Western educational institutions. Non-Western notions of learning are positioned as deficient, passive, and/or inefficient in comparison. Students who are not familiar with dominant discourse practices surrounding participation, have different learning styles, and/or struggle with public speaking,



like Daiyu, Li, and Hirono, are negatively impacted by inequitable participation grades and the often tacit assumptions that shape these grading practices.

#### 4.2.4 Explicit Instances of Othering

Irina, in particular, recounted experiences of explicit Othering throughout her academic career. In her second year of mainstream courses, in the same class in which she encountered difficulties with the unclear grading practices discussed above, she also experienced explicit Othering from her instructor. Throughout our interviews, she often mentioned that she enjoyed sharing information about her country and culture in her classes. While many instructors were receptive to this, there were several times she experienced negative responses from instructors. She recalls telling this particular instructor about how she discovered certain words could not be directly translated from English into her first language:

**Excerpt 13.** Irina, Interview 1/23:50–24:33

- 1        IRINA;        Yea, actually, that teacher made a joke about it, too. I was trying to  
2                    explain him that concept and I'm like 'well, you have that 'cuddle' and  
3                    'snuggle', and in ((my language)) we don't have it',  
4        DANIELLE; Mhm  
5        IRINA;        And he said 'oh, but you have probably forty words for pain and suffering'  
6                    and I'm like (3.0) @W- like, 'what are you talking about? What's the joke  
7                    about?'  
8        DANIELLE; Yea!  
9        IRINA;        I mean, okay, ((we)) are harsh uh (1.0) drink vodka all the time, you  
10                    know, like the [stereotypes,  
11        DANIELLE;        [#A- Yea  
12        IRINA;        like whatever. But why do you say that about me?' like, really.  
13        DANIELLE; Mhm  
14        IRINA;        I mean, it's just- Uh, it feels inappropriate.

Irina's instructor builds on stereotypes that people from her country are harsh, perhaps violent, and negative to portray her as the threatening or unkind Other. In doing so, the instructor relies on an essentialist ideology of her language and culture. According to Bucholtz (2010) essentialism is "an ideology that social groups are clearly delineated, internally homogeneous, and fundamentally different from other groups. Essentialism treats the characteristics of group members as inherent, fixed qualities that are either biologically or culturally determined" (p. 6). From this perspective, instead of recognizing that concepts such as 'cuddle' and 'snuggle' still exist in Irina's first language, just with larger phrases or sentences to describe the acts, the instructor implies that her language must only reflect a stereotypical misrepresentation of her culture. As seen in Irina's response, and as I will expand on in section 4.3.3.1, these conjured misrepresentations are very familiar to Irina and a site of struggle throughout her academic career.

Implicit prejudice is integral to neo-racism, and while the instructor's statement is a direct denigration of Irina's language and culture, it is framed as a joke, thus allowing the instructor to deny any malicious intentions behind the comment if he were to be confronted on it. In part, this is done in line 5 with the reported use of the hedge "probably" and through the hyperbole that her language has "forty words for pain and suffering". A hyperbole, often used in comedy, can be used to express an exaggeration which is untrue yet not fully regarded as a lie (Ferré, 2014), thus allowing the instructor to distance himself from his statement if need be. While modern color-blind discourses and neo-racist discourses often perpetuate racism and ethnicism by concealing it "beneath an 'inclusive' and 'nice' professional veneer" (Holliday, 2015, p. 19), Pérez (2013) explains humor is often used to overtly express racism while attempting to neglect the harm and offense of the statement. In this situation, it worked to obscure the malicious misrepresentation

behind the words, as Irina reported that because she felt the instructor was joking, she did not know how to address the comment and said nothing about it. It was not until later when another student commented on the inappropriateness of the incident that she said she felt her frustration was justifiable and the comment was not “just a joke”. However, she said that at the time she didn’t know how to react, so the instructor’s comment went by unaddressed.

In a second incident with the same instructor, Irina reported neo-racism directed at her due to her country of origin’s political history. In a conversation that was not audio-recorded that I later made fieldnotes of, Irina reported that her instructor had asked students to help him choose a book cover by voting on which color scheme they liked. Irina was one of the few students that voted for a red and yellow color scheme. In response, the instructor laughed at her, making a remark that she would like ‘communism colors’ due to her country of origin’s communist past. Irina reported a similar reaction to this comment as in excerpt 13. She reported that at the moment, she did not say anything about it. Later, she felt frustrated by the invocation of stereotypes and the instructor’s clear lack of knowledge about her country and culture, as she pointed out to me her country has not been under a communist government since before she was born (Fieldnotes January 22, 2020). However, considering the sociopolitical background of anti-communism in the U.S. brings deeper significance to the instructor’s statement.

In both incidents described above, Irina’s instructor establishes her as the Other while maintaining his sameness with the rest of the class using Bucholtz and Hall’s (2004) tactics of intersubjectivity. By painting Irina as the aggressive Other in Excerpt 13, the instructor uses tactics of distinction to create separation between them personally as reflected in Irina’s report of the use of the personal pronoun “you” (line 5); where the instructor could have referred to her language by its name, the invocation of “you” positions Irina personally. Conversely, the

instructor aligns himself with students in the class he may perceive as non-ELL or American students through the process of adequation where their differences such as age, gender, education, and/or socioeconomic status are momentarily disregarded in favor of their perceived linguistic or cultural similarities (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). Therefore, the distinction is established not only between Irina and her instructor but also between Irina and the rest of the class.

At times, students may be Othered if they do not adhere to dominant discourse practices. In one interview, proceeding a discussion with Irina in which she expressed feeling self-conscious about her accent, I asked her if she had any experiences with someone explicitly commenting on her or someone else's accent.

**Excerpt 14.** Irina, Interview 2/5:35–6:42

- 1 DANIELLE; Did you have anyone- or like, maybe not about you but did you hear  
2 anyone directly comment on someone else's like accent or pronunciation?  
3 IRINA; (1.2) Mm, hm, hm, hm, I'm not sure. I can't really say that it was obvious  
4 or someone would say like 'What? I can't understand. Speak normal.' But  
5 I had a class, and there was a girl, she was from Indonesia, I think. And  
6 the teacher- I mean, she had- you know, all Asian people they have like  
7 very quiet voice. They try to be silent. They like don't yell. They don't  
8 speak loudly. So, she was super shy.  
9 DANIELLE; Mhm  
10 IRINA; And the teacher asked her something in class, and she '#oh'. She was like  
11 super shy. She was like ((mumbling)) like very quietly.  
12 DANIELLE; Mhm  
13 IRINA; And he was like 'What? Can you say louder?' like (1.0) and she would  
14 like try to do that, and he obviously got irritated because he came very  
15 close to her like stood next to her, trying to like show entire class that he  
16 can't hear.  
17 DANIELLE; Mm  
18 IRINA; And I don't know- that was very annoying.

While Irina overgeneralizes by stating all Asian people are very quiet, she brings up the topic of varying social practices; as discussed in section 4.2.3, many students may have different learning styles and emotional factors which impact their ability to participate in class. However, upon seeing the student struggle, Irina's instructor's response was to cause greater discomfort by putting her on the spot. Fairclough (1989) states that drawing attention to a conversation partner of lower power is one way of exerting power. The instructor physically exemplifies his power over her, and his displeasure, by moving to stand by her and loudly stating her failure to speak loudly enough.

In both Irina's experience and those of other students, the instructors respond to students by enacting oppressive ideologies to exaggerate stereotypes and misrepresentations of ELL students. Shuck (2004) views the enactment of ideology as a form of collaborative linguistic performance that serves to Other ELLs by referring to them in exaggerated, negative ways. In such cases, speakers normalize extreme stereotypes and the devaluation of ELLs' linguistic competencies for the sake of the speaker's performance. Performance is collaborative, and the speaker uses tactics of adequation and distinction (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004) as they aim to entertain the listener or build a relationship of sameness between them by contrasting it with the Otherness of the ELL (Shuck, 2004). While the first instructor did this by making "jokes" to establish her Otherness while maintaining his sameness with the other students, the second instructor did so by pointing out what he considered to be the student's linguistic deficiency.

Both of these incidents were highly public situations in which the instructors had control over the conversation. As Fairclough (1989) states, "power in discourse is to do with powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants" (p. 46). In this context, it is clear the instructor holds power over the students in part due to his

institutionally granted position. Exercising this power, he is able to constrain how the students respond to him, what social relationships they are able to construct, and the subject position they occupy (Fairclough, 1989). As Irina and the other student are constrained to the subject position of “student,” their possible responses are constrained by the power imbalances and dominant discourse practices. They may want to express frustration or displeasure but can only do so by risking their position in the class. Irina mirrors this sentiment later in the interview when she says, “I didn’t know I could say my teacher was a sexist or a racist” (Irina Interview 2). As I will discuss further in chapter five, Irina’s statement speaks to the lack of awareness many students have regarding their rights and options as students when they do face discrimination. As a result, many students are coerced or led to consent to oppressive language ideologies and inequitable treatment in their classes.

## **Chapter 5 Findings: Impacts on Students and Student Identity**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I will discuss my second research question to explore how the language ideologies that ELL students reported facing impacted them. Though I mainly focus on impacts to their identities, I also touch on issues like grades and impacts to their academic careers. Upon analyzing interviews and reflective journals, I found that the participants' responses indicated that the hegemonic ideologies (particularly native speakerist and prescriptivist ideologies) they encountered when interacting with their instructors were reflected in their narrations of both their subjectivities and how they positioned themselves in their classes and interview interactions. As students reported being positioned by instructors as the Other or linguistically disadvantaged NNES, some participants took up and reproduced prescriptivist ideologies through how they evaluated their own language use, often by denigrating their competencies due to perceived grammatical errors. Overwhelmingly, the participants referenced NESs as an ideal standard for their language use, resulting in, among other practices, subordinating themselves to NES students in classes. Additionally, many students faced negative impacts on their academic careers, primarily through a reduction in their grades. In reproducing oppressive language ideologies, the participants exemplified how hegemony is maintained through the process of consent, despite that these language ideologies are oppressive and disadvantageous to them. However, students also resisted oppressive ideologies at times, exemplifying the complexity of identity as a site of struggle.

### **5.2 Taking Up Oppressive Ideologies**

When the participants faced oppressive language ideologies in their mainstream courses, they often took on hegemonic language ideologies and regarded themselves and/or their

language use as deficient. All the participants identified at least one area of their language use in which that they felt they could, or needed, to improve. And others expressed explicit displeasure with their English, such as Hirono, who said, “I don’t have pride of my English” when discussing classroom participation.

Linh exemplified one of the ways in which participants took up standardized language ideologies that she had encountered in mainstream classes. She had been discussing the ways in which her English competencies had changed throughout her academic career when she began to discuss her desire to improve her writing skills:

**Excerpt 15. Linh** Interview 2/8:15–9:00

- 1 MAI; It’s hard for me to write a scholarship expressing myself.  
2 DANIELLE; Mhm  
3 MAI; (2.0) But I don’t know if they only grade based on the way I write. I mean,  
4 I could write a- (1.0) a grammatically correct paragraph,  
5 DANIELLE; Mhm  
6 MAI; but it’s not deep thought, it’s not a complicated sentence.  
7 DANIELLE; Right  
8 MAI; It’s just like ‘my name is Linh’. It’s easy, easy grammar.  
9 DANIELLE; Right, mhm  
10 MAI; Yea, so, it’s not really complicated, so I don’t know if they would- they  
11 would feel like it’s- uh, it’s not yet qualified- I’m not yet qualified for a  
12 scholarship just because I write it simply.

Linh’s evaluation of her own language reflects many of the hegemonic language ideologies discussed in section 4.2.1. In lines 6, 8, and 10, Linh uses language qualifiers (e.g., “not a complicated sentence,” “easy, easy grammar”) to stress the simplicity of her writing, directly connecting grammatical complexity to the depth of thoughts expressed. Linh takes up standard language ideologies that view standardized English, or English varieties perceived as more formal, as intrinsically more complex and capable of communicating more complicated thoughts



(Lippi-Green, 2012; MacSwan, 2018). She then extends these ideologies to position herself as not a good writer; while in line 11 she begins to say the essay may not be qualified to be rewarded a scholarship, she cuts herself off to say she herself is “not qualified” to receive a scholarship if she does not write essays with a certain level of syntactic density and grammatical complexity. By shifting the qualifying factor from the inanimate essay to herself, she indicates value judgments may be made about her personally based on language use. However, it is worth mentioning again, as outlined in sections 3.5 and 4.2.1.2, Linh had already successfully written many academic essays in her mainstream courses and overall received high grades.

Participants’ discourse also often reflected prescriptivist and standard language ideologies, which assert that so-called “perfect” English is attainable, particularly within a short amount of time after arriving in a context in which the target language is the primary language (Curzan, 2014; Lippi-Green, 2012), as exemplified by the following example from one of Irina’s interviews:

**Excerpt 16.** Irina Interview 2/3:47–4:08

- 1           IRINA;           When you go, like- you know, when you live longer here, you think that  
2                            you’re supposed to know more things. You’re supposed- you like think  
3                            that your English is better. And when people say that it’s- (1.5) it’s better,  
4                            but it’s not perfect, yea, so, you feel kinda ‘oh no, that’s sad.’

Irina expressed the sentiment that living longer in an English-dominant context would lead to attaining “perfect” English. In doing so, she discredits progressing, yet “imperfect”, competencies (e.g., “It’s better, but it’s not perfect.”) based on the evaluation of others.

Throughout this excerpt, Irina uses the indefinite pronoun “you”. As Fairclough (1989) states, the indefinite pronoun is often used to create solidarity between two people or groups and to

establish claims as normal or commonsensical. Thus, she normalized her perspective and reproduced hegemonic language ideologies. However, through prescriptivist and meritocratic ideologies, contextualized mistakes and/or a lack of rapid linguistic growth may be deemed as a result of a lack of effort (Curzan, 2014).

## **5.2.2 Student Perceptions of the “Native English Speaker”**

The participants of this study expressed ideologies aligning with common hegemonic notions of the NES previously discussed in section 2.4 (Creese, Takhi, & Blackledge, 2014; Doerr, 2009; Holliday, 2015). NESs were often regarded as a homogenous group of linguistically superior English speakers, and all the participants brought up native speakers or American students at some point, either referencing their language use as the ideal or otherwise juxtaposing themselves with NES students by invoking tactics of adequation and distinction, ultimately subordinating themselves to their NES peers as I will discuss in section 4.3.2.2.

### **5.2.2.1 Native English Speakers as “the Embodiment of Standardized English”**

Throughout our interviews, the participants framed NESs’ language use as the ideal, standardized variety of English which they strove to achieve. Participants’ discourse generally communicated a valorization of NESs’ language as free of accent, variation, and/or grammatical errors. Irina exemplified native speakerist perspectives on accent when she was discussing her experiences studying English:

#### **Excerpt 17.** Irina Interview 2/2:30–3:16

- 1 IRINA; I felt, I don’t know for some reason as long as you live here- I started
- 2 feeling ‘Oh people don’t like the way I speak. They don’t like my
- 3 pronunciation. They don’t like my accent.’ It would be give me (3.0) um,

1 not really stress, but it would make me upset because (1.0) you try to live  
2 here and do your best, studying the language,  
3 DANIELLE; Mhm  
4 IRINA; like working on your speaking every single day you know, and the only  
5 goal you have is to speak perfectly, you know, to sound like an American  
6 so people would be like ‘oh where are you from? Are you like American?  
7 What? Where- where you from?’ and they don’t know where you’re from  
8 because you have good language.

Irina’s references to perfect speech (line 6) and “good language” (line 9) in conjunction with sounding like an American reflects a native speakerist ideology that ideal English is achieved when she is no longer recognized as an ELL or international student, which would require her to remove all indicators of her ties to her L1 and country of origin. Her response highlighted the desire to be viewed as an American NES (lines 6-9). Irina’s response is not uncommon among ELLs; as Doerr (2009) explains, being viewed as a citizen of a country with English as a national language was strongly tied to perceived NES status.

While Irina’s references to her accent were preceded by negative adjectives in all our interviews (most prominently, “weird”), in this excerpt, she addressed experiencing negative appraisals of her accent by members of the dominant discourse community. Irina’s response here raises questions about the extent to which she is internalizing these attitudes. Similar to Lippi-Green’s (2012) assertions, Irina used “accent” to refer exclusively to non-English accents. Accent is, then, used as an Othering factor which only belongs to those who are not perceived as part of the dominant discourse community (Lippi-Green, 2012). Contrastingly, NESs are positioned as having no accent, and therefore “normal” or “correct”.

Irina discussed these hegemonic language ideologies as if they are common and widely accepted. While in lines 1-3 Irina used the personal pronoun “I” to describe her experiences and

emotions related to the reception of her accent, in line 4, she switched to using the indefinite pronoun “you” to describe the goal of learning English and her ideal reception by English speakers. By using “you” instead of “I” to discuss the purpose and goal of language acquisition, she painted a native speakerist ideology as widely accepted among language learners.

The participants additionally valorized the grammatical accuracy and writing abilities of NES students. When I was asking Daiyu about how her teacher graded based on grammar, she mentioned that she could not make more than three mistakes if she wanted to get full points.

**Excerpt 18.** Daiyu Interview 1/10:45–11:07

- 1        DANIELLE; Oh, I think I saw that rubric.  
2        DAIYU;        Mhm  
3        DANIELLE; (2.0) Yes, interesting. Um (2.5) Do you feel like- How does that make you  
4                    feel if you see that, you know?  
5        DAIYU;        It make me feel like I need to see a tutor every, like, with every  
6                    assignments. Like I can’t do by myself. Like I need someone like native  
7                    speaker can check to make sure that my grades not get down or something  
8                    like that.

In response to grammar-based grading, Daiyu reported feeling she could no longer meet the standards of her assignments on her own. Instead, she cited the need for a native speaker or someone with near-native proficiency (“someone like a native speaker”) to check her writing. Importantly, in reality, NESs are not intrinsically more linguistically competent or free from grammatical variation (Creese, Takhi, and Blackledge, 2014; Doerr, 2009), yet Daiyu expressed the native speakerist belief that there is a superior value in NESs’ writing or language use regardless of their qualifications or experiential background (Holliday, 2015). She reported viewing her own writing and language use as inferior as a result, overlooking the fact that many NES students may struggle to meet the demands of their assignment as well.

### 5.2.2.2 The ELL Self as Subordinate to NES Peers in Classroom Interactions

The participants' views of NESs as an ideal representation of language use influenced how they reported positioning themselves in the classroom. Firth and Wagner (2007) state the dichotomous views of NES and NNES result in NESs being “unproblematically viewed as the NSS’s subordinates, with regard to communicative competence” (p. 763). This attitude was reflected by participants.

Often, when the participants discussed their NES peers, they subordinated themselves based on their perceived language proficiency and status as an NNES. As identity is constructed through how people position themselves and those around them (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004), exploring how the participants positioned themselves in relation to their classmates is significant to understanding their identities as students. Daiyu and Hirono both express doubt regarding the legitimacy of their participation in classes with NES students. Daiyu addresses this issue below:

#### **Excerpt 19.** Daiyu Interview 1/2:40–3:43

- 1 DANIELLE; Since this is your first quarter in mainstream classes, how did you feel  
2 going in? Did you feel like you were confident about your academic  
3 English?  
4 DAIYU; Yea, this is pretty interesting. When I was in our English class, it’s not  
5 only international students here. There have a lot of native speakers here  
6 around, so it’s a lot. So- so I’m so scared. I’m so afraid to, like, stand out  
7 to- to, uh, say my opinion or something.  
8 DANIELLE; Mhm  
9 DAIYU; So, I usually pretty quiet when I’m- I’m in the English class. But in ((the  
10 support class)), there just one or two native speakers here,  
11 DANIELLE; Mhm  
12 DAIYU; and all of us is international students so I will feel pretty comfortable.  
13 Like, I- I pretty want to say my opinions or something  
14 DANIELLE; Mhm  
15 DAIYU; to volunteer to do some work when my teacher want volunteer. So, it’s  
16 kinda pretty different.

Daiyu's response here suggests that her positioning of herself changes when she is around NES students. When in a class with primarily ELL students she feels confident, by contrast, in a mixed class, she worries about being Othered by her NES peers. Hirono expressed similar feelings when I asked her why she felt uncomfortable participating in class:

**Excerpt 20.** Hirono Interview 1/5:00–6:13

- 1           DANIELLE; Did anything specific happen that made you nervous to talk in class? Or  
2                                   do you just (1.0) #
- 3           HIRONO;     Hm (4.0) Yes, I- I think (3.0) most of the international students don't talk  
4                                   in the class. Um, after English class we have ((the support class)), and then  
5                                   many people speak in the class. But in English class we don't talk. And  
6                                   then (2.0) other students talk a lot than us. So, we feel like maybe they are  
7                                   (1.5) hm, feel our English is bad, so I @hesitate to talk.
- 8           DANIELLE; The other students? You think?
- 9           HIRONO;     I think also other students think so.

While Daiyu used the singular pronoun “I” to describe her perspective and experience, only using the collective pronoun “us” in line 12 (“us international students”), Hirono primarily used collective pronouns “we” and “us” (lines 4-7) to refer to international students specifically while “they” and “other students” (lines 6 and 9) are used to refer to non-international students. In doing so, Hirono generalized her perspective to a widely occurring phenomenon. Furthermore, she created a dichotomous distinction between international students and “other students”. Through this distinction, she utilized Bucholtz and Hall's (2004a) tactic of authorization to position non-international students as having greater authority to talk in class or judge international students' English due to a perceived linguistic authority. Both Hirono and Daiyu's statements reflect prescriptivist views of language which regard deviations from standardized English as problems or signifiers of “bad English”. As a result, they positioned themselves as

subordinate to NES students (or non-international students, as Hirono expressed) by silencing themselves and deferring to NES students' answers in class. As Lave and Wenger (1991) assert, participation and non-participation alike work to establish one's membership and positionality within a discourse community. While silence can communicate a variety of things, Tartar (2005) and Morita (2004) both found that ELL students often remained silent in mainstream courses when they experienced feelings of linguistic of intellectual and/or linguistic inferiority in comparison to the other students in the course. In addition, students may use silence as a form of self-preservation when they feel speaking up would cause them to be judged or lose face (Tartar, 2005), as Hirono indicates through her concern over being judged by the other students. However, it is important to note that silence cannot always be attributed to one single cause or factor; one student may remain silent across a variety of contexts and courses for different and intermingling reasons (Morita, 2004).

While Irina does not report subordinating herself to NES students in interpersonal classroom interactions, she does express an expectation of being subordinated by dominant discourse members. As Irina was discussing her experiences with her English and History combined classes, she described becoming an English tutor because her history teacher recommended her for the job:

**Excerpt 21.** Irina Interview 1/17:50–18:13

- 1        IRINA;        One day, I get an email and it says 'oh, this teacher recommended you to  
2                        become um, an English tutor'. I'm like 'what? N-' (1.0) I'm like 'what?'  
3                        We had a class, forty people in there. He recommends me to become a  
4                        tutor- English tutor. I'm not even American. I felt- you know I felt like  
5                        I'm above the clouds.  
6        DANIELLE;    @@@ yea  
7        IRINA;        It's an amazing feeling, the teacher recommends you to be a tutor for  
8                        English.

9 DANIELLE; Mhm  
10 IRINA; And you're like wow, but I'm not- I'm not from here. Is it allowed? And  
11 you feel- you feel amazing.

Irina's first reaction when being given the position of English tutor was to highlight that she is not an American. It can be ascertained that her previous notions of requirements for legitimacy as an English tutor were NES status and nationalistic ties.

### **5.2.3 Identity as a Site of Struggle: Resistance**

As exemplified in this study and many others (e.g. De Costa, 2016; Séror, 2008; Shen, 1989) students are often prescribed identities by instructors and other students throughout their educational careers. When faced with oppressive language ideologies, students who fail to meet teachers' standards may take up identities of deficient students or struggling NNES students. However, others may resist the identities prescribed to them.

Irina, in particular, exemplified identity as multiple and a site of struggle (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Darwin & Norton, 2015; Norton-Peirce, 1995) through how she discussed herself and other students. While she often spoke about her language use by strongly relying on prescriptivist and standard language ideologies, as shown in section 4.3.2.1, she also resisted the oppressive ideologies and ideological treatment she faced throughout her academic career. Throughout our interviews, three main forms of resistance came up in our discussions: claiming legitimacy, invoking linguistic truths, and deflecting oppressive ideologies.

#### **5.2.3.1 Resistance Through Legitimation**

Irina resists oppressive language ideologies by drawing on legitimation in excerpt 22. According to Weber (1964), "every system of authority attempts to establish and to cultivate the



belief in its legitimacy” (p. 325). This relates to the legitimacy of both social practices and social actors and is deeply connected with who is granted what kind of power. The recognition of legitimacy is integral both to gaining power and gaining acceptance into the dominant discourse community (Bourdieu, 1997; Hall & Bucholtz, 2004a).

While many participants used tactics of authorization to reinforce hegemonic language ideologies, Irina often drew on authorization and illegitimization to legitimize her own language use, knowledge, and identity as a student despite how teachers or other students might have regarded her. Specifically, Irina often used her success as a student (as measured by grades, ability to answer questions in class, and progression to higher-level courses), as well as other ELL students’ signs of success, to legitimize both her language use and her subject position as a legitimate student in the college. Though Irina had several experiences with oppressive language ideologies, neo-racism, and discrimination, she generally spoke confidently about her language use and position as a student.

**Excerpt 22.** Irina Interview 2/7:36–8:3

- 1 DANIELLE; For the times you felt insecure like with writing or speech or anything,  
2 how did you (1.0) handle it? Like, how did you make yourself feel better  
3 about it? Or- or- or did you just move on and different classes made you  
4 feel better?
- 5 IRINA; I would say that there are always people who will not like you,  
6 DANIELLE; Mhm
- 7 IRINA; and there will always be people who like you. So, I used to feel upset. I  
8 thought that- I even started getting- I thought ‘am I starting getting  
9 depression’, you know, because family is far away, teachers are being not  
10 really nice to me, but I was like ‘okay, don’t just go in there. I know I can  
11 do it.’ I mean it doesn’t matter what people really say. How about the fact  
12 I am here alone without my family? They pay a lot of money here for me  
13 to study, and I think that I already finished a lot. I achieved a lot in my life  
14 before I’m only nineteen years old, and I’m already tutoring someone in  
15 chemistry-

16 DANIELLE; Mhm  
17 IRINA; in America! I get paid for it. And, like, my family they are so proud of me.  
18 They just like they just can't describe they are so proud.

Though Irina invokes many negative adjectives of emotion in her conversations (e.g., “upset”), she stresses her success by repeating that she has achieved a lot in a short amount of time. It is partly through the repetition of time clauses (e.g., “already”, “before I’m only nineteen”) and reports of what she has done (e.g., “finished a lot”, “achieved a lot”) that Irina highlights the significance of her achievements (see Gee, 2014a; Fairclough, 1989). She then qualifies her abilities by pointing out she is a paid tutor at the college holding an officially appointed position, thereby giving her some level of institutionalized authority within the institute. This excerpt, then, exemplifies how she draws on tactics of authorization to position herself as a legitimate student and language user due to the signs of academic success such as good grades, the approval of her family, her hard work, and her position as a tutor.

Irina extends the tactics of authorization and illegitimation to evaluate and position other students, using what she perceives as academic success to defend other ELL students when she observes them being Othered in mainstream courses. Irina addresses the incident of explicit Othering discussed in section 4.2.4 in which she witnessed another student being put on the spot for not meeting the instructor’s expectations. The excerpt below directly follows excerpt 13 in which Irina described witnessing her instructor very publicly position a student as a deficient or struggling NNES because she did not speak loudly enough. Though she did not directly address the instructor, she rebuked his actions in our interview.

**Excerpt 23.** Irina Interview 2/6:43–7:00

1 IRINA; ‘I mean you see she’s not from here. Can you just be patient? She’s  
2 scared. Like, don’t ask her. Talk to her like after class.’

3 DANIELLE; Yea, #  
4 IRINA; I mean if she's in this class, she's supposed to pass previous classes, so  
5 she's not like stupid. You know?

In line 1, Irina first addresses the presumed reason the student did not speak in class. Rather than viewing the student as deficient for being an ELL, she connects being an ELL with a need for instructors to show more patience. She focuses on the student's anxiety, likely exacerbated by the teacher's actions, instead of asserting the student was linguistically deficient because she did not answer the question when called on. Unlike the examples in section 4.3.2.2, in which students deferred to NESs in their classes, Irina positions herself authoritatively by using imperative sentences in lines 1 and 2.

Furthermore, Irina brings up the student's competency in past classes to counter the assertion she is intellectually or linguistically deficient. She recognizes the student has met the prerequisites to attend this class, and thus, is intellectually, academically, and linguistically capable (lines 4 and 5). In doing so, Irina draws on asset-based pedagogical perspectives which frames diverse knowledge, experiences, and literacies as valuable contributions in the class (Morrison, 2017).

Irina additionally uses her intellectual capabilities to actively resist neo-racist perceptions of her and establish herself as a legitimate student in her classes. She states that she feels teachers often had negative perceptions of Eastern European students as they would resist calling on her to answer questions or would oversimplify and over-explain simple concepts to her based on a perceived NNES deficiency:

**Excerpt 24.** Irina Interview 1/12:00–12:30

1           IRINA;           I really noticed that every time, the first time I come to class, teachers see  
2                               my first name and last name, and it's really long. And they know where  
3                               I'm from.  
4           DANIELLE; Mm Mhm  
5           IRINA;           They know that I'm ((Eastern European)), and they always think of me  
6                               like 'oh, you're stupid. You're probably, like, spoiled'. But then I come to  
7                               class, I answer all the questions, and they're like 'oh, I guess she's smart.  
8                               Okay, we like her'. And then, they like (2.0) They do. And then, they like  
9                               me.

Though some instructors' actions made Irina feel marginalized and trivialized, she was able to actively resist any perceptions of her as deficient by showing instructors otherwise. In her interactions with instructors, she positions herself as a "good student" by actively participating in class and/or showing her knowledge. In doing so, she is able to shift their perceptions of her. However, it must be recognized that engaging in dominant social practices and performing the identity of a good student as Irina describes in line 6 and 7 does not always result in recognition as a legitimate participant in the dominant discourse. Due to racial or ethnic bias and/or many other factors, active participants in the dominant discourse may still be perceived as deviating from the dominant discourse (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

### 5.2.3.2 Invoking Linguistic Truths

Rather than reproducing prescriptivist ideologies, Irina draws on descriptivist ideologies when discussing her teachers' grammar-based grading practices (which were discussed in section 4.2.1). When discussing her history teacher's content-based grading, which contrasted with her English teacher's grammar-based grading practices, she said:

#### **Excerpt 25.** Irina Interview 2/12:41–12:53

1           IRINA;           You always make mistakes. Pretty sure you can find mistakes in scientific  
2                               journals.

- 3 DANIELLE; Yea, @absolutely.  
4 IRINA; Yea, but it's normal thing. It's like human factor.  
5 DANIELLE; Mhm.  
6 IRINA; We all do mistakes.

Irina invokes what Lippi-Green (2015) calls “linguistic facts” to combat unrealistic expectations from instructors. Linguistic facts refer to facts about language which are typically empirically documented. An example of this would be that language changes over time or that no one uses one consistent, grammatically “perfect” variety of English. Hegemonic language ideologies, contrastingly, are established with very little research or empirical documentation to support hegemonic claims (Lippi-Green, 2015). By invoking the linguistic fact that everyone makes mistakes, including professionals within academia, Irina is able to resist oppressive language ideologies while maintaining that her language use is still legitimate and valuable even if is not grammatically perfect. However, it is worth noting that Irina’s comments in line 1 and 6 regard “mistakes”. While she may be referencing typos, it is possible her perception of what qualifies as a mistake includes the natural variation of language and non-dominant varieties of English which hegemonic language ideologies may regard as mistakes or errors, thus reflecting some degree of prescriptivism or standard language ideology.

Still, interestingly, the excerpt above is the only instance in which participants directly challenged teachers’ decisions to grade based on grammatical accuracy despite many of them expressing the view that the same grading standards often led to making them feel inferior or deficient because they could not meet the grading standards.

### **5.2.3.3 Deflecting Prescribed Identities of Deficiency**

By contrast with excerpt 17, in which Irina aligned with native speakerist ideologies by stating the goal of studying English was to be perceived by others as an American, Irina promoted an attitude of disregard for those who judged her language use through hegemonic ideologies in excerpt 27. In doing so, her response exemplifies how identity is a site of struggle, not just with regard to how students position themselves but also an internal struggle with their subjectivities (Norton-Peirce, 1995). When Irina was discussing grammar-based grading in her classes, she stated:

**Excerpt 26.** Irina Interview 2/10:41–11:15

- 1           IRINA;           I mean you can get sad, of course. I mean I come back home, and I think  
2                            ‘okay, that was bad. That was bad. I had a bad day. That teacher wasn’t  
3                            really nice to me.’ But then I come to class and I’m like ‘I don’t care what  
4                            you said yesterday. I’m- I’m good today. I still respect you. I’m gonna still  
5                            answer questions that you ask because, like, I’m one of the three people in  
6                            the whole class who knows the answer. And I’m still gonna answer with  
7                            my weird accent. You’re not gonna change it. So, you can suck it up.’  
8                            [@@@  
9           DANIELLE;       [@@@  
10          IRINA;            @That’s what I think, basically.

The above excerpt showcases an internal struggle between allowing oppressive ideologies, and the emotions they cause, to define her as a deficient student and resisting them. Here, Irina displays an awareness of oppressive language ideologies, indicated through her use of the qualifier “weird” to describe her accent (line 7). However, she deflects any ideologies which would devalue her contributions due to her accent or language use, rather placing responsibility on the instructor to change their view in lines 7-8 when she states “So, you can suck it up.”. She extends her previously discussed method of resistance claiming legitimacy by building on her stated accomplishments and status as a successful student to press the need to dismiss oppressive

ideological views of herself and her language use (lines 5-6). In doing so, Irina subverts any prescribed identities and works to reposition herself in the class.

Irina's resistance to oppressive language ideologies and prescribed identities of deficiency are profoundly significant for creating social change. As Fairclough (1989) says, "power relations are always relations of struggle" (p. 34), but social change cannot occur without this struggle. While Irina may not directly address instructors' ideologies, she is often able to shift their view of her from deficient student to legitimate member of the discourse community.

### **5.3 Summary:**

The findings in this chapter indicated that students experienced hegemonic language ideologies in their mainstream courses in a plethora of ways. In particular, written assignments were viewed through the lens of hegemonic language ideologies. Standard language ideologies influenced how instructors and students viewed Academic English as a valorized and idealistic variety of English. Possibly because they perceived academic English as intrinsically superior and able to communicate more complex ideas, instructors limited both the type of language that they themselves used in the classroom, impacting student comprehension, and the type of language students could use in their essays. Even when ELL students met the requirements of using academic English, some instructors perceived them as deviating from the standard. Furthermore, grammar-based grading was widely used in a variety of classes, using prescriptivist ideologies to weigh a substantial portion of students' grades based on grammatical accuracy rather than the value of their knowledge and the content of their essays.

Native speakerism and cultural disbelief also impacted how students and instructors interacted. Instructions provided to students were often lacking, ambiguous, or otherwise

unclear, putting the onus on students to fulfill the requirements of assignments like essays. When ELL students relied on their own perceptions of what an essay should look like, they were rebuked by instructors in ways that reinforced native speakerist language ideologies that view non-Western writing conventions as illogical and/or inferior. In some cases, students also experienced explicit Othering and neo-racism due to being an ELL and/or a perceived lack of linguistic competency.

Overwhelmingly, all the participants, to some extent, took up and reproduced hegemonic language ideologies to their own detriment. Many of them viewed their own language use as deficient. Grammar-based grading, specifically, had very negative impacts on students' sense of self; for instance, Daiyu stated she could not complete assignments by herself if she wanted a good grade. The participants also valorized NESs' language use above their own, with some of them positioning themselves as subordinate in classroom contexts.

However, these findings do not mean all participants accepted oppressive language ideologies without question; Irina, in particular, showed resistance against oppressive ideologies and any associated discrimination she experienced as a result. By granting and withholding legitimation, invoking linguistic facts, and disregarding oppressive ideologies, she continuously worked to reposition herself in her classes as a competent, legitimate language user and exceptional student. In the next chapter, I will discuss these findings in light of related research.



## **Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In this study, I have examined two research questions: 1) How do ELL students narrate their experiences with their instructors' practices in mainstream courses, particularly with regard to hegemonic language ideologies? 2) What is the impact of these language ideologies on English language learner students? In this section, I will explore how the findings of this study contributed to a deeper understanding of the phenomena of language ideologies in higher education and the impacts on students.

### **6.2 Hegemonic Grading Practices and Assessment: Detrimental to More Than Just Grades**

This study has illuminated some of the ways hegemonic language ideologies are enacted in mainstream courses as well as the impacts of those enactments on students. Throughout this study, participants' instructors often conceptualized assessment practices in ways that relied on oppressive language ideologies such as prescriptivism, native speakerism, standard language ideologies, and meritocratic ideologies which disadvantage ELLs and other marginalized people. Assessment practices have significant impacts on students' academic careers despite often being reduced to a matter of grades. For many participants, this conflation was a major concern as grade point averages influence many educational opportunities such as the universities students can transfer to, the scholarships they may receive, and other work-study jobs they can take. For many participants, assessment practices also had a significant role in how they positioned themselves and performed their identities as students, partially due to the central role of language ideologies in instructors' evaluations of students' language use and other aspects of students' work.

### 6.2.1 Grammar-Based Grading

Grammar-based grading had perhaps the most blatant impact on students' subjectivities regarding their own language competencies. Many students like Daiyu and Linh reported going into mainstream courses feeling confident about their English competencies only to feel discouraged and unprepared linguistically by the end of their first term. Both directly connected these emotions to the reception of their writing by their instructors. Participants' accounts suggested that the value of their ideas was seldom touched on in instructor feedback; instead, according to participants, instructors focused largely on grammar and word choice and did so in negative ways. These findings reaffirm previous findings such as De Costa's (2016) study in which ELL students that were positioned as deficient, receiving lower grades and more critical assessment from instructors due to their perceived grammatical accuracy, began to position themselves similarly, denigrating their own language proficiency. The impacts of grammar-based grading on students highlights the role of assessment in further maintaining hegemonic language ideologies and the direct effect assessment may have on students' identities, both in how they position themselves and conceptualize themselves as students and language users.

Furthermore, students' learning also suffers when grammatical details are the main focus of assessment in mainstream courses. As Irina explained, when tests were inaccessible due to unclear wording, she spent more time fixating on linguistic details of the questions than she did on the theoretical concepts she was being tested on. Daiyu likewise reported spending copious amounts of time seeing writing tutors to perfect the grammar of her papers rather than spending that time working on the content of the paper. Séror (2008) had similar findings, reporting that for some students, due to time constraints, they felt they had to make a decision between focusing on the content of their paper or focusing on their grammar, and in many cases, the

content of their paper would be disregarded by instructors if the grammar was not perceived as perfect.

### **6.2.2 Participation Points**

Considering the perspectives of ELL students sheds new light on the hegemonic language ideologies which influence instructors' assessment practices. For example, Daiyu's and Hirono's reactions to participation assessment practices in section 4.3.3.2 highlight the stress and anxiety that Western notions of participation may cause many ELL students. Therefore, participation grades which only consider volunteered answers may negatively affect students' grades as well as their ability to successfully and meaningfully engage with the class and learn. Though participation is often framed by instructors as a form of student expression that is necessary for students to learn, students' actual learning is not always considered. Krashen's affective filter hypothesis states that students who are under high levels of stress or anxiety may be less likely to retain information given to them (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Thus, stringent definitions of participation as a performative task severely limits both how students engage in the class and how they are able to learn from participation. Rather, flexible notions of participation which factor in small group and one-on-one discussions as well as individual tasks such as note taking provide a wide range of students with varied, productive means to engage in the class (Morita, 2004). As Sonnenmoser (2009) states, assessment practices should not primarily gatekeep students for arbitrary deviations, or perceived deviations, from the dominant discourse. Rather, these practices should serve students, guiding and redirecting them where needed in order to help them achieve their goals.

### **6.3 Gatekeeping in Higher Education**

Gatekeeping occurs in higher education through a plethora of ways. One primary gatekeeping method, as exemplified in this study, is the obscuring of social practices required in dominant discourses. Many of the participants experienced cultural disbelief in their mainstream courses as non-Western notions of learning, writing, and knowledge as well as their personal experiences were devalued. Simultaneously, teachers' expectations for students were often occluded, whether through vague rubrics and assignment descriptions, or in Irina's case, a lack of instructions. As a result, students struggled to enter and/or be recognized as legitimate participants in the dominant discourse community. As Fairclough (1989) explains, intercultural gatekeeping occurs when members of the dominant discourse community judge people based on unstated norms, attributing perceived deviations from the dominant discourse to student incapability or resistance to dominant discourses. In such cases, misunderstandings or differing background knowledge are not considered as possible contributors, and people are regarded as deficient. In this study, Irina and Linh both faced criticism from instructors about the formality of the language they used in their assignments. Though students were able to convey in-depth analyses on complex phenomena, their discourse—particularly their choices related to register—was regarded as inappropriate.

However, as discussed in section 4.2.1.2 Irina and Linh were both proficient, though still developing, academic writers, indicating their instructors' perceptions of their language as “inappropriately” deviating from dominant discourse practices may have been due to their racial or ethnic backgrounds (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

Gatekeeping often leads instructors to overlook the underlying challenges their students may be facing. As Sonnenmoser (2009) points out, when students' background knowledge is assumed and explicit instruction is not offered, only students who are already members of the

dominant discourse are recognized as successfully participating in dominant social practices. Irina and Linh both exemplified the damaging results of gatekeeping on the basis of differing background knowledge in their reports of instructors neglecting to provide instruction on the requirements and expectations when writing an essay, ultimately leading to both participants receiving lower grades than they had expected without knowing why (excerpts 7, 8 and 9). Thus, when student comprehension is not prioritized, it severely limits the number of students that can thrive in the classroom, further privileging the privileged and disadvantaging already marginalized students.

#### **6.4 Maintaining and Reproducing Hegemony: Coercion and Consent**

Throughout this study, I identified numerous examples of the maintenance and reproduction of hegemonic language ideologies. Commonly, the participants took up hegemonic language ideologies and reproduced them through how they positioned themselves and others. As a result, hegemonic ideologies, like standard language ideology, and power imbalances are naturalized within dominant discourses, and therefore, often overlooked and difficult to challenge (Hammar, 2017).

##### **6.4.1 Coercion**

As exemplified throughout this study, in occupying the subject position of student, ELLs are put into power imbalances with their instructors. Instructors, as well as institutional powers such as policymakers are able to use coercion (consciously or not) to assert and/or maintain hegemonic language ideologies. As with Irina's experiences with explicit Othering and unstated, potentially biased grading practices, challenging her teacher directly could only be done with possible risk to her grade or positioning within the class. Other participants reflected this

mindset, reporting that they did not address issues they had with instructors because of fear or stress. Furthermore, even when students did address hegemonic language ideologies in the classroom, teachers easily dismissed their complaints, as Linh reported experiencing when she asked her instructor to slow her speech only to be met with the demand to “pay attention to her lesson” (excerpt 4).

While students can challenge discrimination and inequitable teaching practices through official means, many students are unaware of their rights as students. Irina’s statement “I didn’t know I could say my teacher was a sexist or a racist”, first introduced in section 4.2.4, reflects many students’ lack of awareness of the resources available to them. At Fir College, students can report “hate crimes and bias incidents”, as worded on their website, by filling out an online form or making an appointment with a student equity advisor. However, language is not mentioned as a possible factor contributing to bias or discrimination. As many schools, including Fir College, are making efforts to increase equity and inclusion, language as a facet of identity which may be discriminated against continues to be ignored. In part, this speaks to the entrenched nature of language ideologies in educational institutions where language is often framed as neutral and the valorization of academic English is regarded as unproblematic (Wolfram, 2010). Furthermore, the means to report discrimination is largely hidden from students as both students and faculty are unaware of the option and if they are, only students who are very familiar with the website and/or protocol can report discrimination. Though I was aware students could report discrimination, I did not know how to report discrimination, and finding the form is not easy or intuitive. Reporting inequity may be more challenging for students who are not familiar with these social practices, like Irina, who did not experience the same ideas surrounding freedom of speech in her previous educational contexts. Kubota (2002) states that institutionalized racism

extends to how school resources are organized to provide more or less services or support to various groups of students. While the intention of equity services is to help marginalized students, these services are hidden from those they are meant to help, acting as an indirect but powerful form of coercion as resources for resistance may seem to students to be non-existent. Furthermore, even when students are able to report problems of discrimination, there is no guarantee immediate action will be taken or if instructors (especially those who are tenured) will make or even be asked to make changes in the future. As a result, students are inequitably coerced into accepting or acquiescing to oppressive language ideologies and neo-racism on the false pretenses that they have no other options.

#### **6.4.2 Partial Consent and the Internalization of Hegemonic Language Ideologies**

Coinciding with Cho (2017) and De Costa's (2016) findings, the accounts of the participants in this study exemplify the process of consent as they often took up and reproduced hegemonic language ideologies to their own detriment. Linh exemplified the process of consent when she deferred to her psychology teacher's grammar-based grading due to the instructor's perceived authority. Linh then took up and reproduced the same prescriptivist ideologies when evaluating her own language use.

Participants often perpetuated oppressive language ideologies through how they positioned the native speaker in juxtaposition to themselves. Cho's (2017) study illustrated similar findings that both native speakers of Korean and native speakers of English in a translation school viewed the other group as being more linguistically adept than themselves, creating a false dichotomy between students. Morita (2004) also found that many of her ELL student participants in college courses described themselves as less proficient than the other students in their classes, in part due to their English language competencies. As with the

participants in this study, students regularly rely on false notions of language acquisition and hegemonic language ideologies to position themselves and those around them on the basis of cultural disbelief.

However, it is important to note that as identity and one's positioning is a site of struggle and constantly changing (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Norton-Peirce, 1995), students' views of NESs and themselves often vary over time and within interactions. For example, Irina's discourse often exemplified resisting native speakerist ideologies; rather than allowing herself to be prescribed the identity of a struggling student due to her first language or cultural background, she positioned herself as a legitimate speaker and successful student. However, other aspects of her discourse positioned NESs as linguistically superior (e.g., her statement that her accent was "weird" in comparison to NES accents). Thus, Irina's discourse exemplified the often contradictory and constantly changing nature of both identity and ideologies.

## **6.5 Implications**

### **6.5.1 Implications for Educators**

The findings of this study highlight the need for more critical approaches to language education as well as the continuous integration of critical perspectives on language in mainstream courses. Students, just like teachers, need to learn about the ideologies they have and enact in opposition with findings from linguistic research. Wolfram (2009) argues that the integration of critical language awareness instruction should be introduced as early as secondary school, when language diversity may be taught alongside world history classes to emphasize the significance of language as an inseparable part of culture. Those outside of applied linguistics often advocate for similar types of attention to social justice issues; for instance, approaches to



critical literacy, according to Hawkins and Norton (2009), focuses on “how dominant ideologies in society drive the construction of understandings and meanings in ways that privilege certain groups of people, while marginalizing others” (p.13). This involves going beyond teaching students to reproduce dominant discourses and urging them to question the sociopolitical contexts which inequitably empower dominant discourses and how they may be disrupted (Janks, 2004; Luke, 2018). Thus, approaches to critical language awareness may include basic sociolinguistic instruction and critical discussions of hegemonic language ideologies as well as discussions about the role of language in power imbalances in the dominant discourse (Fairclough, 1989; Siegel, 2006). Through this, linguistic myths that figure prominently in many hegemonic language ideologies may be broken down, thus helping empower students to resist hegemonic language ideologies, as Irina exemplified by invoking linguistic facts (i.e., that everyone makes mistakes and has linguistic variation) to resist the common prescriptivist stance that all writing should be error free.

Furthermore, instructors can play an important role in increasing their students’ awareness about their rights as students. For example, Irina’s sentiment “I didn’t know I could say my teacher was a sexist or a racist” moved me to make changes in my curriculum in a college preparation EAP course to better inform my students of their rights and options in their classes. As part of the exercise, we discuss what is and is not classifiable as discrimination. Every term thus far, none of the students have recognized language-based discrimination as inequitable and regard many acts of neo-racism as normal, albeit unappreciated, parts of life they cannot act against. As part of this discussion, I walk the students through the steps of filing a report with student services and thoroughly discuss what happens after a complaint has been filed as to reduce any fear or uncertainty surrounding the process.

Mainstream instructors can promote equity and inclusion in their pedagogical approaches through a variety of means. In particular, promoting cultural belief and considering the accessibility and explicitness of their instruction is vital for teaching to a diverse body of students. As discussed in section 4.2.2.2, instructors often offered vague assignment descriptions and/or neglected to consider non-dominant notions of learning, writing, and ideology. As such, valuing diverse forms and sources of knowledge and being explicit in assignment descriptions rather than assuming students understand what is expected of them is crucial to creating more equitable and inclusive pedagogical practices in mainstream courses.

### **6.5.2 Institutional Implications**

In order for educational institutions to move away from hegemonic language ideologies, support should be offered on an institutional level. As Briggs and Pailliotet (1997) exemplified, language ideologies are often perpetuated at every level in educational institutions; the ideologies enacted by stockholders and administrative staff, such as deans, departmental leaders, and policy makers, are interrelated with and often influence how instructors and faculty enact and communicate language ideologies. Thus, institutional change is needed to offer students more equitable and inclusive support such as offering open communication about students' rights, making website features such as equity reports accessible, and ensuring school and departmental policies do not reflect the valorization of oppressive language ideologies such as prescriptivism or standard language ideologies. One such way educational institutions can offer support is by offering resources and training opportunities for instructors to learn critical perspectives on language ideologies.

While many researchers in the past have called for more training for mainstream instructors (Bucholtz, 2010; Gee, 2014a; Lippi-Green, 2012; Wolfram, 2010), this study

reaffirms the need for instructors to examine both their own ideologies and exactly what constitutes equitable pedagogical practices. Meskill (2005) found that pre- and in-service instructors, when given training on critical perspectives on language ideologies, showed an increase in knowledge, understanding, and sympathy for ELL students. Instructors also reported becoming more aware of the ELL students' needs and learning about many new resources to help them and their students better. However, instructor training should be a continuous process; as several studies (Wolfram, 2010; Weaver, 2019) have found, even when instructors receive training regarding oppressive language ideologies and counter-hegemonic pedagogical practices, many struggle to implement what they have learned and often and/or recognize the inequity of standard language ideologies (Weaver, 2019). Thus, as Wolfram (2010) states, due to the deeply entrenched nature of language ideology, long-term training with continuous support is required to break down hegemonic language ideologies in educational institutions.

## **6.6 Directions for Future Studies**

While this study begins to address some of the complexities of hegemonic language ideologies in higher education, there are still many areas that future researchers may wish to examine in order to further understand the phenomenon of hegemonic language ideologies in higher education. In particular, there is a need to observe in-class interactions between instructors and students which may communicate various language ideologies as well as shed light on how ELL students are positioning themselves in in-class interactions. In conjunction with class observations, instructor interviews would allow for exploration of the language ideologies which mainstream instructors articulate in comparison to those they enact, and this juxtaposition may give deeper insight into some of the gaps between ideologies and practices in

education. Such work would help pre- and in-service training programs more accurately address common disconnects instructors face when implementing critical pedagogy.

Furthermore, a longitudinal study of students' experiences with language ideology throughout their educational careers could provide a more thorough and nuanced understanding of the enactment of hegemonic language ideologies within educational institutions. As Irina and Linh, as more experienced students, reported a series of change and growth in their language abilities and attitudes throughout their education, a longitudinal study following the experiences of ELLs and the impacts of language ideology on their identities may allow researchers to follow students' progress over time.

## **6.7 Concluding Remarks**

While the focus of this study was the experience of ELL students in mainstream courses, it is important to consider how pedagogical practices motivated by hegemonic language ideologies may negatively impact a large portion of the study body, if not all students. Many of the inequitable pedagogical practices described in this study, such as grammar-based grading, refusal to adjust lecture speed, and public participation as an assessment practice, negatively impact all students without contributing to better learning. In particular, many neurodiverse students and students with diagnosed learning disabilities, such as but not limited to social anxiety, dyslexia, or ADHD, may struggle when faced with the inequitable pedagogical practices discussed throughout this study (Dolmage, 2018), indicating an ideology of ableism motivating pedagogical practices in addition to hegemonic language ideologies.

It is an important time to consider the interconnectedness of language to race, gender, ability, socioeconomic status, and many other factors as many institutions, including Fir College,

are now beginning to offer anti-racism training and other resources for increased equity and inclusion in reaction to the recent surge of the Black Lives Matter movement. Without attention to the biases and oppressive language ideologies prevalent and often promoted in higher education, institutionalized racism will continue to be prevalent.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Letter of initial contact for potential student participants

Hello!

My name is Danielle Kim. I am a graduate student at the University of British Columbia. I am conducting a study at [REDACTED]. I would like to invite you to participate in a study examining the experiences of international students in mainstream college courses.

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the experiences of English language learners in mainstream courses and the kinds of language ideologies their instructors have. Language ideology is beliefs about language, such as the idea that anyone can have perfect grammar if they study enough. I want to know the kinds of ideologies you experience in mainstream classes, how you experience them, and how those beliefs impact you. The results of this study will be used to write my MA thesis, and the study will be supervised by Dr. Meghan Corella.

Participating in this study would include being interviewed several times; keeping a reflective journal and writing about language related experiences you have; providing me with a list of the classes you are taking; and possibly allowing me to sit in on a few of your classes and/or letting me analyze some of your class documents (for example, teacher feedback on your assignment). This study will occur over Winter quarter 2020 from January to March. If you choose to participate, I will interview you once ever 3 to 4 weeks, depending on your availability. Interviews will take between 30 to 60 minutes each. You can choose to write reflective journals a minimum of once every 1 to 2 weeks. If you choose to participate in this study, your participation will be kept confidential; your classmates, teachers, and anyone aside from my supervisor and I will not know you are participating.

For more information, please contact me at [REDACTED], call me at [REDACTED], or stop by my office in place on Mondays or Wednesdays between 12:30-5:30pm. I can tell you more about the study and answer any questions you might have.

You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Meghan Corella, at [REDACTED] or by phone at [REDACTED].

Thank you for your time,

-Danielle Kim



**Appendix B:**

**Department of Language & Literacy Education  
Faculty of Education**

6445 University Boulevard, Vancouver, BC  
Canada V6T 1Z2  
Tel: (604) 822 5788

**Informed Consent Forms**

**Information for Students**

**Title of the study:**

Language ideology and student identity in higher education

**Principal Investigator:**

Dr. Meghan Corella, Assistant Professor

Department of Language and Literacy Education, UBC, Faculty of Education

Email: [REDACTED] Phone: [REDACTED]

**Co-Investigator:**

Danielle Kim, MA Student

Department of Language and Literacy Education, UBC, Faculty of Education

Email: [REDACTED] Phone: [REDACTED]

*This study will be conducted in fulfillment of Danielle Kim's MA thesis research  
in Teaching English as a Second Language.*

**Purpose of Study:**

The purpose of this study is to explore the kinds of beliefs mainstream instructors hold about language learning and language learners; the kinds of experiences non-native English speaker students have in mainstream courses; and how those experiences impact their identities.

**Procedure:**

Participating in this study includes taking part in interviews and journal reflections with the possibility of classroom observations and document analysis.

In addition to your participation, Danielle would like to invite your instructors to participate in her study. To comply with their privacy, she will request you provide them with a letter inviting them to participate in the study. They may know that you are participating in this study, but they



won't know what kind of information you give Danielle. Danielle will provide you with this letter and discuss how you can approach them.

By agreeing to participate in this study, you agree to participate in interviews. Interviews will take place every 3 to 4 weeks depending on your availability. Danielle will ask you questions about your experiences in mainstream courses at [REDACTED]. These questions will focus on your experiences with language in classes such as “Do you feel comfortable participating in group discussions or asking questions in class?”. By agreeing to be interviewed, you agree to be audio recorded for the duration of the interview. These interviews will take approximately 30 to 60 minutes. At any point in the interview, you may request that recording be paused or stopped.

By agreeing to participate in this study, you also agree to keep a reflective journal. Reflective journaling is when you write about your experiences and reflect or think about how they impacted you. Reflective journals are helpful because they will allow Danielle to learn more about the experiences you're having on a more regular basis than your monthly interviews. You may choose to participate in reflective journaling either every week or every other week. You may record your journals on paper or digitally; you can even email Danielle directly with reflections. Danielle will collect your journals at least once a month and may ask you to elaborate on topics and themes in them during interviews.

Danielle may ask your instructors if she can observe their class that you are taking. Your instructors will not know you are participating in this study. She may observe up to 3 classes and will take field notes during class.

Lastly, Danielle may ask to use emails from you, conversations during tutoring sessions with Danielle, or casual conversations with you as data while respecting your confidentiality through the steps described in the confidentiality section below. Danielle will write notes after your interactions and might ask you further questions about a conversation during interviews. Danielle may request to see documents from your class. For example, she may want to see teacher feedback on assignments or assignment descriptions to see how classroom expectations are communicated to you and what kinds of things your teachers are focusing on in their feedback to you.

Anything you provide to Danielle for analysis will remain confidential and no information will be shared with other students, instructors, or anyone outside of Danielle and her supervisor, as outlined in the confidentiality section. At any point, you may request a portion, or all of the data collected from you not be used in the study. Additionally, you may refuse to provide particular documents if you feel uncomfortable.



**Results:**

The results of this study will be published in Danielle Kim’s master’s thesis. If you would like to learn about the results of this study, please indicate on the consent form; a list of key findings can be presented to you at the end of the study. Additional publications in academic articles or presentations may occur using the data from this study. However, data from this study will not be used in open-access journals or contexts which require data to be publicly available.

**Potential Risks:**

No significant risks outside of those faced in your daily life are associated with participating in this research. It is possible that participating could expose you to some social risks. You may share information about your experiences in class that may be considered sensitive. The purpose of this study is not to judge but instead to describe the language beliefs that are common at [Fir College]. As such, your participation is confidential, and your data will be handled with care as to maintain that confidentiality as outlined below. You may choose not to answer questions that make you uncomfortable, and you may withdraw from the study as a whole or request data or a section of data collected from you be withheld from the study.

**Potential Benefits:**

By participating in this study, you can help us deepen our understandings of the experiences that language learners have in mainstream courses as well as mainstream course instructors’ beliefs and knowledge about language learning and learners. This research may contribute to future work that may help schools and educators better understand how to support mainstream instructors and English language learner students in mainstream courses. Additionally, we hope reflecting on your own experiences and beliefs about language learning can help you to gain deeper insight.

All participants, regardless of they withdraw from the study, will receive a \$30.00 gift card to Student Grounds.

**Confidentiality:**

While your participation will be largely confidential, teacher participant(s) that you are taking classes with may know you are participating in the study, though the extent of your participation and the data collected through your participation will not be shared with them. No raw data (data including your name or any identifying factors) will be provided to anyone outside of Danielle Kim and her supervisor, Dr. Meghan Corella. Your identity will be protected throughout and



after this study in a variety of ways. Pseudonyms (fake names) will be assigned to all participants in the study and will be used in all transcriptions, fieldnotes, and result summaries. A pseudonym will also be assigned to all institutions (such as this school) mentioned throughout the study. No unique or significant identifying factors will be described which could allow you or other participants to be identified (e.g., the exact classes you are in will not be mentioned). Any paper copies of data such as fieldnotes and consent forms will be scanned and shredded. Digital copies of raw data will be stored securely on an encrypted external drive and accessed with a password protected encrypted laptop with up to date virus protection software. Raw data will not be accessed on unsecure or public Wi-Fi and will not be examined in public areas. Raw data will only be accessible by Danielle Kim and Dr. Meghan Corella.

After this study, all data will remain with the Principal Investigator (Dr. Meghan Corella) securely locked in her UBC office for five or more years as per the UBC requirements. Transcriptions and fieldnotes will not contain any identifying information regarding participants and will not be given to any third parties.

#### **Contact Information About the Study:**

If you have any questions or are interested in participating in this study, please contact Danielle Kim. You can email Danielle at dan email is herea or visit her office in [REDACTED] - Mondays or Wednesdays between 12:30 pm - 6:00 pm. If you have concerns or complaints about your rights and experiences as a research participant, please contact the Research Participation Contact Line at the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 (please note, this is a Canadian phone number, and fees may apply). Alternatively, you may email them at [RSIL@ors.ubc.ca](mailto:RSIL@ors.ubc.ca) or call their toll-free number at 1-877-822-8598.

This study has been approved by the [REDACTED] Research Ethics Board.

#### **Consent:**

**Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you have a right to refuse participation or withdraw from the study at any point without a given reason or suffering any negative consequences.**

**By signing the next page, you confirm that you have been given a copy of this form for your own records.**

**By signing, you are confirming that you are willing and consent to participate in this study.**



Statement of Informed Consent

(participant copy)

I have fully read and understand the attached letter regarding the study "Language ideology and student identity in higher education". By agreeing to participate in this study, I agree to keep any instructors or other students' participation secret. I will not discuss this study with anyone other than the researcher. I understand that at any point in the study, I can withdraw from the study and/or request that my data in its entirety or a portion of it be withheld from the study. I have maintained a copy of the attached letter and statement of informed consent for my own records.

You may agree to one or more of the following forms of participation.

Please mark all that apply with an X

I agree to be audiotaped during interviews with the researcher. \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to participate in reflective journals by hand or via email. \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to allow email communication with the researcher to be considered to data analysis. \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to provide the researcher with class materials such as graded assignments. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date (month/day/year)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of participant

**If you would like to receive a summary of research findings, please write your email below.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Email Address



Statement of Informed Consent
(participant copy)

I have fully read and understand the attached letter regarding the study "Language ideology and student identity in higher education". By agreeing to participate in this study, I agree to keep any instructors or other students' participation secret. I will not discuss this study with anyone other than the researcher. I understand that at any point in the study, I can withdraw from the study and/or request that my data in its entirety or a portion of it be withheld from the study. I have maintained a copy of the attached letter and statement of informed consent for my own records.

You may agree to one or more of the following forms of participation.

Please mark all that apply with an X

I agree to be audiotaped during interviews with the researcher. \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to participate in reflective journals by hand or via email. \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to allow email communication with the researcher to be considered to data analysis. \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to provide the researcher with class materials such as graded assignments, rubrics, and assignment descriptions. \_\_\_\_\_

Participant signature

Date (month/day/year)

Printed name of participant

If you would like to receive a summary of research findings, please write your email below.

Email Address

### Appendix C: Student Interview Questions

1. How are your classes going?
  - a. What do you think of them so far?
  - b. Do you like the subjects you are studying?
2. Do you feel confident in your academic English language abilities? Why or why not?
  - a. Do you feel like your EAP classes prepared you for mainstream classes? Why or why not?
3. Do you feel comfortable participating in group discussions or asking questions? Why or why not?
  - a. Did anything specific happen that made you feel that way?
  - b. If you feel uncomfortable, do you still try to participate?
  - c. If you don't participate, do you feel there are any negative consequences (ex. Does the teacher say anything, are you graded based on participation)?
4. What are some of the challenges you have faced at [REDACTED]?
  - a. Do you feel like your teachers understand the challenges you face?
  - b. Do you feel like they are very accommodating?
5. Have you had any discouraging experiences at [REDACTED]?
  - a. Was there anything discouraging in regards to language use?
  - b. How did that make you feel about yourself?
  - c. How do you handle discouraging experiences in your classes?
6. Have you ever had a teacher make comments on your writing, grammar, or speech?
  - a. How did it make you feel?
  - b. What did you do after that? Did you try to change anything or did you think it was unneeded?
7. Do your teachers grade much based on grammar or spelling?
8. Do you feel that your teachers are clear about what they expect from you in class and on assignments?
  - a. Do they give you written instructions and verbal instructions often, or do they rely on one more than the other?
  - b. Do you ask them for clarification often? If so, how do they react?
9. Do you feel that your teachers' speech is easy to understand?
  - a. Have you ever asked them to repeat something or slow down? If so, how do they react?
10. What do you feel your teachers could do to academically support you more?