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Language Attitudes of Writing Center Consultants: Perception and Expectation

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Language Attitudes of Writing Center Consultants:

Perception and Expectation

Benjamin John Sparks

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

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Preface

My first writing consultation is indelible. My tutee, a young, first-year African American student, was visibly angry. He sat behind the table, arms folded, eyes down, practically shaking. By his own admission, he had screwed up. Having never been on his own before, he had enjoyed his newfound college freedom at the expense of his grades and now faced expulsion before the start of his second semester. The piece he had brought to the center for revision was a letter to the university in which he pled his case as to why he believed he deserved another chance. He told me that if he was sent back home to Chicago, he'd have few options, none of them good. Stunned, I did what I could to reassure him and focus his paper on what arguments I found most persuasive. Truth be told, I don't remember much in terms of the style of his writing—I was too overwhelmed by the power this consultation might have in determining the direction of this young man's life. But by its end, he was calmer. We had had what he thought was a productive and encouraging dialogue, and he left the writing center in what seemed a much-improved state of mind, thanking me and the other writing center staff on his way out. I often wonder what became of him and whether that letter had proven sufficient to convince the university.

I was struck then, as now, by how different this man's college experience was to mine. How could I, a graduate student more than ten years his senior from a decidedly middle-class upbringing—and most crucially, *white*—fully appreciate what he was going through? It was then that I recognized the power and importance of the writing center. Nowhere else on campus could this episode have taken place, and every effort should be made to ensure that the promise of the writing center as a place of cultural and linguistic equality is fully realized. It is my sincere hope that this research might contribute in some small way to achieving this goal.

Abstract

This master's thesis explores the results of research into the language attitudes of peer consultants working in a writing center at a large regional public university in the American Midwest. A survey was administered to writing center staff in which they were asked to evaluate the sociopolitical relationship between standard and nonstandard English dialects, the perceived relative grammaticality of these dialects, and the traditional concept of appropriateness in academic writing. Also included were questions pertaining to how consultants manage the practical responsibilities of their positions and the expectations of students and professors with the writing center's stated policy of linguistic inclusivity. Analysis of collected data suggests that consultants are aware of language variation and acknowledge the linguistic principles that all dialects are equally valid and rule-governed but lack sufficient metalinguistic knowledge to fully understand why. Although consultants have been taught to appreciate nonstandard language in student writing, they feel frustrated when trying to promote linguistic diversity at their university, as they also recognize that standard English remains the only accepted dialect in most academic and professional writing and is largely expected by all writing center stakeholders to whom they are accountable.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The ubiquitous and unwavering public belief in an idealized, standard English, what Rosina Lippi-Green dubbed “Standard Language Ideology” (1997), is well established and widely acknowledged by linguists. Failure to adhere to this arbitrary standard frequently results in criticism and prejudicial treatment. Even today, such linguistic bias exists as an acceptable form of overt discrimination—from the Oakland School Board Ebonics firestorm of 1996, to the vitriol leveled at President Barack Obama for his occasional use of African American English (AAE,) to this year’s faux-controversy over Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez “doing the Latina thing” when pronouncing her own name—non-dominant dialects, be they spoken or written, continue to be largely condemned when used outside of their prescribed cultural spheres.

As Laura Greenfield (2011) points out, despite what linguists have repeatedly proven through decades of research,

the general public regularly insists upon the inherent superiority of specific languages and varieties, failing to understand that “correctness” is a socially prescribed modifier, and systematically bases policies and practices on those mistaken judgements. . . . imagined as the original, English, the pure English, the epitome of sophisticated language use. . . . “Standard English,” ultimately, is invoked as that ideal, superior language (pp. 35-36).

Having been inundated with this kind of messaging for much of their personal and academic lives, it is likely that peer writing tutors, even with the best of intentions, might perpetuate the myth of standard English as an innately-superior language during their consultations. This is potentially to the detriment of nonstandard student writers—many of whom have been told throughout their academic careers that their writing is deficient, when in fact it may simply exhibit features of nonstandard Englishes.

This phenomenon is something I encountered with frequency during my tenure as a graduate writing consultant, particularly when working with African American tutees. Disproportionally, African American students would begin their consultations by telling me how embarrassed they were to have a stranger read their paper, how much they disliked academic writing, or how often they had been told by teachers that their work did not meet expectations. The impact of this constant barrage of criticism was clear to see; at best, these students felt discouraged by the prospect of a writing assignment and, at worst, hopeless.

My concern over the possibly-harmful language ideologies of my fellow writing consultants was heightened as I continued to work at the center. In addition to my daily routine as a tutor, I was also a graduate assistant for the writing center, charged expressly with advising its staff on issues of linguistic diversity and inclusivity. As such, part of my duties included hosting a “Fireside Chat”—the center’s name for professional development seminars on a range of topics held periodically throughout the year. Although all in attendance, (approximately twenty consultants,) were experienced writing tutors, they were nonetheless noticeably surprised by many of the basic linguistic and sociolinguistic concepts I covered during the seminar (i.e., dialect variation, academic writing, and Standard Language Ideology,) and our subsequent hour-

long group discussion was both lively and engaging. From this experience, it was clear to me that the consultants were eager to learn more, and I became eager to learn more about them. Were the questions they asked of me indicative of a more pervasive lack of linguistic and/or sociolinguistic knowledge, and if so, how might this deficit potentially affect their consultations? I resolved to find out.

Research Questions

This study investigates the following questions:

1. What are the language attitudes with which consultants operate at the writing center, specifically those pertaining to grammatical understandings of “correctness,” and perceptions of academic “appropriateness,” and
2. What factor(s) may influence or determine these attitudes?

A Note About Language Use

Throughout this paper, certain terms are used interchangeably. Although some literature draws a distinction, I use both “tutor” and “consultant” to refer to the student employees of the writing center. Likewise, I use both “non-dominant” and “nonstandard” when describing any dialect other than standard English, which here encompasses all widely-accepted prestige dialects such as Edited Written English (EWE), Standard American English, (SAE), etc. Note also that I recognize the inherently-problematic nature of using the “standard versus nonstandard” dichotomy when describing languages and dialects, but given the preponderance of these terms in related literature, I have chosen to retain them for the sake of familiarity.

Literature Review

Peer tutoring in a university writing center offers a unique service to students: the opportunity to improve their writing in a low-stakes, friendly environment outside of the English composition classroom and removed from the student-teacher hierarchy. Although some scholars have argued that the power dynamic between tutor and tutee remains asymmetrical because the tutor is assumed to possess more knowledge about writing (Trimbur, 1987; Harris, 1992; Thompson, 2009; Bitzel, 2013), there is little doubt that, when compared to meeting alone with a professor during office hours, peer tutoring lends itself to a notably lowered affective barrier—one that might otherwise inhibit an honest, productive dialogue. There is a spirit of camaraderie and a sense of shared struggle; when it comes to meeting the demands of the professor and the requirements of the assignment, the tutor and tutee are “in it together.” But with this unique opportunity comes also unique challenges, and first among them are the student consultants themselves. The core concept of peer tutoring is attractive because it aims to foster an egalitarian relationship between writer and consultant; both are on similar social and academic footings, so the consultation, while piloted by the tutor, is ideally a process of give-and-take, not lecture.

However, the tutor should have some conception of what constitutes “good” writing and be able to clearly impart that understanding to the student when necessary, or the consultation would be of little practical value. By virtue of the application and hiring process, most writing tutors come to the center already in possession of this knowledge, but what other ideas about writing, and language in general, might they hold? Furthermore, are these ideas linguistically-sound, and if not, can they be informed through education and continued writing center work?

Surprisingly, few studies have asked these questions, and fewer still have conducted any formal research in an attempt to answer them.

As an institution, the writing center currently inhabits an atypical sociopolitical space on college campuses. To outside observers, it is a place in which student writers go to have their papers “fixed,” often at the impetus of their writing teacher. Frequently, both students and instructors assume that the center is full of prescriptive grammarians, eager to uncap their red pens and strike through any offensive dangling participles and split infinitives. While a working knowledge of standard English grammar is indisputably an essential part of a consultant’s ideal skillset, today’s writing center has become much more than a collection of copyeditors.

The modern writing center serves as a nexus between student and teacher, first-year and senior, chemist and filmmaker, Spanish speaker and Chinese speaker. It is a place in which different experiences, interests, and proficiencies are expressed through different languages and dialects. Its function might vary wildly for each writer: a safe space in which traumas are exorcised through words, a sounding board for a storyteller in the midst of a creative brainstorm, or a graduate’s last stop before submitting their curriculum vitae to a prospective employer.

As Carol Severino (1994) eloquently puts it, the writing center,

is the contact zone where different cultures, languages, literacies, and discourses meet, clash, and grapple with one another. The center is a disciplinary borderland where the rhetorics of the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences meet—to both intersect and conflict (p. 2).

In addition to its having become a cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary meeting ground, the writing center has also proven itself as a powerful, practical instrument for improving student confidence and academic performance, with stakeholders across each university trying to leverage their writing centers in various, often competing, ways. These interested parties have spilled much ink over how writing centers should be operated, for whom their services should be tailored, and what the ultimate goal of those services should be. The voluminous amount of literature published yearly on writing centers is clear evidence of this.

I have sorted scholarship related to the current study into one of two main categories. First are the studies and analyses that are part of a continuing discussion about the history, nature, and role of the writing center as an academic institution, and the degree to which it can (or even should) be a mechanism for enacting change both within and outside of the university (North, 1984; Carino, 1995; Grimm, 1996; Bawarshi & Pelkowski, 1999; Wilson, 2014; Metz, 2017). These studies take a top-down, holistic approach by reviewing the evolution of the writing center as well as its systemic challenges and theoretical approaches to linguistic diversity.

Next are the bottom-up, linguistically-oriented studies which are concerned with the use of nonstandard English in student writing and related language education pedagogies. (Kamusikiri, 1996; Balhorn, 1999; Syrquin, 2006; Ivy & Masterson, 2011; Perryman-Clark, 2013; Flores & Rosa, 2015). These studies clearly demonstrate that students often integrate features from their home language(s) into their writing, analyze how these features typically manifest, and describe how readers traditionally react to them. The research establishes that features of nonstandard Englishes make their way both onto college campuses and into writing centers and are generally met with disapproval.

The Changing Face of the Writing Center and Language Attitudes

Historical perspectives on tutoring and linguistic diversity. It is first worth positioning this current writing center discourse as part of a continuum. Offering a purely historical accounting, Carino (1995) detailed the evolution of the writing center from its genesis as a separate fix-it shop for remedial students in the early 20th century, through to more recent controversies over its identity and struggles with respectability in academia at large. Carino concludes with a few prescient words of caution. He warns us that “...although the rhetoric regarding students in early writing center discourse at times seems misguided, even cruel, these facilities preached and practiced many of the same things current writing centers endorse” (Carino, 1995, p. 113).

A year later, Grimm would echo Carino’s (1995) warning, describing how, “...instead of excluding underprepared students, we now analyze them. Writing centers correct, measure, and supervise abnormal writers in order to meet the standards set by the institution” (Grimm, 1996, p.7). Although this analysis is now over two decades old, as we shall see, the issues that she and Carino (1995) describe continue to be of concern to modern writing centers. Grimm continues, “because many writing centers operate with the policy of supporting the teacher completely...the possibility of studying the conflicts that bring students to writing centers is rarely even imagined in the day-to-day encounters of the typically busy center” (1996, p. 7). While “supporting the teacher” remains a part of the modern consultant’s responsibilities, so too is supporting their center’s policies of linguistic diversity—policies to which most writing centers now subscribe. This can (and does) create tension between professors and writing center staff.

Such hostility is chiefly reflected by the opposition that advocates of linguistic diversity continue to face on college campuses, often from those ostensibly within their own discipline. Eighteen years after Grimm (1996), Wilson (2014) describes how her university's English professors condemned her attempts to make their writing center's website a "more inclusive virtual space" (p. 31) by adding a bibliography of world Englishes and the first two paragraphs of the National Council of Teachers of English's (NCTE) 1974 position statement on Student's Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL). Despite its age, the NCTE's resolution that "teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language" (p. 1, 1974) remains, to some, a controversial statement. After one of Wilson's colleagues threatened to stop referring his students to her writing center, she was forced to remove the SRTOL statement for fear of losing funding. She was also called in to her department chair's office and subjected to a litany of other related complaints from her university's writing professors. Still, Wilson maintains a cautious optimism that "the next generation of university professors will be more receptive to diversity, including linguistic diversity, in our writing spaces" (2014, p. 33).

Metz's (2017) experiences while training other English teachers also illustrate how strongly those raised in a prescriptive grammar tradition respond to nonstandard English in academic writing. He describes the visceral, incredulous reactions of language arts educators when met with the prospect of "decentering" standardized English, i.e., opening their classrooms to nonstandard dialects and promoting language variation (Metz, 2017). To Metz, it quickly became clear that "Many English teachers have taken the role as language guardians, advocating the grammar of Standardized English...and upholding the writing conventions of historically

sanctioned style guides” (2017, p.364). The author also recognizes the ideological, bureaucratic, and academic roadblocks encountered by advocates of linguistic diversity, admitting that “Members of English departments don’t see eye-to-eye. Administrators need convincing. And then there are always the standardized tests that assume, incorrectly, the grammar of Standardized English is the only English grammar” (Metz, 2017, p.371). However, like Wilson (2014), he too is hopeful, and ends with a call to action, arguing that “English teachers have a responsibility to acquire precise linguistic knowledge based in facts... [and] to hold up truths about language even when the political climate makes it unpopular” (Metz, 2017, p.372).

Modern perspectives on tutoring and linguistic diversity. Despite humble beginnings and constant challenges, writing centers, much like the English composition classrooms from which they first sprang, have made great strides toward linguistic equality in recent decades. Fortunately, the conversation has largely shifted from whether linguistically-inclusive policies are needed to one of how they should best be implemented and maintained.

The International Writing Center Association’s (IWCA) Position Statement on Racism, Anti-Immigration and Linguistic Intolerance makes it clear that language discrimination in relation to English instruction is tantamount to outright racism (International Writing, 2010). Writing in response to the Arizona Board of Education’s decision to ban teachers of English with what they consider “ungrammatical” accents, the IWCA condemns the board for attempting to “de-legitimize the voices, bodies, and epistemologies of people of color” and asserts their position that “as institutions committed to the democratization of education on university campuses, writing centers are invested in promoting social justice” (International Writing, 2010, p. 1). In so doing, the IWCA set a clear precedent for their membership to follow.

Fortunately, the language policies of the Grand Valley Writing Center (GVWC) align with those of the IWCA. The center strives toward inclusive practices and aims to provide a safe space for writers of all backgrounds and abilities to improve their process and their work. Its stated goal is “to help writers help themselves—not just with that single piece of writing, but also to become better writers overall” (“Mission Statement,” 2018). Per its statement on English inclusivity, the writing center “accepts, validates, and promotes all language varieties represented by the students” and their program “does not judge any language or dialect as inferior or incorrect” (see Appendix A). Declarations like these are critical to ensure that the writing center remains a welcoming and inclusive institution. If, however, the ultimate aim of the modern writing center is, as GVWC’s motto suggests, to “help make better writers, not better papers” (“Consultant Guide,” 2016, p. 6), in what ways might it and other centers be changing writers in order to make them better?

The process-based approach implied by the phrase quoted above has its roots in North’s foundational essay on writing centers in which he proposes a “pedagogy of direct intervention” (1984, p. 439). Instead of the traditional product-based approach, which hitherto had tasked consultants purely with correcting the text itself, he argues that “the object [of the writing center] is to make sure that writers, and not necessarily their texts, are what get changed by instruction” (North, 1984, p. 438). North also passionately asserts that the writing center exists independent from the university, stating that writing tutors are “not here to serve, supplement, back up, complement, reinforce, or otherwise be defined by any external curriculum. We [writing tutors] are here to talk to writers” (1984, p. 440). Although North’s declaration is now 35 years old,

it remains one of the most important essays in writing center scholarship, and its ideas continue to influence many of the pedagogical theories behind working with student writers.

However, more recent scholars, operating from a postmodern, postcolonial theoretical framework, have questioned whether the process-based approach posited by North, and adopted by writing centers like the GVWC, is as benign as it appears. According to Bawarshi and Pelkowski (1999), North's argument that we "make sure that writers...are what get changed" (1984, p. 438) inadvertently promotes an imperialist agenda, when we consider that that change has traditionally been one of perfunctory acculturation from marginalized language practices, like AAE, to standardized (and historically white, Eurocentric) academic discourses. Instead, they contend that writing consultants should help marginalized students foster a sense of "critical consciousness" as part of a larger writing center pedagogy—in other words, an awareness of and agency in the process of North's (1984) process-based approach (Bawarshi & Pelkowski, 1999). The goal of this pedagogy is "not to subvert academic discourse or to suggest that students reject it, but rather to teach students how self-consciously to use and be used by it" (Bawarshi & Pelkowski, 1999, p.44). Building from North, Bawarshi and Pelkowski argue that it's insufficient for writing centers to simply work to change writers; it's the writers themselves who must be aware of why and how any given discourse community demands them to change, and they must negotiate that change—with the help of, but independent from—the writing tutor (1999).

Nonstandard English in Student Writing

Evidence and pedagogical approaches. Although I recognize that many nonstandard Englishes exist, African American English (AAE) is chief among them in terms of current usage in the United States, and research has shown that several of the distinct linguistic features of

AAE can appear in the writing of its speakers. It is thus often the focus of writing center and language education scholarship. Accordingly, in the following discussion, I have chosen to use studies of AAE in student writing as representations of nonstandard Englishes more generally. These studies all underscore the need for writing tutors to familiarize themselves with some of the features of nonstandard Englishes, (including, but not necessarily limited to AAE,) so that they are able to recognize these features not as errors, but as characteristics of another variety, and work together with the tutee based on the expectations of the assignment.

In Balhorn's (1999) phonological examination of AAE and student writing, he found that, while African American students do bring features from AAE into their writing, many of these features are not necessarily unique to AAE and are present in the writing of other nonstandard English users. Although his overall argument is that there is little actual linguistic difference between AAE and standards like Edited Written English (EWE,) Balhorn concedes that "no one should deny that some dialect-specific forms of AAE do have an effect on the writing of African American students" (1999, p.134). He concludes with the recommendation that "the goal of language arts teachers [or for our purposes, writing centers and tutors,] should not be to eliminate AAE features in the speech and writing of their students, but instead to become familiar with the idiom...and help students elaborate it to meet the communicative demands of the classroom" (Balhorn, 1999, p.141).

In Syrquin's (2006) extensive register analysis of African American collegiate writing, she found significantly more frequent usage of stylistic and grammatical features unique to spoken AAE. From 40 first-year college students, (20 African American, 20 white,) she collected three essays apiece and looked for stylistic and grammatical evidence of influence from oral

African American community culture. Syrquin found significant use of these features amongst African American writers, with particularly high frequencies in the writing of students from lower-income families (2006).

These findings support Syrquin's assertion that African American speech features "persist into the development of academic writing skills" and that this persistence "can make their [specifically, low-income African American students'] transition to academic writing lengthy and complex" (2006, pp. 85-86). This was especially true when compared to their white, middle-class counterparts (Syrquin, 2006).

Even if, as Ivy and Masterson (2011) found in their comparable study of elementary and middle school African American students, many writers have learned to code-switch away from AAE by eighth grade, some of its distinctive and often stigmatizing linguistic features remain. Echoing Syrquin's (2006) earlier sentiment, they contend that "the sociolinguistic differences of these children must be an aspect of consideration in helping them reach their full academic potential" (Ivy & Masterson, p. 37, 2011). But how are these students best helped?

Reflecting on her two decades of teaching freshman composition, Kamusikiri (1996) advocates for an "Afrocentric approach," whereby AAE is presented in the English composition classroom "...as a matter of linguistic negotiation, [in which] we make students aware that there are many styles and diction choices, none of them intrinsically wrong, each appropriate in its context" (p. 198). For her, change must begin with the perception of AAE speakers and writers amongst writing assessors: "By adopting an Afrocentric approach to writing assessment," she contends that, "teachers can appreciate the linguistic virtuosity of AAE speakers" (Kamusikiri, 1996, p. 202). This recommendation of teaching linguistic negotiation to students closely

resembles Balhorn's (1999) later push for teachers to become "familiar with the idiom" of AAE and help students "elaborate it" (p. 141). Even today, these negotiation-based approaches remain effective blueprints by which writing centers help students shift between written dialects.

Perryman-Clark (2013) uses evidence of AAE-based phonological patterns often employed by African American student writers to argue in favor of the continued push for SRTOL in English composition classrooms. Her study focused on three African American students enrolled in a first-year writing course. The author analyzed their writing for AAE-based phonological and syntactical patterns, such as the presence of zero copula, habitual *be*, third-person singular verb forms, and multiple negation. Like Ivy and Masterson (2011), Perryman-Clark found that these student writers make highly-sophisticated linguistic choices, manipulating and code-switching their language between AAE and standard English based on audience and genre expectations (2013).

However, not all scholars agree with an approach that requires students to navigate between dialects in order to make their writing more acceptable. Flores and Rosa (2015) go further than their predecessors and offer sharp criticism of this "appropriateness-based" strategy of language instruction. In their critical analysis, they conclude that language education must ultimately be shifted away from "an additive approach embedded within a discourse of appropriateness toward one that seeks to denaturalize standardized linguistic categories" (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 168). For them, the concept of appropriateness in language education remains "...complicit in normalizing the reproduction of the white gaze by marginalizing the linguistic practices of language-minoritized populations" (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p.166).

While indisputably an improvement over earlier subtractive approaches, wherein writing teachers attempted to completely replace students' native language practices with the standard, Flores and Rosa maintain that even newer additive approaches like those advocated for by Kamusikiri (1996) and Balhorn (1999), "continue to interpret the linguistic practices of bilinguals through a monolingual framework" (2015, p. 153). Note that Flores and Rosa's explicitly raciolinguistic definition of bilingualism includes AAE-speaking learners of standard English, as they are considered part of the linguistic group which stands in opposition to the white, monolingual Other.

Although substantial progress has been made, the debate over appropriateness and language use in student writing remains unsettled. What is clear, however, is that features of nonstandard Englishes, like those of AAE, appear in student writing. But how are these features perceived by assessors like English instructors and writing center tutors?

Attitudes toward nonstandard English in student writing. Several recent studies have shown that AAE-specific linguistic features and structures continue to be considered "bad" writing and are more likely to be flagged by evaluators for correction during a consultation or examination (Wilson, 2011; Johnson & VanBrackle, 2012; Horton, 2017). The first two of these studies also served as direct inspiration for my research.

A writing center director herself, Dr. Nancy Wilson assessed 144 fellow employees of Texas State University. Of the total participants, 41 were English department faculty and 103 were writing center tutors. On a written survey, she asked respondents to rate how "bothered" they were by sentences which exhibited features of nonstandard languages, specifically AAE (e.g., "ain't," zero copula, multiple negation, etc.) in comparison to the typical developmental

errors produced by ELL writers (e.g., missing/wrong article, syntax, misplaced adjective, etc.) and common “European American” errors (e.g., wrong word, fragment, missing apostrophe, etc.) Participants were also offered the opportunity to provide a comment with their ratings. Dr. Wilson found that sentences showing AAE features were rated significantly lower and their corresponding written responses were much more negative and critical—both of the language itself and the hypothetical student who produced it. Moreover, these criticisms were often expressed in explicitly racialized terms (2011).

Likewise, Johnsons and VanBrackle’s (2012) meticulous study supports Wilson’s (2011) findings that AAE “errors” (i.e. features) are considered particularly egregious in student writing. The authors began their research by collecting three actual essays written by students during previous years of the University System of Georgia’s Regent’s Writing Exam. One exam had received a fail (low), one a pass (intermediate), and one a high pass (high), by raters. The authors then corrected all of the surface errors in each essay while leaving everything else unchanged in order to produce a “clean” version of each text. Next, using the eight most common surface errors found in each type, an AAE, ESL, and SAE version of each essay was created for a total of nine: Low AAE, Low ESL, Low SAE, Int. AAE, Int. ESL, Int. SAE, High AAE, High ESL, High SAE. These essays, unbeknownst to the raters, were inserted back into the USG Regency Exam, each receiving between 43 and 54 ratings by different writing assessors. A log-linear model was applied to generate ratios for each pairing of the nine essays, i.e., the odds of a type receiving a passing grade when compared to another type. Based on this model, AAE essays of all levels were found to be the most likely to fail of all types (Johnson & VanBrackle, 2012). For example, a “Low AAE” essay was 4.2 times more likely to fail than a “Low ESL” essay, and an

“Int. AAE” essay was 7.6 times more likely to fail than an “Int. ESL” essay (Johnson & VanBrackle, 2012, p. 43). Johnson and VanBrackle conclude that these results provide clear evidence that student writing samples which exhibit AAE features “are at a disadvantage when compared to other essays of the same level of quality” (2012, p. 45).

In a study similar to Johnson and VanBrackle (2012), Horton (2017) administered a two-part language survey to 14 graduate teaching assistants in the English department of a large public research university in the American Upper South. The first part of this survey asked participants to holistically rate (from 0-4) what they were told was an authentic sample of undergraduate writing which had been written during a timed assignment (Horton, 2017). Participants were then alternately presented with one of two essays adapted from Johnson and VanBrackle (2012). The content of both essays was identical, however one of the essays included morphosyntactic AAE features. The second part of Horton’s survey investigated respondents’ attitudes toward stigmatized English varieties. Like Johnson and VanBrackle (2012), Horton found that assessors rated the essay with AAE features a full letter grade lower than the otherwise-identical essay (2017). This result also conflicted with what participants had claimed elsewhere on the survey: That they believed nonstandard features should not be marked as error and had voiced their support for the use and normalization of non-dominant English varieties (Horton, 2017).

The majority of previous literature has been focused on the role of the writing center, detailed linguistic analyses of student writing, or the philosophies and pedagogies of English language instruction, with little attention paid to the consultants working on the frontlines with students. This is not surprising, as most of these studies have been conducted by current and

former composition teachers and writing center administrators. However, as an advanced student of linguistics, and having worked extensively both as and with writing tutors, I consider myself to be in a unique position to investigate their perspectives on these topics. By means of the following linguistically-informed inquiry, this research is intended to offer additional insight meant to help bridge the gaps between the writing center, tutee writing, and tutor training.

CHAPTER TWO

Method

Context

This study was conducted at Grand Valley State University (GVSU) in Allendale, Michigan, a public liberal arts university with an enrollment of 23,396 students: 21,680 undergraduate and 2,997 graduate students (“About GVSU,” 2018). The student body is predominantly white, although as a percentage of overall population, minority enrollment has increased from 4% in 2008 to 8.3% in 2017, and university efforts to promote racial and ethnic diversity continue (“Diversity Dashboard,” 2017). According to an internal institutional report, minority undergraduate students are statistically more likely to seek writing center assistance than are white undergrads (Batty, 2017), and while care must always be taken so as to not totally conflate language use with race, there exists a strong correlation between, for example, the African American population of the United States and the use of AAE (Mufwene, 2001). Thus, as GVSU becomes more racially and ethnically diverse overall, the likelihood of writing center consultants to be exposed to nonstandard Englishes increases.

The writing center. The Fred Meijer Center for Writing and Michigan Authors at Grand Valley State University, (hereafter referred to as the “Grand Valley Writing Center” or simply the “GVWC,”) served as the venue for this study. It offers its services to a total population of nearly 30,000 students, faculty, and alumni across the school’s Allendale and Grand Rapids, Michigan campuses. The GVWC also welcomes second language writers of all English proficiencies. During my time as a writing consultant, I worked with students from a wide variety of linguistic backgrounds, including Chinese, Arabic, Spanish, Korean, Malay, and Igbo,

all of whom were at different stages of their language learning journey—some were struggling with the perplexing nuances of English prepositions, while others were still working on basic word order and sentence structure. Continued efforts to promote the center’s services have proven successful, as evidenced by the GVWC’s increasing popularity; over the 2009 to 2018 academic years, the total number of consultations per year rose from 9,802 to 11,350—a 14% increase, far outpacing the university’s overall 2% enrollment increase during the same period (“History of Enrollment,” 2018).

Services offered by the writing center. The GVWC assists students in two major ways. First, the center offers one-on-one peer consultations which are held in either of its two physical on-campus office spaces. Any student seeking writing assistance may either schedule an appointment with a specific consultant through the center’s website, telephone, or walk in “off the street” without an appointment. Undergraduate student appointments run a total of 30 minutes in length, while graduate students and second language writers are allowed to schedule appointments up to an hour upon request. Writers are also able to schedule standing weekly appointments with their preferred consultant should they so choose or if the project warrants it. Google Docs support is also offered in the event that the writer is unable to be physically present. This technology enables the tutor and tutee to collaborate virtually and in real-time.

Second, the writing center embeds its undergraduate tutors within GVSU’s introductory writing class, “Writing 150—Strategies for Student Writing” (WRT 150). This is considered a foundational college writing course, and all first-year students must pass with a grade of C or better in order to fulfill the university’s general education requirement. (Students in GVSU’s Honors College have an alternative curriculum and are exempted from this requirement.)

As the goal of WRT 150 is to have its students “practice different kinds of academic writing and learn strategies for rhetorical research-based writing” as well as to instruct writers on how “to build well-supported arguments and incorporate sources” (“WRT Course Descriptions,” 2019), there is considerable overlap with the kind of work that consultants typically do within the writing center itself. As embedded WRT 150 tutors, they lead workshops with multiple students or perform other related duties at the discretion of the instructor.

The consultation process. Practically speaking, the center advises its consultants to focus on higher-order concerns—organization and rhetoric, descriptiveness, clarity and coherence, etc.—and eschew explicit grammar correction unless specifically asked for by the tutee, is a recurring error, or is deemed necessary for meaning, in which case it is left up to the tutor to make such a determination. This strategy is reflective of the center’s process-based approach.

The GVWC offers guidance through all phases of the writing process—from interpreting and clarifying assignment criteria, to brainstorming, outlining, writing, and revision. It also helps students grapple with the more esoteric, technical aspects of scholarly writing such as discipline-specific formatting and citation. While all kinds of written work are welcome, (résumés, personal statements, poetry, drama, narrative fiction, etc.) many students, especially first-years, feel most uncomfortable with assignments that require strict academic language and structure, i.e., essays and reports. I encountered many bewildered students in desperate need of help with APA, MLA, or Chicago citation and style—concepts with which they were entirely unfamiliar.

Indeed, as writing center services have become an increasingly integral part of Grand Valley’s overall writing curriculum, many first-year students are strongly encouraged to visit the center as a part of their introduction to collegiate writing or are incentivized in other ways.

Several tutees admitted to me that their professors had offered them the opportunity to re-submit a disappointing paper for a better grade if they brought it to the writing center, while other students were simply offered extra credit.

After the consultation, the tutor and tutee are required to jointly compose post-session notes which detail what elements were focused on, what recommendations and revisions were made, and what the writer intends to do with their work going forward. The tutee is then given an opportunity to submit a private evaluation of their experience and offer thoughts as to how the writing center might improve its services. All of these notes are filed digitally and kept by the writing center administrative staff for future review and analysis.

The consultants.

Consultant recruitment and hiring. The GVWC recruits its student consultants via online advertisements, social media, physical bulletin board postings in and around campus, and word-of-mouth. All students currently enrolled in classes at the university are eligible to apply. In addition to the physical application, one faculty recommendation and two academic writing samples are required. At least one of these samples must include research and references.

As part of the interview process, would-be consultants are required to evaluate an example student essay in front of the writing center administrative staff. Applicants are asked to identify the ways in which the student essay could be improved and describe how they would clearly and empathetically address those issues with the writer. In addition to favorable personal characteristics, (demeanor, professionalism, etc.,) the interviewers also look for evidence of a process-based, mindful approach to writing in their candidates.

Consultants are financially compensated either through work-study or a set hourly wage determined by academic standing; undergraduates are paid \$10.45 per hour while graduate students are paid \$12.45 per hour. This makes it one of the highest-paying student jobs on campus. The GVWC hires an average of 25-30 new employees a year and maintains an average total staff of 65 consultants. This total also includes 2-4 graduate consultants hired per year. Consultants' shifts are determined by their academic schedule with most consultants working between 8-12 hours a week.

Consultant instruction. Once hired, all new tutors must take a one-credit course, "Writing 306—Seminar for Writing Tutors" (WRT 306), which runs concurrently with their first semester of work in the writing center. Per the course's syllabus, its overall objective is to "prepare new writing consultants to effectively assist other students with their writing process" which students achieve "through learning the research and theory of academic writing and consulting, by observing others as they consult, and by reflecting on one's own practice -- in real and mock consultations" (see Appendix B).

WRT 306 is structured in a seminar format and generally 8-10 students in size. Most of its assignments ask consultants to post written responses to weekly readings on the course's online blog. The majority of these readings are taken from WRT 306's only required textbook, *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors, 2nd Edition* by Melissa Ianetta and Lauren Fitzgerald. Select blog responses are then shared and discussed during the next week's class. Students are also required to observe and reflect on another consultant's tutoring session as well as sit in on a WRT 150 portfolio grading. During this process, a panel of three writing professors evaluate three papers from each of their WRT 150 students and jointly determine students' final grades.

Per the course's description, "The goal is to arrive at a "community" grade rather than a grade based solely on one teacher's preferences" ("WRT 150 Portfolio Grading FAQ," 2017).

This experience is meant to familiarize consultants with the characteristics that writing professors generally consider acceptable in their students' writing and inform their future consultations in the writing center. While the particular characteristics can be nebulous and vary depending on the professors who constitute the panel, writers are generally assessed on their ability to meet basic standard English grammar and style expectations, and their writing should show demonstrable improvement over the semester.

For those students taking WRT 306 for a letter grade, the semester culminates in a small research project and presentation. Students must pass with a C grade or better in order to remain employed at the writing center. The class is also offered as credit/no credit.

As WRT 306's objectives might suggest, the course's content is largely concerned with the moment-to-moment beats of the consultation process itself, such as building rapport, setting an agenda, ordering concerns, providing friendly-yet-constructive feedback, managing stress, resolving potential conflicts, and writing detailed post-session notes. However, WRT 306 also represents an opportunity to expose consultants to elementary linguistics and the philosophical principles of working with student writers. One of the classes' stated goals is that consultants will, "Respect the variety of dialects of English and understand their similarities and differences from Revised Academic English" (Appendix B). This is primarily achieved by devoting a class period to a discussion of identity and language and by reading an excerpt from *Articulate While Black* by H. Samy Alim and Geneva Smitherman. For many new writing consultants, this class is

the first time that they are introduced to an explicitly linguistic perspective on language use, including concepts like linguistic discrimination, dialect variation, and nonstandard Englishes.

However, it is worth remembering that it remains to be seen whether GVWC consultants can identify nonstandard language features as such, as opposed to simply resolving them as errors for correction. As has already been demonstrated, research overwhelmingly suggests that even highly-experienced writing assessors label nonstandard writing as “bad” or “broken” English, instead of recognizing nonstandard languages as following their own valid set of internal grammatical rules (Wilson, 2011; Johnson & VanBrackle, 2012; Horton, 2017).

Instrument Design

I constructed a mixed-methods online survey instrument which incorporated both closed (quantitative) and open-ended (qualitative) questions in order to collect my data (see Appendix C). This design required participants to provide specific responses but also allowed them to supplement and explain their answers. I chose this type of tool because I considered it the most appropriate and effective method for collecting specific data through targeted questions from a large participant pool, and it has a well-established history in similar applied linguistics research (Mackey & Gass, 2016). I also took inspiration from the design of previous studies conducted by Wilson (2011) and Johnson and VanBrackle (2012).

When constructing the survey, I made a conscious effort to avoid specialized linguistic terminology such as “dialect,” “variety,” and “vernacular.” I did this not only for the sake of simplicity, but also to avoid any potential confusion on behalf of the consultant participants when asked to consider the already-complex relationships between Englishes. Consultants without a background in linguistics would likely be distracted by these terms.

Moreover, such designations are frequently determined politically, not linguistically, and the often-nebulous distinction and implied hierarchy between them is ultimately irrelevant to the aims of the survey. Instead, I opted to simply use “versions” when describing standard and nonstandard Englishes in order to keep the language of the survey as straightforward and accessible as possible.

The survey included three main sections: 9 questions which related strictly to language perception spread across 3 distinct question types, 10 which collected individual linguistic and biographical background data, and 1 final open-ended question which could optionally be used to comment on any of the topics included in the survey and/or the writing center. This produced a total of 20 questions. The nine questions of the initial language perception section of the survey were divided into three parts. The following will detail each of these separately.

Language perception.

Consultants’ attitudes toward language use in the writing center. In the first section, I asked respondents to rate their level of agreement across a 5-point Likert scale with respect to the following: statements detailing the nature of and relationship between standard and nonstandard Englishes; the participant’s perceived responsibilities as a consultant; and their impression of the varied expectations that students, professors, and writing center administrators have of them with respect to language use during consultation. All participants had the same list of statements, but the order of the list was randomized.

Consultants’ perceptions of standard and nonstandard English. In the second section, I asked participants to choose from a selection of 24 possible descriptors for first standard and then nonstandard English (see Appendix D.) This list was the same for each and included words

sociopolitical in nature (*dominant, prestigious, stigmatized, etc.*) technical (*rigid, grammatical, flexible, etc.*) and aesthetic (*beautiful, impure, boring, etc.*) Note that the actual survey did not make these distinctions; participants were presented with an uncategorized list of terms.

These questions were meant to elucidate the biases—both implicit and explicit—that the consultants might have about such varieties. Accordingly, I chose to provide these terms myself in order to determine if specific words would be more frequently associated with either dialect. Using checkboxes, respondents could choose as many or as few as they saw fit. They were also allowed to add their own descriptor(s) in a text field at the end of the section.

Consultants' judgements of grammaticality and academic appropriateness. I modeled the third and final part of my survey's language section after Wilson's (2011) study in which she asked participants to rate their level of "botheration" over different features of nonstandard Englishes. Similarly, I presented consultants with six self-contained sentences that each exhibited a single error—or, in the case of African American English (AAE), a feature. However, instead of "botheration," I asked participants to use their judgment as consultants to rate each sentence across two 5-point Likert scales in the metrics of grammaticality and appropriateness. I defined these as "how correct the sentence seems" and "how acceptable the sentence is in academic writing" respectively.

Of the six sentences, two contained errors representative of developing L2 writers, (syntax, missing article,) two errors often made by Standard English (SE) student writers (comma splice, lexicon,) and two showed features of AAE usually identified as error when compared to standard English (zero copula, 3rd person singular -s verb form.) These example sentences are modified excerpts from real student essays as used in Johnson and VanBrackle

(2012). It was made clear that the sentences were written exactly as intended by the student, i.e., any errors found should not be considered typos. Respondents were explicitly directed not to correct these errors in their evaluations—only to use their judgment as consultants in order to rate the sentences using the criteria outlined above. Survey participants were also given an opportunity to clarify their answers via text boxes which followed each question.

Participant background.

In order to determine the factor(s) that might have an influential effect on language attitudes, non-identifiable biographical data were collected for each participant (Appendix C). This section included questions pertaining to age, gender identity, major and minor, academic standing, “native tongue,” foreign language study and/or use, length of writing center employment, and exposure to or study of linguistics.

The final question in this section allowed respondents the opportunity to provide “comments about language, writing, and working as a consultant” wherein they could offer additional thoughts, insights, clarify or append answers to any of the previous sections, or comment on their experience of taking the survey and being asked to reflect on language and writing center-related topics.

Data Collection

Participant recruitment. As this research project involved the use of human subjects, I sought and was granted approval from the Human Research Review Committee (HRRC) at Grand Valley State University (protocol number 18-234-H, see Appendix E). All participants were notified of their rights and gave informed consent (IC) prior to taking part in the research.

This project also complied with the European Union General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) privacy directive.

Over the course of two weeks, the GVWC solicited potential participants twice via the “Writer’s Pad” email listserv, which all current consultants receive automatically at their GVSU-provided student email address (see Appendix F.) Active employment as a tutor at the writing center was the only eligibility criteria for participation. The solicitation message contained a hyperlink which took participants to the GDPR and IC screening and then the beginning of the online survey, hosted by SurveyMonkey. Consultants were also made aware of the survey during a weekly staff meeting and encouraged to participate. Per HRRC guidelines, it was made clear to all potential subjects that their participation was entirely optional, and due to the anonymous nature of the survey, that their responses would in no way affect their position at the GVWC or the university. Likewise, in order to ensure the privacy of all consultants, at no time during or after the recruitment process was any directly-identifiable information collected.

Participants. Out of a total 69 possible participants, 26 individuals agreed to participate in the study—a 38% response rate. Of these, 19 individuals (28% response rate) completed the survey in its entirety and are included in the final data. This group included 15 consultants who identified as female, 2 male, and 2 non-binary/genderqueer. With respect to academic standing, seniors were the largest group at 13, followed by juniors (3), sophomores (2), and one graduate student. All reported English as their first language, and 16 had studied a foreign language for a minimum of two years. Consultants ranged in length of writing center tenure from 1 to 6 semesters, with a mean of 3 semesters and a median of 4. Ages ranged from 19 to 36, with a mean and median age of 21. Participants took an average of 16 minutes to complete the survey.

Data Analysis

Respondents were analyzed as a whole and also sorted into two primary categories based on their reported backgrounds. First, participants were divided according to their length of time as consultants at the writing center. These two groups can be understood as consultants with less experience (2 or fewer semesters) and those with more experience (3 or more semesters.) Second, consultants were divided according to their linguistic education, i.e., whether or not they had attended at least one university-level class in linguistics.

Since there was so little variation amongst participants in terms of gender identity, academic standing, language background, or foreign language study, I determined that experience and linguistic education were the most potentially-influential in light of the study's research questions. Answers to the three language sections of the survey were then cross-referenced to determine if either of these two characteristics proved to be influencing factors.

In many instances, there were no significant differences between consultants of disparate experience or education, in which cases all respondents were treated as a whole. Questions which produced a relevant discrepancy between experience and education levels were explored in greater detail where appropriate.

Answers to the language sections of the survey and the consultants' written responses were sorted thematically into three major categories to best match the issues under consideration in my research questions. By theme, these three categories were:

1. Consultants' beliefs about English varieties and academic writing;
2. Consultants' perceptions of writing center stakeholders' expectations;
3. Consultants' metalinguistic knowledge and conceptions of appropriateness;

Additionally, in order to best analyze the descriptors section, I divided the 24 possible choices first into three categories based on type (sociopolitical, technical, and aesthetic,) and then further divided these types into positive (green) and negative (red) connotations.

Finally, I sorted the results of the consultants' sentence evaluations by error/feature type, i.e., Standard English (SE), English as a Second Language (ESL), and African American English (AAE). Insufficient data distribution meant that statistical analyses could not be performed for the majority of questions. For those few questions with sufficient data, no statistically-significant results were found so I have declined to report them. Accordingly, consultants were treated as a whole group for both the descriptors and sentence evaluation sections.

CHAPTER THREE

Results

Consultants' Beliefs About English Varieties and Academic Writing

As shown in Table 1 below, a majority of all participants disagreed that nonstandard English is inappropriate at school and in academic writing. There was little variation across consultant groups with respect to the appropriateness of nonstandard English. However, when consultants were asked their own beliefs about standard English and the writing center, results were mixed and produced more variation between groups of different experience levels.

Table 1

Consultants' beliefs about English varieties and academic appropriateness

Question	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
NSE is inappropriate in academic writing	3	1	15
It is okay to use NSE at home but not at school	1	2	16
I believe that SE should be used at the WC	5	7	7

As illustrated in Figure 1 below, amongst participants who disagreed that standard English should be used in the writing center, the majority have less experience. In contrast, more experienced consultants expressed uncertainty in response to this question. Consultants with linguistic education disagreed more frequently than those without.

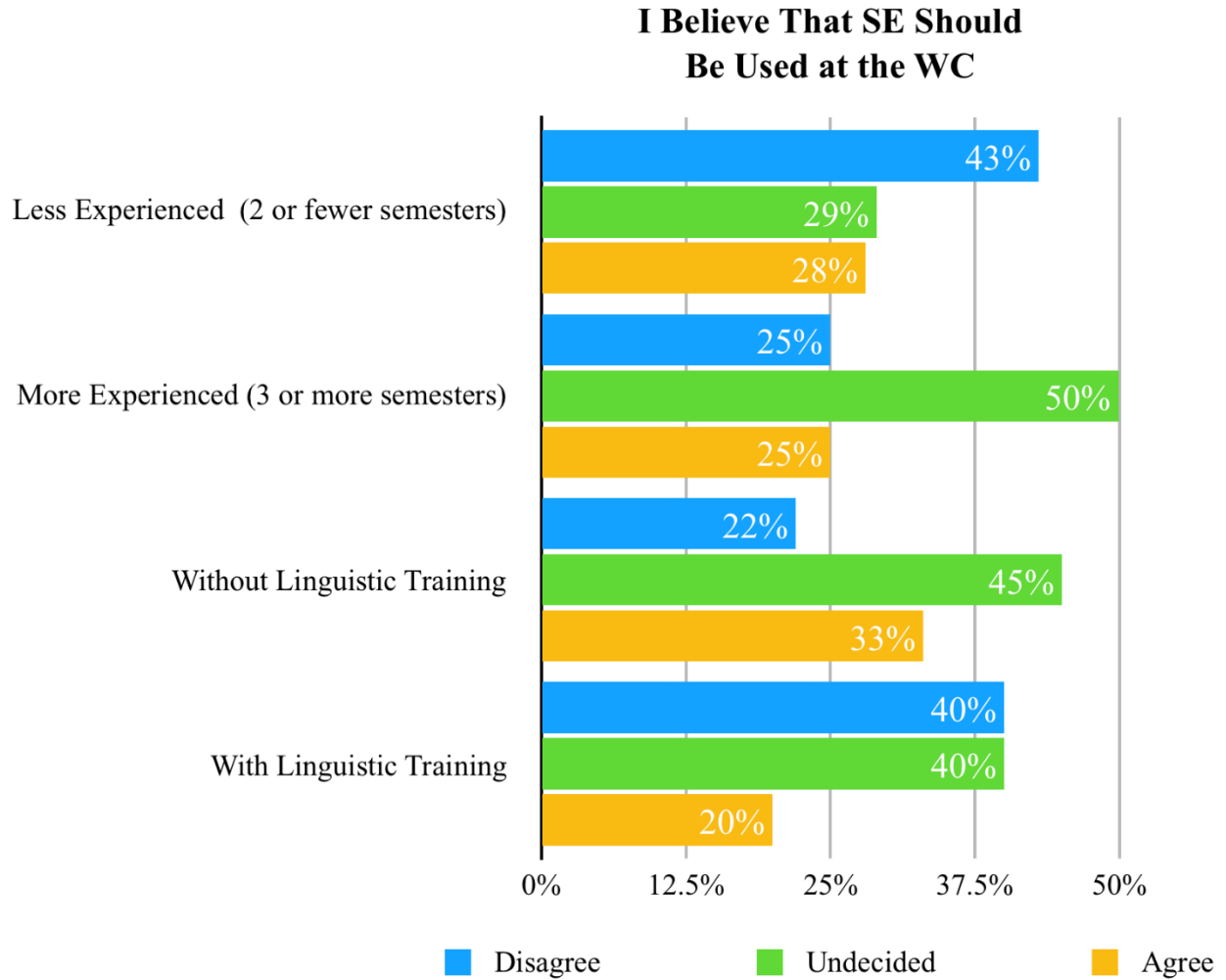


Figure 1. Beliefs about standard English use at the writing center by consultant group.

Many consultants also commented on their desire for a wider acceptance of nonstandard English in academia:

- “I feel that other dialects of English are just as reputable as standard English and should be accepted in the classroom setting.”
- “There is a terrible stigma that all writing must be standardized English, but that's just not feasible or true.”
- “We have a very Americanized/Westernized view, and practice, of language in a college setting. Although not reinforced in the Writing Center, it is also not paid enough attention to.”
- “I don't think that Standard English is the end-all-be-all of English, though universities and academic settings often ascribe to this way of thinking.”
- “I hope this helps, and that, one day, linguistic diversity is promoted at the middle/high school level!”
- “I believe all types of dialects should feel valued so that students feel comfortable using whichever dialect they feel needs to be used for the assignment/used to communicate their thoughts effectively.”
- “We were taught in WRT 306, the Seminar for Writing Tutors that there is such a thing as code-switching, and that there are many types of English that can all be valid in academic writing.”

Other consultants expressed concern that failing to use standard English might disadvantage students or jeopardize their future success:

- “I worry that encouraging students to use nonstandard English at the academic level, regardless of how valid it is and how disappointing it is that our society believes standard English to be the only acceptable English, could negatively affect students' futures. Standard English is still academic English, and the "money" language, and is important to understand and use.”
- “...in an academic setting, Standard English has been “approved” in a way that says if you can write like this, then you will succeed.”
- “...we use Standard English in Academia and in most places so that we can all better understand each other.”

The 19 survey participants selected a grand total of 202 descriptors: 105 for standard English and 97 for nonstandard English (Tables 2 and 3 below).

Table 2

Total selected descriptors for standard English by frequency in descending order

Descriptor	SE	NSE
Dominant	14	0
Academic	14	0
Professional	12	0
Grammatical	9	9
Valuable	8	12
Useful	8	8
Prestigious	8	0
Rigid	6	0
Sophisticated	5	3
Educated	5	3
Straightforward	3	3
Corrupted	3	2
Natural	3	17
Stigmatized	2	15
Flexible	2	9
Ignorant	2	0
Beautiful	1	3
Simplified	0	2
Boring	0	0
Lazy	0	0
Broken	0	2
Pure	0	2
Slang	0	1
Casual	0	5

Table 3

Total selected descriptors for nonstandard English by frequency in descending order

Descriptor	NSE	SE
Natural	17	3
Stigmatized	15	2
Valuable	12	8
Grammatical	9	9
Flexible	9	2
Useful	8	8
Casual	5	0
Sophisticated	3	5
Educated	3	5
Straightforward	3	3
Beautiful	3	1
Corrupted	2	3
Broken	2	0
Pure	2	0
Simplified	2	0
Slang	1	0
Prestigious	0	8
Rigid	0	6
Dominant	0	14
Academic	0	14
Professional	0	12
Ignorant	0	2
Boring	0	0
Lazy	0	0

Overall, the three most frequently selected terms describing standard English were “dominant” (74%), “professional” (63%), and “academic” (74%). For nonstandard English, the most common were “natural” (94%), “stigmatized” (83%), and “valuable” (67%).

As previously mentioned, survey participants were presented with an uncategorized list of terms. In order to clearly represent consultants’ attitudes toward each variety, in the following sections I have sorted them into sociopolitical, technical, and aesthetic types.

Terms that fell into the sociopolitical category were the most chosen for both standard English and nonstandard English (66 and 40 times, respectively.) As illustrated in Figure 2 below, consultants chose negative sociopolitical terms much more frequently when describing nonstandard English.

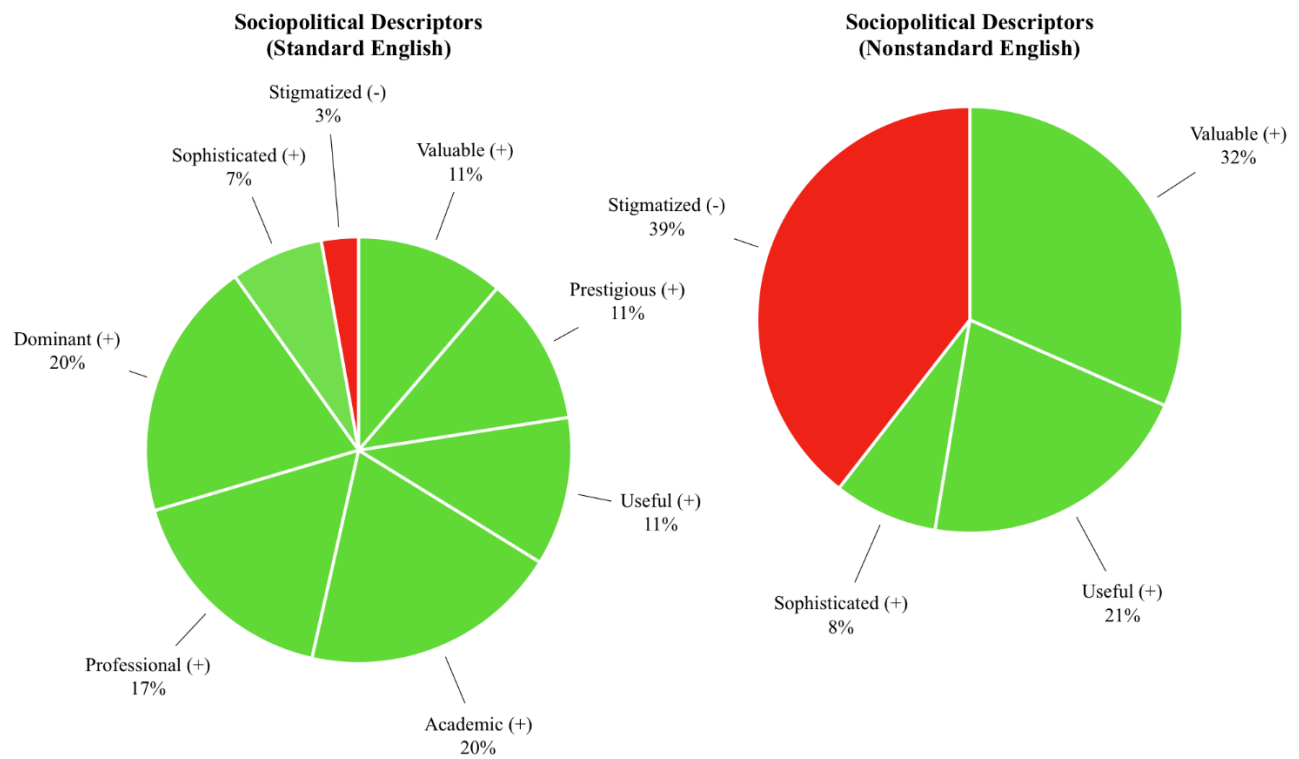


Figure 2. Percentage of descriptors chosen for English varieties within sociopolitical category.

Figure 3 (below) shows that the second most selected were descriptors of a technical nature. These were chosen at a nearly equal rate for both standard English (25) and nonstandard English (29). “Rigid,” chosen six times for standard English, produced a slightly more negative overall result for this variety as opposed to nonstandard English. “Grammatical” was selected nine times for both standard and nonstandard English.

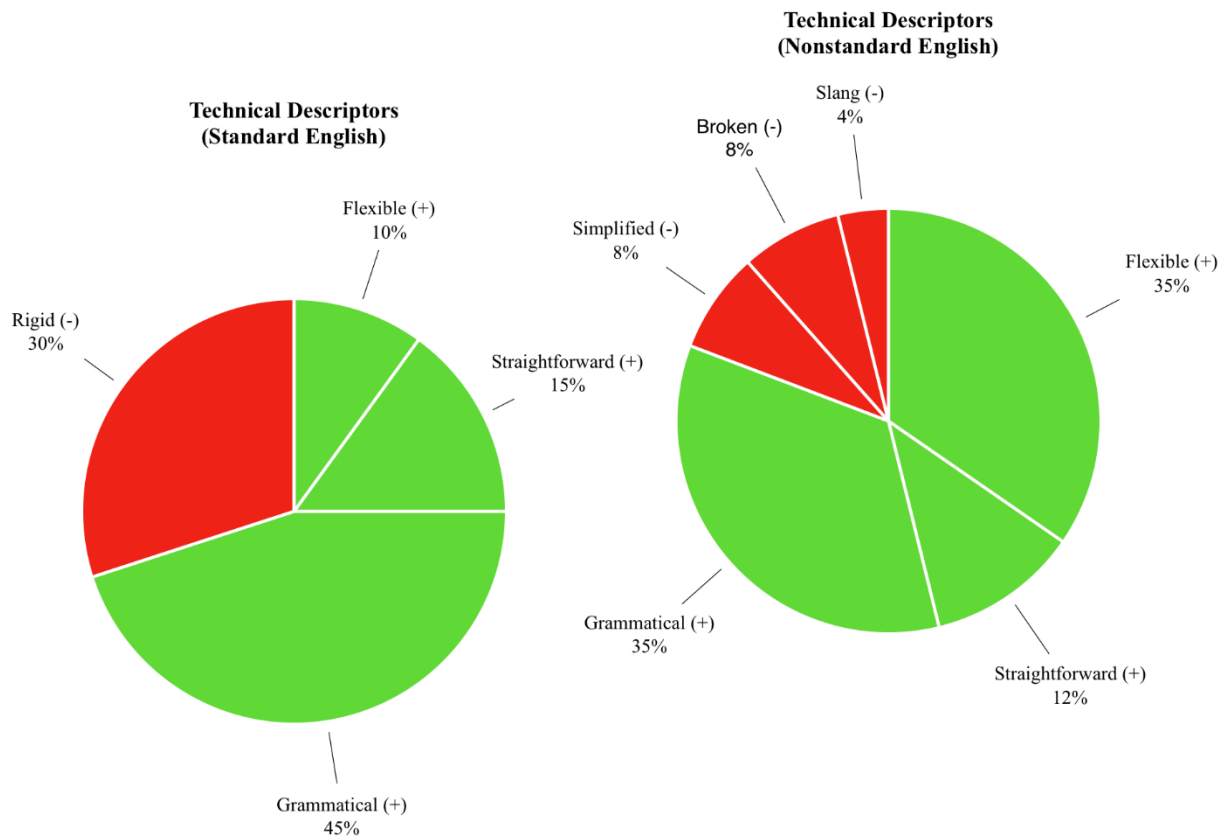


Figure 3. Percentage of descriptors chosen for English varieties within technical category.

As illustrated by Figure 4 below, consultants chose aesthetic-type descriptors nearly twice as often in relation to nonstandard English (27) than they did for standard English (14.) “Natural” in relation to nonstandard English was the most selected term across all categories at 17. This was the most positive selection of terms used to describe nonstandard English, and the most negative selection for standard English.

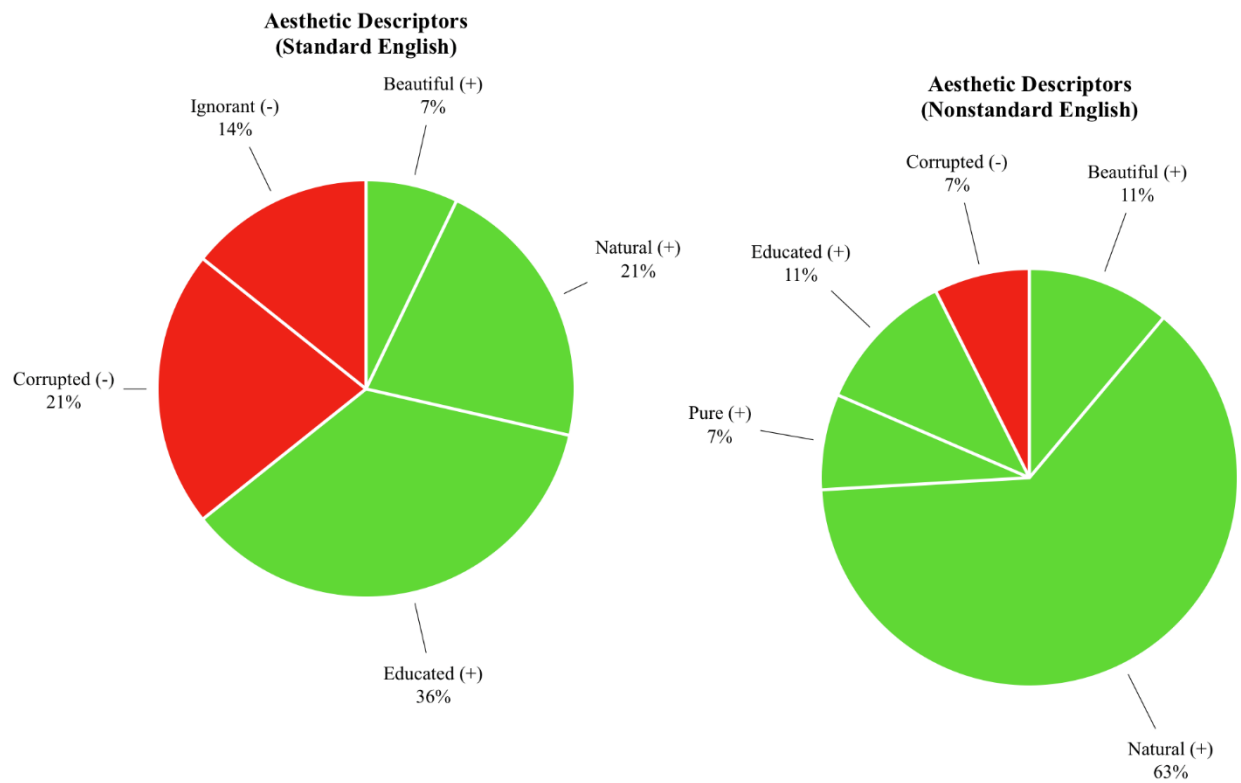


Figure 4. Percentage of descriptors chosen for English varieties within aesthetic category.

As shown below in Table 4, respondent-provided descriptors highlighted the racial and cultural dimensions of standard and nonstandard Englishes and the tension between them.

Table 4

Consultant-provided descriptors for standard and nonstandard English

Standard English	Nonstandard English
white, changeable, challengeable, evolving, resistible, accepted, “what is expected”	non-white, different, resistance, resisting

Consultants’ Perceptions of Writing Center Stakeholders’ Expectations

As shown in Table 5 (below) almost all consultants agreed that both professors and students expect the use of standard English in the writing center. However, respondents showed comparatively more undecidedness and disagreement when asked to consider writing center administrators’ expectations, with discrepancies between consultant groups.

Table 5

Consultants’ perceptions of writing center stakeholders’ expectations

Question	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
Professors expect me to help students use SE	17	1	1
WC administrators expect me to help students use SE	10	4	5
Students expect me to help students use SE	16	3	0

As illustrated in Figure 5 (below) less experienced consultants and those without linguistic education showed the most undecidedness and disagreement, whereas experienced consultants and those with linguistic education more frequently agreed that that writing center administrators expect the use of standard English.

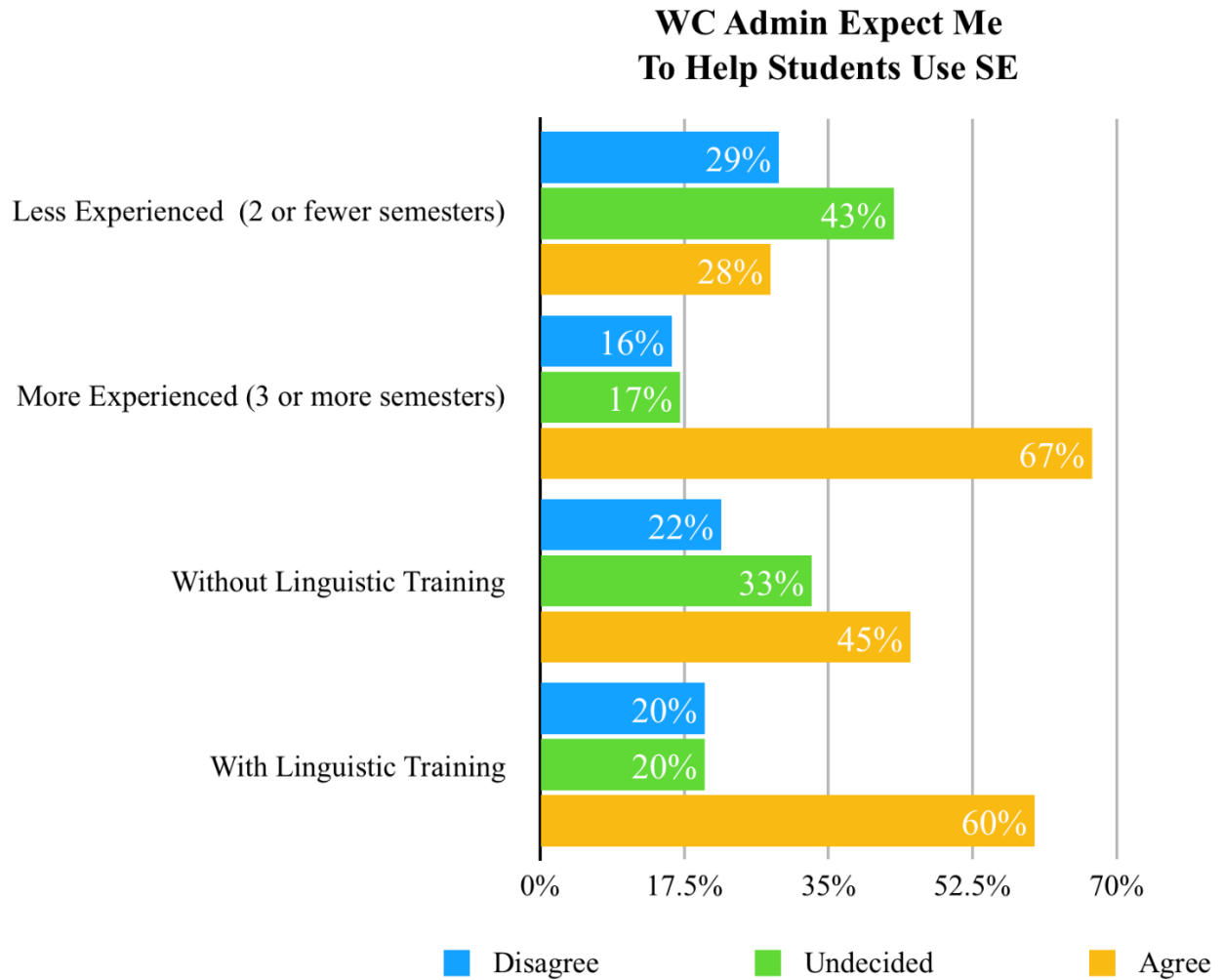


Figure 5. Perception of writing center administrators' expectations by consultant group.

Consultants had much to say on the issue of stakeholders' expectations for language use in the writing center and university. Many commented on the fact that, since most professors expect standard English from their students, consultants are therefore obliged to use it, even if this approach doesn't align with what they personally believe or have been taught about linguistic equality:

- "...typical academic work at GVSU implies or has an unwritten rule of using Standard English- in other words we don't talk about it, but most people and professors recognize it as an accepted form of good writing."
- "...it's often difficult to reconcile different dialects of English with the fact that professors often expect standard English despite what we are told in the writing center."
- "I wish that professor's expectations for "proper English use" aligned with what we teach."
- "...it is a gamble of whether professors or people in general who have not taken linguistics classes are aware or accepting of it [NSE] as equally valid."
- "...students and professors often tend to see it [NSE] as too unprofessional or lax for an academic setting. Whether I agree or not is not particularly relevant because this seems to be the reality of the environment."
- "Some professors may expect (and even indicate on syllabuses and in assignment parameters) that students will use "standard" or "grammatically well-formed" written English."
- "I definitely feel as though professors expect "standard" English and we have to help students navigate that line."

Consultants' Metalinguistic Knowledge and Conceptions of Appropriateness

Table 6 (below) shows that all but one consultant disagreed with the proposition that there is only one correct English. However, the majority of respondents across all categories were undecided as to whether standard English is “more grammatical” and whether nonstandard English has “fewer rules” than standard English. Both of these questions pertain to the relative grammaticality of Englishes varieties, (i.e., the common misperception that one system is more or less rule-governed than another) and both broke down across similar lines.

Table 6

Consultants' metalinguistic knowledge

Question	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
There is one correct version of English	1	0	18
SE is more grammatical than other versions of English	1	12	6
NSE has fewer rules than SE	2	11	6
AAE is slang	0	10	9
I can recognize NSE in student writing	16	1	2

As illustrated below in Figure 6, consultants with three or more semesters of writing center experience more frequently recognized the linguistic equality between dialects, with nearly half disagreeing that nonstandard English is less rule-governed than standard English. Likewise, consultants with linguistic education were slightly more likely than those without to disagree that standard English is more grammatical.

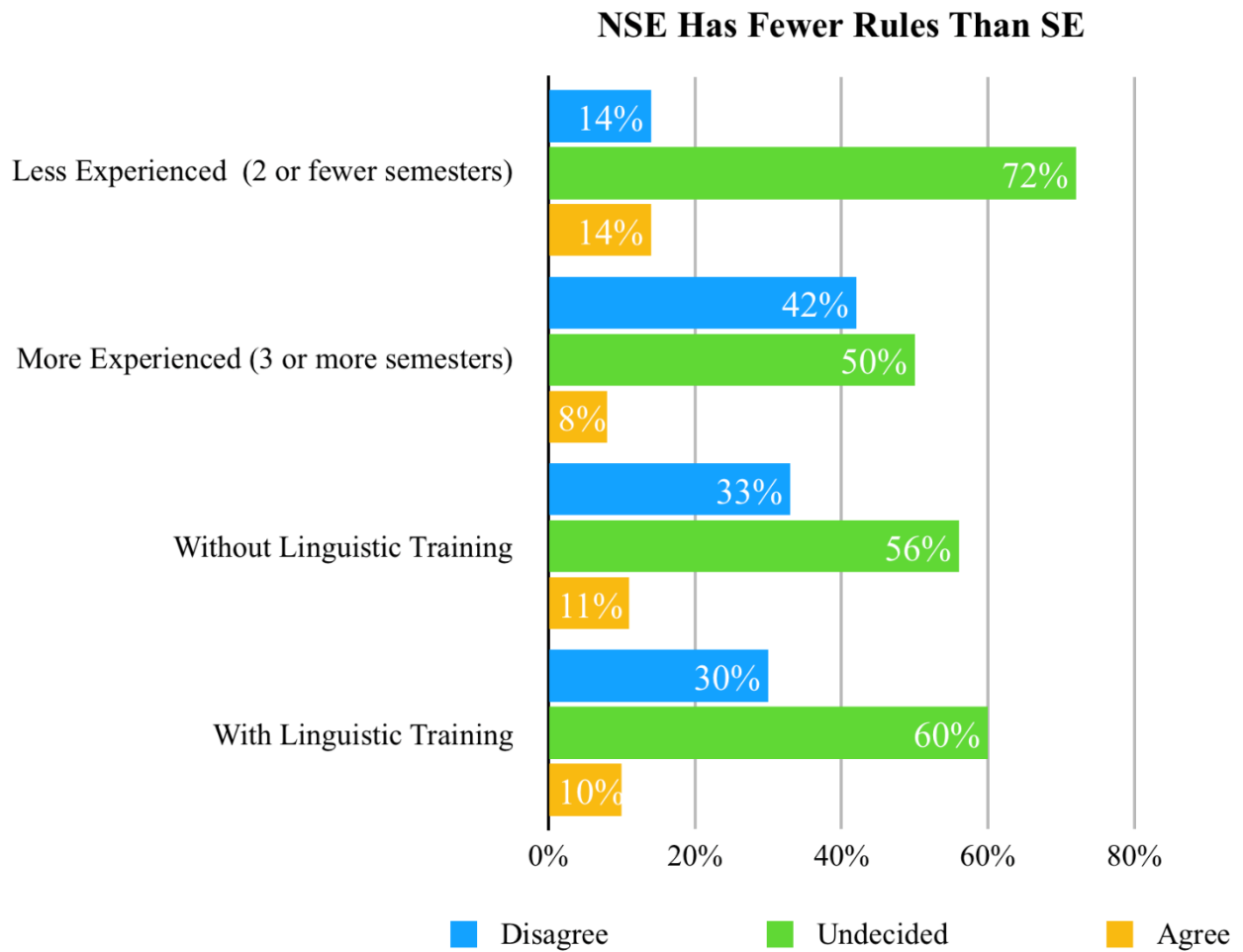


Figure 6. Metalinguistic understanding of dialect grammaticality by consultant group.

Consultants' comments also demonstrated their knowledge of language variation:

- “In American colleges, we are also inadvertently taught that English is the only academically accepted, or recognized, language. We view Nonstandard English, African American English, etc. as “wrong” instead of “right, but different.””
- “I have an understanding that there are other dialects of English that should be recognized just as readily as standard English.”
- “...other non-standard forms of English are rule-governed and technically correct...”
- “...there are different dialects in the US (and elsewhere) which do follow their own set of grammatical rules.”
- “I view non-standard English and standard English as dialects of the same language: English.”
- “All dialects of English are equally grammatical and correct.”
- “Linguistically, I have learned that all forms of English are valid, complex, rule-bound forms of language that should be placed on equal footing with Standard English.”
- “As I understand it, many dialects of English have more rules than standard English though they may not necessarily be written down in a particular rule book.”

Figure 7 (below) shows that consultants were divided on the question as to whether African American English is slang. Although consultants with more experience and more education disagreed at higher rates than those with less experience and without education, at least half of respondents across all groups remained undecided. No one agreed that AAE is slang.

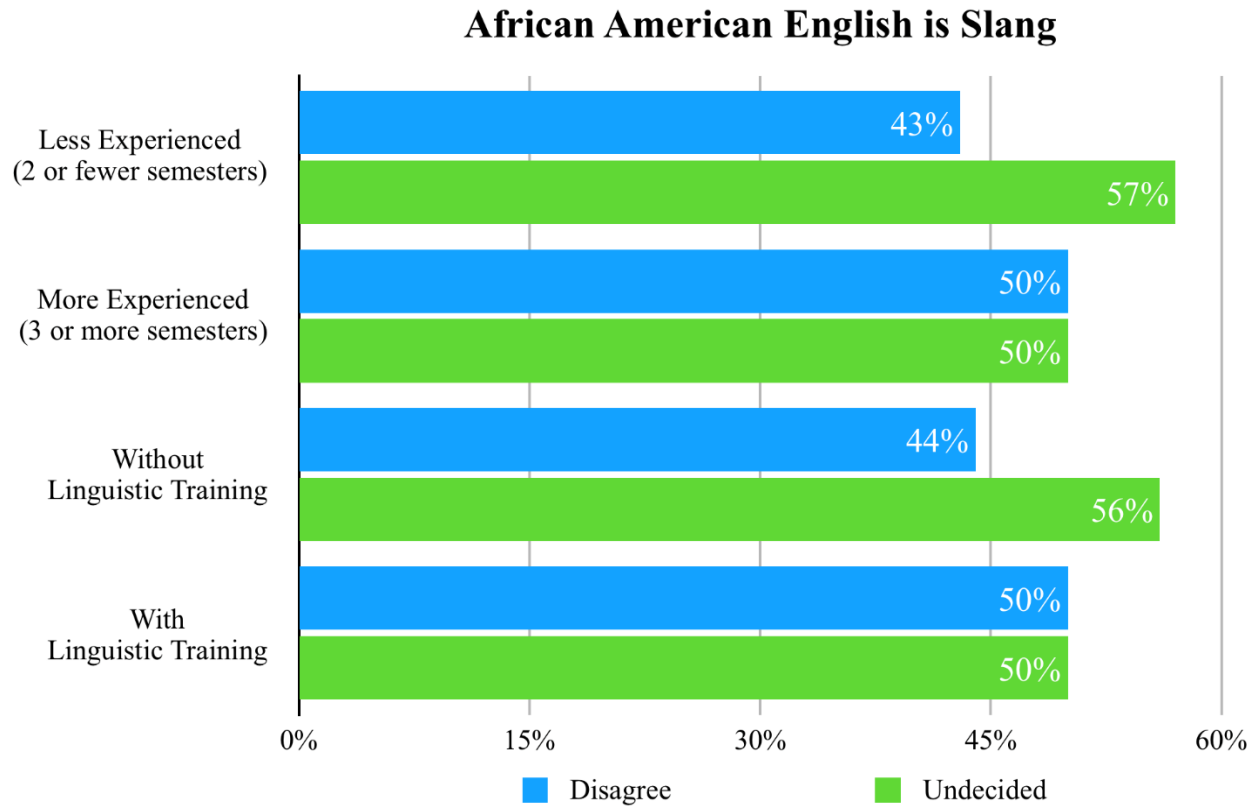


Figure 7. Beliefs as to whether African American English is slang by consultant group.

As illustrated in Figure 8 below, irrespective of length of writing center tenure or linguistic education, consultants reported high levels of confidence in their personal ability to “recognize nonstandard English in student writing.” Over 75% of all consultant groups were confident they could identify features of nonstandard English. Consultants with linguistic education were the most confident group at 90%.

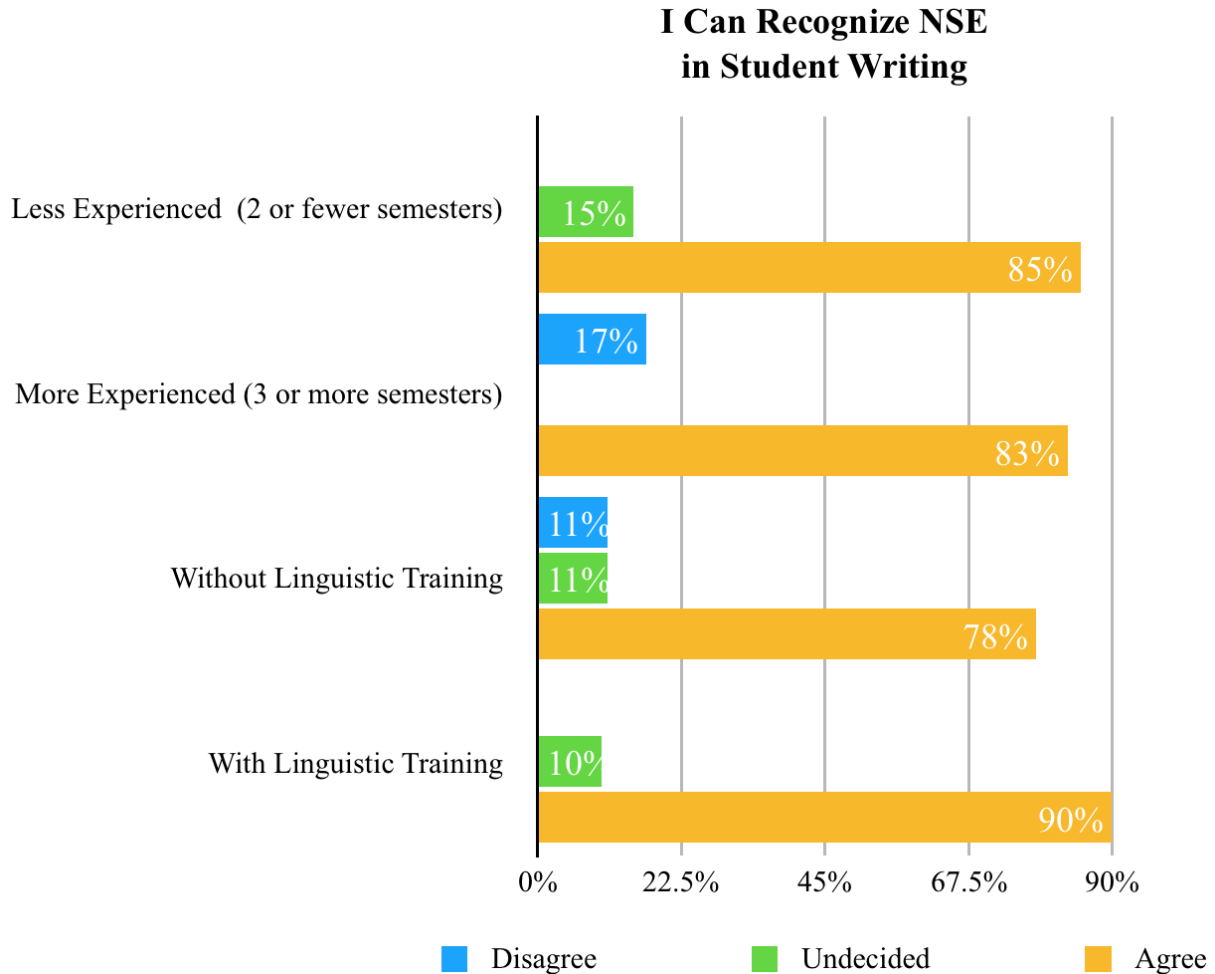


Figure 8. Confidence in own ability to recognize nonstandard English by consultant group.

Despite these generally high levels of confidence, several consultants took the opportunity to voice their desire for more education in nonstandard Englishes:

- “I’m used to using standard English in my classes, since most classes require it, so it’s hard for me to distinguish between non-standard English and incorrect grammar.”
- “As consultants, we are not given the proper education to work alongside ESL students.”
- “I would like to learn more about other dialects of the English language and how they can be implemented in academics.”

Consultants' evaluations of the example sentences section of the survey were reflective both of their metalinguistic knowledge (*grammaticality*, Table 7 below) and their beliefs about academic language (*appropriateness*, Table 8 below).

Table 7

Consultants' evaluation of example sentences in terms of grammaticality

Error Type	Unsure	Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely
(SE) Comma Splice	1	0	7	9	2
(SE) Lexicon	0	6	4	6	3
(ESL) Syntax	0	6	6	3	4
(ESL) Missing Article	0	1	2	6	10
(AAE) Zero Copula	2	2	5	6	4
(AAE) 3 rd Per. Sg. -S	1	3	7	7	1

Table 8

Consultants' evaluation of example sentences in terms of academic appropriateness

Error Type	Unsure	Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely
(SE) Comma Splice	2	3	4	6	4
(SE) Lexicon	0	8	5	2	4
(ESL) Syntax	0	9	5	3	2
(ESL) Missing Article	0	2	1	5	11
(AAE) Zero Copula	0	6	4	9	0
(AAE) 3 rd Per. Sg. -S	1	8	5	4	1

Standard English errors.

Comma splice. “This would mean higher taxes to pay for the financial needs of the elderly, this would also cause fewer jobs to be available for the young.”

A majority of respondents (11) answered that the comma splice was Mostly or Completely grammatical. However, in their written responses, eight consultants correctly identified the error and recommended that the sentence be rephrased or that the comma be

replaced by a semicolon. Nonetheless, a majority of consultants (10) concluded that the comma splice did not prevent the sentence from being Mostly or Completely acceptable in academic writing as they reported that the overall meaning was “still clear.”

Lexicon. *“Their is no one solution to the problem.”*

This error produced more negative responses from consultants, both in terms of grammaticality and appropriateness. The majority of respondents (10) answered that it was Not at All or only Somewhat grammatical and a large majority (13) that it was Not at All or only Somewhat acceptable. Although many consultants pointed out that “their” and “there” are homonyms and that “the sentence is readable and [the consultant] can clearly understand the point the student is making,” others were concerned that it was “an avoidable mistake, and would likely draw negative attention from the reader.”

ESL developmental errors.

Syntax. *“You should this time use wisely to achieve the task for the day.”*

Respondents reacted negatively to this syntax error across both metrics, as the incorrect word order interfered with meaning according to consultants. The majority of consultants (12) answered that it was Not at All or Somewhat grammatical, and a large majority (14) that it was inappropriate. Responses indicated that readers found the sentence “weird,” “confusing,” “disrupted,” “jarring,” “unorthodox,” and “distracting.” One consultant suggested accurately that the sentence “sounds like something an ESL learner would produce,” while another recognized that English sentence structure “is not the case in other languages.”

Missing article. *“Different cultures have varying values with regard to the older members of population.”*

This was the most positively rated error of all six sentences. It was considered Mostly or Completely grammatical and Mostly or Completely appropriate by a majority of consultants (16). Only four responses suggested that an article/determiner would be necessary, while others saw “no issues with this sentence,” said that it “sounds/feels right,” or concluded that “the sentence is complete and sounds correct.”

African American English features.

Zero copula. *“It is important that you disciplined enough to use the time that you have allowed yourself.”*

Consultants were divided on this feature of AAE. A slim majority (10) answered that the zero copula was Mostly or Completely grammatical, while seven answered Somewhat or Not at All. Two consultants were undecided. This result was reversed when appropriateness was considered. A slim majority (10) answered that the sentence was Not at All or only Somewhat acceptable in academic writing, as opposed to nine who considered it Mostly acceptable. No respondents answered that it was Completely acceptable.

One consultant recognized this sentence as being representative of a nonstandard version of English but stopped short of identifying the particular feature:

- “I recognize this as a Nonstandard Form of English, but since it is not the form I use, I do not claim to know its grammar rules.”

Several others appreciated that the sentence was grammatical by its own rules but would likely be flagged by a writing professor as failing to meet standard English expectations:

- “While it is correct, I can see a professor disagreeing because it is not standard English.”
- “Here there's clearly a nonstandard English variety in use, and so it will have a place in certain genres. It is not Standard American Written English as-written, but it's not non-grammatical per se.”

3rd Per. Sg. -S. “*Success start with wanting to be successful.*”

Consultants reacted less favorably to this AAE feature when compared to the zero copula. A majority (10) considered it Not at All or only Somewhat grammatical, and a large majority (13) considered it inappropriate. However, in their written comments, several consultants demonstrated an understanding of different rules within languages and dialects:

- “Once again we're looking at a nonstandard English variety, so depending on the genre it may be appropriate.”
- “Again, correct but may be criticized for not being standard English.”
- “The third person singular form of the verb in Standard English would be starts. If speakers of this form of nonstandard say this is grammatical then it is grammatical!”

CHAPTER FOUR

Discussion

It is important that I begin by delineating the scope of this discussion. Here I am concerned exclusively with the consultants themselves—not overall writing center policy and administration, nor best practices in English language teaching pedagogy. While those issues are indeed critical to properly contextualizing these findings, (and I have tried to include sufficient scholarship in order to allow for this,) they are ultimately outside the purview of this paper.

The data show that consultants at the Grand Valley Writing Center possess an overall favorable disposition toward nonstandard English. Participants' survey responses and written comments indicated that they view nonstandard English as linguistically valid and believe that it should be considered appropriate in academic writing. However, the data also show a general acceptance that, as writing tutors, they are obligated to use standard English in order to meet the expectations of writing center stakeholders—specifically, those of students, the writing center administrative staff, and university professors. Finally, consultants' mixed answers to questions of grammaticality and error evaluation indicated a lack of metalinguistic knowledge, contrary to the consultants' reported self-confidence in their ability to recognize nonstandard features.

The results of this research suggest that consultants at the GVWC are well-informed and have taken the lessons learned in their writing center education to heart. They recognize that the continued domination of standard English is strictly the result of social and political tradition and academic convention, and they understand that other language varieties are equally rule-governed. Moreover, the majority of consultants go further than simply acknowledging these facts and instead actively support the argument that nonstandard Englishes should be permitted

in academic writing. Likewise, the top descriptors selected by consultants are an accurate reflection of the environments in which these language varieties currently operate. Positive sociopolitical terms demonstrate standard English's academic and professional dominance. While positive aesthetic terms in relation to nonstandard English suggest that consultants were eager to show that they do not regard it as an inferior variety; according to their selections, they consider nonstandard English to be valuable, natural, and equally useful, albeit different.

However, the survey data and written responses also reveal that many consultants lack the metalinguistic underpinnings to understand the technical differences between language varieties. It is one thing to be told that all dialects are equally rule-governed—a common refrain amongst linguists—and quite another to fully appreciate the reasons why. This is evidenced by the respondents' high levels of uncertainty when confronted with questions pertaining to relative grammaticality. This may be due in part to the survey's use of the word "grammar," which I purposefully chose to leave undefined, as I wanted to discover how its meaning would be interpreted by consultants. The data indicate that consultants are likely to conflate grammar with *prescriptive* grammar, i.e., the established norms of correct and incorrect usage. These are usually contrived practices based purely on tradition and custom. They are the agreed upon rules which constitute standard English, itself a contrived language that only exists on the page. But as linguists are also fond of saying, we all speak a dialect. No one speaks in standard English, though when asked their native language, several consultants reported on the survey that they do. This suggests that more education on the specifics of language and dialect variation, including the disambiguation of related terms, like grammar, is needed.

Linguists understand grammar as the internal systems by which all languages and dialects operate. In this sense, one language cannot be any more or less grammatical than another. If consultants were trained to acknowledge multiple English *grammars*—all of equal intrinsic linguistic value but assigned unequal sociopolitical and cultural power by those in positions of authority—it might assist them in situating AAE and other nonstandard dialects next to standard English, and in so doing, hopefully alleviate some of their confusion. For example, something as simple as introducing a book of AAE grammar into the writing center could show consultants (and students) that it is a highly-researched and catalogued system with a long and fascinating history—a history that is actually much, much older than the standard English in use today.

This recommendation is also supported by the consultants' uncertainty surrounding the question as to whether or not African American English is slang. As a mature, stable, and robust language, it most decidedly is not slang, and the use of the word in this context is difficult to construe as anything but trivializing, even pejorative. However, this may well come down to the consultants' conception of standard English as the *de facto* language of the professional world. By contrast, nonstandard Englishes are likely perceived as more natural and casual—a conclusion also supported by the fact that all but two survey participants selected “natural” to describe nonstandard English. It is this general sense of relaxedness that might then be equated with slang. But a language cannot itself be considered as such—slang is used to describe a subset of vocabulary within a language, not the entire system to which it belongs. Either consultants are unsure of AAE and other nonstandard Englishes as fully self-contained and complete languages, or they are unsure of the definition of slang.

In the consultants' written responses, there was a palpable sense of resignation to the fact that, despite what they had been taught or what they might personally believe, they were duty-bound to use standard English at the writing center in order to help student writers succeed academically. This was a sentiment expressed by nearly every respondent, and considering my initial research questions, is what I would argue is ultimately the most influential factor in determining the consultants' operating language attitudes. As one respondent put it, "Whether I agree [that NSE is inappropriate in academia] or not is not particularly relevant because this seems to be the reality of the environment." Expectations override any other potential factors.

However, this makes their mixed responses to the survey's example sentences section somewhat puzzling. Given that the instructions explicitly stated that consultants should evaluate each example in terms of "how acceptable the sentence is in academic writing," I would have expected to see more Not at All selections as opposed to Mostly or Completely appropriate. Indeed, even the most glaring ESL syntax error—one that several consultants said made the entire sentence almost incomprehensible—was considered Not at All acceptable by only nine participants. From the perspective of a university professor expecting a paper written in perfectly-grammatical standard English, I strongly suspect that none of these errors would be considered completely appropriate; they are, after all, errors. In this case, were respondents answering according to their personal beliefs of what they think *should* be appropriate, or were they acting in their official capacity as consultants, as the survey directed them to do? If the former, then their responses make some degree of sense. If the latter, then it represents a failure to adhere to the rules of the standard English that they claim to be compelled to use when working with students in the writing center.

Limitations

Though I consider the results of my research to be ultimately encouraging, they must be taken with a grain of salt. For one, there exists a potential bias in the type of writing consultant who would choose to participate in an optional survey of this nature. It is more than likely that these consultants were particularly interested linguistically-oriented topics, and accordingly may already have possessed more sophisticated knowledge than their coworkers at the writing center who declined to participate.

Moreover, I must recognize the priming effect that both the solicitation message and the order of elements on the survey might have had in encouraging certain kinds of responses. Anyone familiar with my work at the writing center as a graduate assistant specializing in linguistic diversity and inclusivity would likely be able to guess what answers I would want or might expect. Additional qualitative research would help elucidate consultants' views and interpret the collected data. In future studies, it would also be beneficial to conduct post-survey interviews with the participants in order to further explain their responses.

Finally, the relatively small sample size (19 respondents out of a possible 69) produced a homogeneity amongst survey participants in nearly all of their background characteristics (i.e., gender, language use, academic standing, age, etc.) making it impossible for me to determine if these factors influenced the consultants' reported language attitudes. This essentially limited my analysis to writing center experience and linguistic education, criteria which only produced meaningful differences in a handful of questions. A larger, more diverse collection of participants would likely be more revealing.

Implications

My findings largely coincide with those of Horton (2017). Although his study did not involve writing centers, he too discovered a disconnect between what his respondents claimed to believe about stigmatized Englishes and their evaluation of nonstandard features student writing. Horton's data suggested that, "although university English instructors are consciously well-intentioned about linguistic diversity, they may nevertheless be influenced by Standard Language Ideology" (2017, p.7). Similarly, my data suggest that, although Grand Valley University writing consultants are both well-informed and well-intentioned about linguistic diversity, they are likely influenced by the pervasiveness of Standard Language Ideology in the environment in which they work and, as Horton (2017) also discovered, lack the knowledge to accurately identify features of nonstandard English when they encounter it in student writing.

Clearly, continued inquiry along these lines is needed, as is additional instruction and support to those who work with student writers. Furthermore, while we, in our capacity as linguists, must work to raise the profile and prestige of nonstandard dialects and dismantle Standard Language Ideology when we encounter it, we may also begrudgingly acknowledge the fact that standard English will likely remain the language of most professional and academic writing for the foreseeable future. It is thus imperative that we make all writing center consultants aware that nonstandard student writers are in no way defective in terms of their ability to communicate via the written word—only that the forms those words might take often differ, albeit in predictable, perfectly logical, and linguistically-valid ways. In service of this, consultants would benefit greatly from a broader, more linguistic definition of grammar, one wholly detached from the conception of correct and incorrect usage as they relate to the standard.

Conclusion

In the entirety of my academic experience, my involvement with the Grand Valley State University writing center as a graduate assistant and consultant, while simultaneously a student in the school's applied linguistics program, was the most personally enlightening. I was able to witness first-hand the tension between what linguists and sociolinguists know about language and the realities of its use in academia. It comes as a relief that my initial concerns about writing consultants' possible misconceptions about standard English were largely unfounded. That said, there is certainly room for improvement with respect to their metalinguistic knowledge about English varieties. Fortunately, there is a good foundation on which to build.

As a possible first step toward rectifying this problem, I suggest that new consultants' understanding of and attitudes toward language be made explicit from the beginning of their tenure at the writing center, perhaps by administering a survey like the one used in this paper. This would have several benefits. First, consultants would be forced to reflect upon their own relationship to English and its varieties while confronting and challenging their assumptions about academic writing. This is desirable in and of itself. Rarely are students asked to think critically about their personal language use, and even more rarely to think about the language use of others vis-à-vis the larger institutions and societies in which they live, work, and study. Both the questions and results of the survey could spur meaningful discussion amongst consultants, going so far as to potentially challenge their belief in the sociolinguistic status quo. Second, it would make writing center administrators aware of their consultants' beliefs and attitudes toward English, allowing them to better tailor the foci of future education. If, for example, part of the curriculum of WRT 306 could be designed in such a way as to respond specifically to the

individual consultants' linguistic preconceptions, this class would become a much more effective mechanism of instruction and produce more knowledgeable and confident consultants as a result. This has benefits for both the tutor and tutee. During consultation, the tutor could recognize and respond more appropriately (i.e., using non-judgmental, inclusive language) to nonstandard language usage, affirming the tutee's ability while also informing them of the expectations that the professor might have about writing—however linguistically-unsound they might be. This gives the writer awareness and agency when shifting between dialects. That both students might then go on to challenge Standard Language Ideology in their lives outside of the writing center is an added benefit and potentially another step toward larger linguistic equality in the future. However, lest the cart is put before the horse, the tutors should first understand how their own assumptions about language and writing conform to or conflict with linguistic principles.

That said, I am also keenly aware that writing centers and consultants already have a Herculean task: help student writers meet assignment criteria and professorial expectations while simultaneously preventing damage to the identity of the writer, which as we know is inextricably linked to their language use. It is important for us to remember that peer tutors are themselves busy college students, the vast majority of whom are studying subjects other than linguistics. It would be unreasonable to ask them to become experts in an additional field. But during my time at the Grand Valley Writing Center, nearly every consultant with whom I interacted was engaged, enthusiastic, and eager to learn. For many, it wasn't just a job; they felt a legitimate sense of responsibility and truly wanted to do right by their tutees. By their very nature, writing centers foster an environment of self-discovery and self-improvement, and I suspect that most consultants would leap at the chance to further develop their knowledge and ability.

Appendix A

GVWC English Inclusiveness Statement



English Inclusiveness

The Fred Meijer Center for Writing and Michigan Authors accepts, validates, and promotes **all** language varieties represented by the students we serve.

Our program does **not** judge any language or dialect as inferior or incorrect.

We do this by...

- **Not** labeling any variety of English as superior
- Supporting students in their learning of discipline-specific writing styles, like Standard Edited Written English, while also working to validate and elevate the writer's personal voice
- Training writing consultants to respect all language varieties
- Recognizing that empowering a writer's home language allows the writer to feel valued and more confident about learning new knowledge and skills
- Acknowledging that mastery of a home language will help the writer to master other languages or language varieties



Appendix B

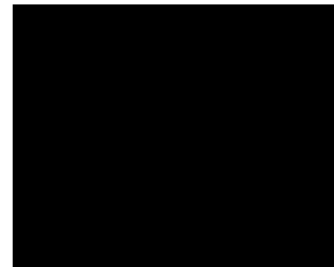
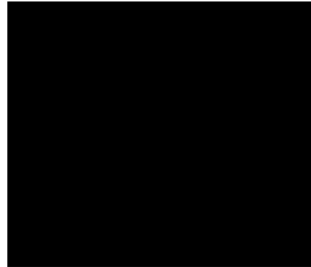
Writing 306 Learning Objectives



Fall 2018 WRT 306 Syllabus



Contacts



Learning Objectives

This course is designed to prepare new writing consultants to effectively assist other students with their writing process. Participants will become more effective through learning the research and theory of academic writing and consulting, by observing others as they consult, and by reflecting on one's own practice -- in real and mock consultations.

By the end of the seminar, WC peer consultations will --

- Demonstrate empathy in consultations
- Identify the recursive stages of a student's writing process
- Interpret writing assignments' purpose, audience, and genre
- Collaborate with a writer on a plan of action for revision
- Ask critical questions to evoke students' critical thinking
- Respect the variety of dialects of English and understand their similarities and differences from Revised Academic English

Appendix C

Language Perception Survey

General Data Protection Regulation

1. Are you currently located within the United States?

Yes

No

Informed Consent & Privacy Policy

Please read the following information thoroughly.

TITLE: A Survey of Writing Center Consultants' Language Perceptions

RESEARCHERS: Ben J. Sparks; Dr. Colleen Brice, English Department.

PURPOSE: This study aims to gather information about GVSU writing consultants' views of their role(s) in the Writing Center, their perceptions about language, and the factor(s) that may influence their views.

PROCEDURE: Participants in this study will be asked to complete a brief (approximately 15-20 minute) online survey.

RISKS: Electronic data will be collected for this research project. As with any use of electronic means to store data, there exists a minimal risk that data could be lost or stolen. All data will be stored on a secured system.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO YOU: There are no direct benefits to you. However, your participation will help the writing center better understand how consultants approach their responsibilities and improve future consultant training.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate. You may quit at any time without any penalty to you.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY: All information collected from you or about you is for the sole purpose of this research study and will be kept confidential to the fullest extent allowed by law.

PERSONAL DATA: Personal data to be collected in this study includes the following: age; gender identity; academic information (major/minor, standing, relevant classes taken); length of writing center employment; linguistic background. Sensitive personal data will be handled and processed only by researchers conducting this study, or by specially authorized university or government officials to make sure the research was done properly.

DATA SECURITY: GVSU is committed to keeping your data secure. We have put in reasonable physical, technical, and administrative data protection measures for this research. If you suspect a data breach has occurred, please contact the Vice Provost for Research Administration at Grand Valley State University, 1 Campus Drive, Allendale, MI. Phone: 616-331-3197. E-mail: rci@gvsu.edu.

DATA RETENTION: Personal data will not be retained after completion of this research.

WITHDRAWING CONSENT: You have the right to withdraw your consent to the collection and processing of personal sensitive data at any time. If you would like to withdraw from participating in this study, please contact Ben J. Sparks at sparksbe@mail.gvsu.edu. If you would like to request that your personal data be removed from this study, please contact the Vice Provost for Research Administration at Grand Valley State University, 1 Campus Drive, Allendale, MI. Phone: 616-331-3197. E-mail: rci@gvsu.edu.

CONTACT INFORMATION: If you have any questions about the study you may contact:

Dr. Colleen Brice · (616) 331-8574 · bricec@gvsu.edu

Ben J. Sparks · (616) 780-0578 · sparksbe@mail.gvsu.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Compliance & Integrity at Grand Valley State University, 1 Campus Drive, Allendale, MI. Phone: 616-331-3197. E-mail: rci@gvsu.edu.

SurveyMonkey's Privacy Policy can be found online at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/legal/privacy-policy/>

This study has been reviewed by the Grand Valley State University Human Research Review Committee (Protocol 18-234-H-GVSU).

2. Do you consent to the above?

- Yes, continue to the survey.
- No, I do not want to participate.

Language Perceptions

Remember, your **answers are anonymous** and you **may end the survey at any time**.

3. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
There is one correct version of English.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Standard English is more grammatical than other versions of English.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nonstandard English has fewer rules than standard English.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nonstandard English is inappropriate in academic writing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can recognize nonstandard English in student writing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is okay to use nonstandard English at home but not at school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
African American English is a kind of slang.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professors expect me to help students use standard English.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Writing Center administrators expect me to help students use standard English.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students expect me to help them use standard English.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that standard English should be used at the Writing Center.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please explain your answer(s).

[Please note: Although exporting from SurveyMonkey to PDF breaks formatting, this page rendered correctly when participants took the survey online.]

4. Standard English is a/an _____ version of English.

(Check all that apply.)

- grammatical
- simplified
- dominant
- valuable
- rigid
- stigmatized
- prestigious
- straightforward
- sophisticated
- beautiful
- corrupted
- boring
- lazy
- natural
- useful
- educated
- professional
- flexible
- broken
- pure
- ignorant
- slang
- academic
- casual
- other (see below)

Please feel free to add your own descriptors and/or explain your answers:

5.

Nonstandard English is a/an _____ version of English.

(Check all that apply.)

- grammatical
- simplified
- dominant
- valuable
- rigid
- stigmatized
- prestigious
- straightforward
- sophisticated
- beautiful
- corrupted
- boring
- lazy
- natural
- useful
- educated
- professional
- flexible
- broken
- pure
- ignorant
- slang
- academic
- casual
- other (see below)

Please feel free to add your own descriptors and/or explain your answers:

Example Sentences

Using your own judgement, please evaluate the following examples of student writing.

- First, in terms of their **grammaticality** (i.e., how correct the sentence seems to you.)
- Second, in terms of their **appropriateness** (i.e., how acceptable the sentence is in academic writing.)

Assume that the sentences were written exactly as the student intended, i.e., **there are no typos**.

6. This would mean higher taxes to pay for the financial needs of the elderly, this would also cause fewer jobs to be available for the young.

	Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely	Unsure
Grammatical	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Appropriate in Academic Writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please explain your answer.

7. Different cultures have varying values with regard to the older members of population.

	Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely	Unsure
Grammatical	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Appropriate in Academic Writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please explain your answer.

8. It is important that you disciplined enough to use the time that you have allowed yourself.

	Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely	Unsure
Grammatical	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Appropriate in Academic Writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please explain your answer.

9. Their is no one solution to the problem.

	Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely	Unsure
Grammatical	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Appropriate in Academic Writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please explain your answer.

10. You should this time use wisely to achieve the task for the day.

	Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely	Unsure
Grammatical	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Appropriate in Academic Writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please explain your answer.

11. Success start with wanting to be successful.

	Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely	Unsure
Grammatical	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Appropriate in Academic Writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please explain your answer.

Participant Background

All of your information is collected **only for statistical purposes** and **cannot be used for identification**.

12. Age

13. Gender Identity

14. Major(s)

15. Minor(s)

16. Current academic standing

First Year

Senior

Sophomore

Graduate

Junior

Other (see below)

Other (please specify)

17. What is your first language (i.e., what is your "native tongue?")

18. Do you use or study any other language(s)?

Yes

No

If yes, which language(s) and where?

(For example, "I studied French for two years in high school" or "I speak Spanish with my family, but English with my co-workers.")

19. How many semesters have you worked at the writing center?

20. Have you ever taken any courses in linguistics?

Yes

No

If yes, what and where?

(For example, "I took an introductory sociolinguistics class at Grand Rapids Community College.")

21. Have you ever been exposed to the field of linguistics outside of the classroom, (e.g. workshops, conferences, self-study, etc.)?

Yes

No

If yes, please briefly explain your answer.

(For example, "I attended a Fireside Chat about linguistic diversity.")

22. Do you have any additional comments about language, writing, and working as a consultant?

Appendix D

List of Descriptors by Type with Positive & Negative Connotations

SOCIOPOLITICAL

valuable (+)
prestigious (+)
sophisticated (+)
useful (+)
academic (+)
professional (+)
dominant (+)
casual (-)
stigmatized (-)

TECHNICAL

flexible (+)
straightforward (+)
grammatical (+)
simplified (-)
rigid (-)
broken (-)
slang (-)

AESTHETIC

beautiful (+)
natural (+)
pure (+)
educated (+)
corrupted (-)
ignorant (-)
boring (-)
lazy (-)

Appendix E

GVSU Human Research Review Committee Approval



DATE: December 04, 2018

TO: Colleen Brice
FROM: HRRC
STUDY TITLE: Assessing linguistic bias in new writing center consultants
REFERENCE #: 18-234-H
SUBMISSION TYPE: HRRC Initial Submission

ACTION: Exempt Determination
EFFECTIVE DATE: December 04, 2018
REVIEW TYPE: Exempt Review

Thank you for your submission of materials for your planned scholarly activity. It has been determined that this project is human subjects research* according to current federal regulations and MEETS eligibility for exempt determination under Exempt Category 2, 45 CFR 46.101. You may now proceed with your research.

Exempt protocols do not require formal approval, renewal or closure by the Human Research Review Committee (HRRC). While not required, it is highly recommended that this research be closed when it is completed by submitting the *HRRC Closure Form*. Any revision to exempt research that alters the risk/benefit ratio or affects eligibility for exempt review must be submitted to the HRRC using the *Change in Approved Protocol* form before changes are implemented.

Any research-related problem or event resulting in a fatality or hospitalization requires immediate notification to the Office of Research Compliance and Integrity (rci@gvsu.edu or 616-331-3197) and the Research Integrity Officer Jeffrey Potteiger at 616-331-7207. (See *HRRC policy 1020, Unanticipated problems and adverse events.*)

Exempt research studies are eligible for audits and will remain eligible for these reviews until the research has been closed.

If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance and Integrity at 616-331-3197 or rci@gvsu.edu. Please include your study title and protocol number in all correspondence with our office.

Sincerely,
Office of Research Compliance and Integrity

*Research is a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge (45 CFR 46.102 (d)).

Human subject means a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or identifiable private information (45 CFR 46.102 (f)).

Appendix F

Survey Solicitation Message

Greetings Consultants!

My name is Ben Sparks and I'm a graduate student in the Applied Linguistics M.A. program here at GVSU. (Some of you may remember me from last year when I worked at the FMCWAMA as a graduate assistant and consultant.) I'm contacting you in the hope that you might complete a brief research survey, the data from which will be used in my master's thesis.

If you have a few spare minutes, I'd greatly appreciate your help.

Please Note:

- You must be physically located within the United States in order to participate.
- Your position at the WC will in no way be affected by your participation (or lack thereof.)
- Participation is voluntary and you may end the survey at any time.
- Responses are anonymous and no personally-identifiable information will be kept.
-

If you understand the above and agree to proceed with the survey, click the link below.

Please take your time and answer honestly. Thanks!

[SurveyMonkey link]

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