The Politics of Academic Language: Towards a Framework for Analyzing Language Representations in FYC Textbooks

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Abstract: This article argues that composition studies' professional artifacts and pedagogical materials can perpetuate tacit ideologies about academic language that are in conflict with our field's larger goals toward social justice and inclusion in FYC. In order to exemplify a systematic analysis of our artifacts and materials for their tacit language ideologies, the author compares how three popular FYC textbooks—*The Norton Field Guide to Writing*, *Everyone's An Author*, and *They Say, I Say*— represent academic language in seven major categories: name, placement, definition, characterization, features, examples, and instruction. This textbook analysis illuminates how no representation or discussion of academic language can be neutral, and it also illuminates the obvious gaps that still exist between scholarship on academic language and textbooks' representations of academic language. The author ultimately advocates for this kind of systematic and proactive analysis across our professional artifacts and pedagogical materials so they might be revised to better align with social justice and inclusion initiatives.

Especially since the emergence of "Students' Right to Their Own Language" in 1974,{1} first-year composition (FYC) instructors have wrestled with how to best represent, characterize, and teach "academic language." Tensions abound between valuing students' multiple language varieties and ensuring they can successfully write in a "standard" variety considered suitable for academic discourse (Canagarajah, "Pluralization"; Hall; Leki; Matsuda, "World Englishes"; Schroeder et al.; Stuckey; Zamel){2}. These tensions have only increased since scholars have continued to connect language with identifying factors like race and class, which for the most part position white, middle- and upper-class students closer to academic language than students of color, working-class students, or multilingual students (Lippi-Green; Inoue). Meanwhile, starting with Bruce Horner and John Trimbur's groundbreaking article, "English Only and U.S. Composition" and progressing into the translingualism movement, monolingualism itself has been recognized as an ideological myth (Matsuda, "Myth"; Trimbur), and these scholars have advocated for the FYC classroom as a pluralistic and diverse linguistic space. Thus, how we represent and situate academic language among our students' language varieties becomes significant in establishing a socially just and inclusive FYC classroom.

Although many scholars have recognized how the inherent politics of academic language necessitate shifts in our writing pedagogies (see collections edited by Bruch and Marback; Smitherman and Villaneuva; Scott et al.), these shifts are often at odds with our professional artifacts and pedagogical materials. In other words, our scholarship may be progressing, but our everyday materials are not necessarily progressing with it. As early as 1979, when expressivist and social approaches to writing instruction were branching off from current-traditional ones, Richard Fulkerson worried that writing instructors might be using the classroom practices of one pedagogical philosophy, the assignment prompts of another, and the evaluative practices of still another—a pitfall he calls "value-mode confusion" (347). I fear we may be experiencing a similar value-mode confusion when it comes to representing "academic language" in FYC. It is my contention that, even if our pedagogies attempt to account for the politics of academic language, they often fail because they are, in A. Suresh Canagarajah's words, "still guided by outworn paradigms. We cannot pour new wine into old skins" ("Foreword" xiii). Here, our scholarship is the new wine, but our professional artifacts and pedagogical materials are the old skins.

In this article, I offer an example of how our professional artifacts and pedagogical materials can perpetuate tacit ideologies about academic language that are in conflict with our field's larger goals toward social justice and inclusion in FYC. This example is a comparative analysis of how three FYC textbooks represent—and inevitably convey value judgments about—academic language. I first review the politics of academic language by examining how any

language variety, including academic language, is tied to identity, values, and ways of knowing. Next, I systematically compare how three popular FYC textbooks, *The Norton Field Guide to Writing*, *Everyone's An Author*, and *They Say, I Say*, represent academic language in seven major categories: name, placement, definition, characterization, features, examples, and instruction. I end by considering the implications of this comparative analysis. Throughout this article, I purposefully use the vague term "academic language" to refer to the language variety most commonly expected in academic writing; this vague, undefined term allows me to examine how academic language is represented within different textbooks without establishing my own representation as a point of comparison. While academic language typically encompasses some version of "standard English," I am using the term "academic language" in my analysis of FYC textbooks in order to specifically examine the variety of language expected or valued in the academy as opposed to myriad professional settings. The purpose of this comparative analysis is to exemplify an investigation of our professional artifacts and pedagogical materials for their embedded value judgments. Uncovering these tacit ideologies about academic language is a first step toward resolving value-mode confusions and constructing the socially just and inclusive FYC for which our scholarship advocates.

The Politics of Academic Language

Understanding the politics of academic language begins with acknowledging that all languages are strongly linked to their users' identities and community membership. In a foreword titled "3/5 of a Language?" David Bloome begins with this epigraph: "A definition of language is always, implicitly or explicitly, a definition of human beings in the world" (xi). Languages, then, are not merely functional tools but are bound to histories, cultures, and communities. The languages one speaks reflect community memberships, and each of these communities does not simply require "vowel shift[s]" but also requires "us to adopt ways of speaking, thinking, feeling, acting, and valuing" (Bloome xiii). While identifying factors like race and ethnicity do not determine language varieties, they are often markers of those varieties since languages reflect community membership. H. Samy Alim and Geneva Smitherman beautifully describe this link between language, being, and community:

> The artful use of language...is a source of pleasure, entertainment, reflection, and of course, socialization. It's not only where you learn to speak the language of those you love; it's where you learn to love and be loved. It's where you have your first formative experiences of being a member of a family, a community, a culture. It's where you develop your first notions of where you are and who you might become. (58)

We see language as always intertwined with community membership and ways of being, and many speakers shuttle between languages as they shuttle between their communities. However, as Bloome notes, some language communities are more compatible than others (xiv), and thus which languages are valued by social institutions becomes an issue of politics.

The compatibility between one's language varieties and academic language is a factor that can disadvantage students in the FYC classroom. For example, Horner and Trimbur alert us that "the first-year writing course actually *embodies* a language policy that privileges English in relation to other languages" (595, emphasis in original). Unsurprisingly, they find that the development of FYC as a monolingual space is strongly linked to cultural histories and social identities. By diversifying the language varieties valued in FYC and our culture at large, they argue, we will be the better for including "different speakers, thinkers, and writers speaking, thinking, and writing differently" (615). This valuing of diverse language varieties for the diverse knowledges they cultivate has also been the rallying cry of the translingualism movement, which "sees difference in language not as a barrier to overcome or as a problem to manage, but as a resource for producing meaning in writing, speaking, reading, and listening" (Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur 463). This approach insists that increased fluidity between and across all language practices can lead to "new ways of knowing" and "more peaceful relations" (467). What I'd like to draw attention to in these arguments is that norms and standards for language are not about language itself but about ways of thinking and ways of valuing certain social identities or communities. In the FYC classroom, then, students whose language communities already closely resemble academic language may be able to make a slight shift to meet academic language's standards, but for other students, the shift is more dramatic, and it could mean leaving cultural and social values behind to adopt the language of the academy.

Peter Elbow is one of many scholars who recognize the exclusive power of academic language when he notes, "I wonder if we really want to teach this discourse-stance once we notice the messages it sends: 'We don't want to talk to you or hear from you unless you use our language'" (147). This inflexibility to accept other language varieties in academic writing aligns with Asao Inoue's observation that language can act as a "hegemonic discourse" (24). Academic language as a hegemonic discourse follows the general hierarchal organization of most varieties of English: "Those varieties of English associated with white, northern, middle- and upper-class communities are

perceived as better than those varieties of English associated with groups such as African Americans, Mexican and other Latino communities, Southerners, and people from working-class backgrounds" (Bloome xiii). But if it is the blend of cultural and social values enacted through language that leads to new and varied ways of knowing, then solely valuing academic language from a monolingual perspecitve is, at best, unjustly disadvantageous to certain student populations and, at worst, a homogenizing and/or silencing force. We see, then, that how we represent and value academic language in FYC is always politicized: language is always standing in for more than itself.

Because academic language as a hegemonic discourse organizes white, northern, middle-and upper-class varieties above others, it is ultimately linked to whiteness. This means that construing academic language as the only "correct," "proper," or "right" variety for entering academic conversations in the FYC classroom works directly against goals of social justice and inclusion. In a recent blog post, "Is Academic Writing White?" Andrea Lunsford reflects on how writing's alignment with power, and power's alignment with whiteness, led her to realize the ways in which certain vernaculars struggle to be seen as legitimate and how academic language can act as a "form of submission" against those struggles. Similarly, Smitherman and Villanueva highlight a study that reveals how judgments on language, as a stand-in for race, become a convenient way to not *appear* racist but still subject people of color to racialized systems. For example, one participant noted, "I'm not racist, but if those kids want to get ahead, they need to learn proper English" (3). In this case, criticizing language was less taboo than criticizing race, but as we've seen, language and race cannot be separated so easily.

It is important to clarify that academic language's link to whiteness is not a social justice issue in itself—almost every language variety is tied to race and/or other identifying factors. Instead, academic language in the FYC classroom becomes an issue of social justice and inclusion when it is construed as "proper," "right," "correct," or the only variety capable of communicating in the academy. In his book, *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies: Teaching and Assessing Writing for a Socially Just Future,* Inoue critiques traditional writing assessment methods for reflecting racialized hierarchies. While Inoue focuses on assessment in particular, his argument that these racialized hierarchies implicitly direct our traditions in composition applies to any practice that *assigns value*, including the value we assign to academic language:

> SEAE [standardized edited American English], of course, is often a racial marker, a marker of whiteness, but not a marker of one's racial formation, nor a marker of racism *unless it is used against students* in a writing assessment *as the standard.* Its use by a researcher or teacher isn't necessarily a racist act, neither is identifying those standardized structures as racialized, and people who historically have been racialized by them. The point isn't to get rid of race. Race is one way we mark diversity and complexity, difference. The point is to get rid of racism, unfair racialized hierarchies. (23, my emphasis)

Inoue's clarification that SEAE is a marker of *race* and not necessarily a marker of *racism* reminds us that how we *value* academic language and its representations can make the difference between establishing a socially just and inclusive FYC classroom or not. Importantly, Inoue recognizes pedagogical materials—rubrics and grades—that do not value what our scholarship urges us to value. I would like to offer another example of how our scholarly values and pedagogical materials can be at odds by examining another source that assigns value to academic language in our FYC classrooms: our textbooks.

Methods

The role of textbooks in composition gained attention in the late '80's with Robert Connors' "Textbooks and the Evolution of the Discipline" and Kathleen Welch's "Ideology and Freshman Textbook Production," and scholars more recently have re-energized these foundational arguments to examine how textbooks function in our FYC classrooms and programs. Textbooks have been critiqued for suppressing questioning by relying on "unsupported" directives (Bleich; Spellmeyer) and for homogenizing students in academia by stabilizing knowledge and eliminating idiosyncrasies (Scott). Some recent explorations of these concepts investigate how textbooks represent civility (Rood), LGBTQ communities (Hudson), argument (Knoblauch), and pathos (Jensen). While Horner does caution against looking only to textbooks to trace histories or traditions in composition because the uptake of those textbooks can be more telling but not as readily accessible, it is clear that textbooks contribute to our field's "reality in documentary form" (257), as sociologist Dorothy Smith might say. Gerald Alred and Erik Thelen insightfully explore these realities:

> Indeed, this textbook will influence [a teacher's] success in the classroom as well as his perception of his students' success. Correspondingly, this textbook will influence the students' perceptions of his professional credibility and the authority of the enterprise. In its sophistication, its voice, its choice of examples, its organization, its conception of the writing process, and in a myriad of other ways, this

textbook will powerfully define contemporary composition studies in our colleague's department... Beyond the local scene, the textbook will help construct the image of the program. When someone asks at a conference, "What text are you using for that course at your school?" the answer often *defines* the course, the program philosophy, and perhaps even the institution in the mind of the questioner." (469-70, emphasis in original)

It is this ability to define a course or program that led me to further investigate how our textbooks construct academic language, the values embedded in those constructions, and whether they align with our field's progressive stance on the matter.

To conduct this analysis, I examined how three composition textbooks represented academic language in seven major categories, summarized in Table 1 below. These categories were chosen because they seem to signal value judgments about what academic language is or isn't, as well as how it should or shouldn't be used. Some categories were decided on beforehand (i.e., I supposed from the outset that each textbook's name and definition of academic language would signal value judgments), and others emerged inductively in the analysis process (i.e., during my analysis, I realized that even beyond name and definition, the characterization of academic language, as well as whether the texts included examples or not, were also major factors in expressing value judgments). Some categories are easily defined – like placement—while other categories are a bit messier—like the difference between features and characterization. Thus, it's important to note that while these categories provide a system by which to compare each textbook's representation of academic language, the results of this analysis are still interpretive

Table 1. Analytical categories used to compare each textbook's representation of academic language

Category	Description
Name	The name or title given to academic language
Placement	Within or under what chapter, section, or heading the discussion of academic language appears
Definition	A statement of the exact meaning of academic language
Characterization	Descriptions of or expressions about the nature of academic language
Features	The linguistic or grammatical attributes of academic language
Examples	An instance or illustration of academic language
Instructions	Directions or suggestions about how academic language is to be used

My sample selection includes three composition textbooks commonly used in FYC: *The Norton Field Guide to Writing*, 3E, by Richard Bullock; *Everyone's An Author*, 2E, by Andrea Lunsford, Lisa Ede, Beverly J. Moss, Carole Clark Papper, and Keith Walters; and *They Say, I Say*, 2E, by Gerald Graff, Cathy Birkenstein, and Russel Durst.{3} These three textbooks were produced by the same publisher (Norton), published in the same time period (2012, 2013, and 2017) and categorized similarly (primarily rhetorics as opposed to handbooks or readers). I especially chose more recent textbooks since they have been published in the wake of scholarship that focuses on the politics of academic language.

What differs between the three textbooks, and therefore what makes this comparison about how they represent academic language compelling, is their purpose and approach. To better situate my analysis within these textbooks' overarching values, I will briefly summarize how each textbook describes its purpose and approach in its preface. In fact, because I am interested in how these textbooks construct the documentary reality of our classrooms and programs, the remainder of my discussion positions the textbooks, as opposed to the authors, as authorial agents (i.e., *Norton* lists features like...).

The Norton Field Guide to Writing

As the name implies, *Norton* is meant to be as "handy" and "user-friendly" (p. iii) as the guides one might use on-the-job or in the field. To this end, *Norton* especially values brevity and cross-linking, which can be summarized in its aim

to provide "enough structure without too much detail" (p. iii). Thus, every section and even words within the text are color-coded so one can easily cross-reference information, and the text can be followed sequentially or sections can be mixed-and-matched. The six major sections are Rhetorical Situations, Genres, Processes, Strategies, Research/Documentation, and Media/Design. Another way this text targets ease of use is by featuring guidelines—usually in the form of bulleted lists of questions—"designed to help students consider the choices they have as writers" (p. iv). It's especially important to note that *Norton* lists students and novice teachers as audiences who could benefit from the text's structured information.

Everyone's An Author

Meanwhile, *Everyone's An Author* positions itself as a response to the modern increase in authorship – "today, everyone can be an author" (p. vi)—brought on by technology (and especially the internet) in which most anyone can and does write and publish regularly. To answer this "major transition in what it means to be a writer" (p. vii), this text lays out the responsibilities of a productive writer in the realm of academic writing but also in the realm of a number of other genres, medias, and even social media. Starting from the assumption that most of its readers have been writing online already, *Everyone's An Author* places special emphasis on the need for rhetoric, sound argumentation/research, collaboration, and flexibility in style; thus, its seven major sections are The Need for Rhetoric and Writing, Writing Processes, Genres of Writing, The Centrality of Argument, Research, Style, and Design and Delivery. Like *Norton*, *Everyone's An Author* also considers its audience to be both students and teachers, for whom it aims to "take some of the best ideas animating the field of rhetoric and writing and make them accessible and usable" (p. viii).

They Say, I Say

Lastly, *They Say, I Say* primarily seeks to demystify academic writing for first-year students. Instead of covering many genres or processes like *Norton* and *Everyone's An Author*, the scope mostly focuses on encouraging first-year students to think of academic writing as a "social activity" (p. xv). By presenting a short text that is "understandable but not oversimplified" (p. xvi), *They Say, I Say* leads its readers through the "rhetorical moves" academic writing requires in four sections, including listening to others (They Say), situating one's own ideas (I Say), connecting those parts in writing (Tying It All Together), and engaging other academic conversations (Entering the Conversation). While *Norton* offers bulleted lists of questions to guide writing choices, *They Say, I Say* offers sentence templates in most chapters "to help [students] make sophisticated rhetorical moves that they might otherwise not think of attempting" (p. xvi). The audience identified in the preface and further confirmed by the text's writing style, the use of second person pronouns, and sentence templates is primarily students (and especially students new to academic writing).

Results and Discussion

Systematically questioning our professional artifacts and pedagogical materials means, first of all, simply taking stock of what's there. offers a general comparison of what categories appeared or did not appear in each textbook, through which we sense the level of depth or space each of these textbooks give to a discussion about academic language:

Table 2. General comparison of what categories appeared or did not appear in each textbook

Category	*Norton Field Guide*	*Everyone's An Author*	*They Say, I Say*
Name		x	x
Placement	x	x	x
Definition		x	
Characterization	x	x	x
Features	x	x	x

Examples			x
Instruction	x	x	x

Some of the findings in this chart seem self-evident; for example, if a discussion of academic language is included, it must have a specific placement in the text. Likewise, instruction seems commonsensical within the genre of a textbook. However, what this chart does not reveal is the complexity of difference in how these categories, even the seemingly obvious ones, are implemented within each text and especially the value judgments embedded in those implementations. In examining our professional artifacts and pedagogical materials, then, we must dig deeper than what appears on the surface, something I'll do for each analytical category in turn.

Name and Placement

All three textbooks approach naming and placing academic language differently, and, even in the name and placement, we begin to see an emergence of the value judgments each textbook attaches to academic language. *Norton* does not name the type of language associated with academic writing. Instead, in the chapter, "Writing in Academic Contexts," *Norton* lists "Key Features of Academic Writing." The last of these key features is "Careful attention to correctness," which includes a one-paragraph description of the type of language that should and should not be used in academic writing (23). By not naming any language variety and by placing its discussion about language under a heading of "correctness," *Norton* seems to forfeit any discussion about multiple varieties or why certain expectations for academic language exist. Instead, academic language is merely what is correct and appropriate instead of a specific language variety: this could mean it's up to each writer to decide what is correct and appropriate, but it could also mean that there is only one path for correctness. The one paragraph of discussion seems to signal the latter, but it also aligns with *Norton's* mission of brevity.

Similar to *Norton*, *Everyone's An Author* embeds its discussion of academic language in a chapter titled "Meeting the Demands of Academic Writing" under a list of "Characteristic Features." Unlike *Norton*, though, *Everyone's An Author* names academic language "Standard Edited English," and this feature is the first on its list of characteristic features of academic writing that "you're expected to do in college writing" (44). This suggestion to "Use Standard Edited English" is followed by four paragraphs of discussion (45).{4} The specific naming of academic language could signal that it is a language variety like any other that comes with its own expectations, values, belonging, and ways of thinking. On the other hand, the specific naming could also signal a constraint in the type of language allowed in academic writing, especially since it is the first feature listed under Characteristic Features of Academic Writing. Similar to the way in which *Norton's* one paragraph reflects the textbook's purpose of brevity, *Everyone's An Author's* four paragraphs of discussion reflect its purpose to explain responsible authorship to those already writing online. As textbooks that review a number of genres and styles of writing, *Norton* and *Everyone's An Author's* placement of academic language within a list of features for academic writing is understandable, although limiting.

Lastly, while *Norton* and *Everyone's An Author* place their academic language discussion in subheadings as part of academic writing features, *They Say, I Say* devotes a chapter to the subject titled "Ain't So / Is Not: Academic Writing Doesn't Mean Setting Aside Your Own Voice" within the broader section "Tying It All Together." It sticks to general names like "academic writing" or "academic language" for the most part. Later in the chapter, it uses the term "standard English" as a comparison to other language varieties, and it puts "standard" in scare-quotes (125); however, in a more instructional section, it drops the scare quotes. On the one hand, *They Say, I Say's* whole chapter on academic language seems logistically likely considering the textbook is focused only on academic writing instead of a host of genres and processes like *Norton* and *Everyone's An Author*; on the other hand, devoting a whole chapter to the discussion may also signal how much room there is to discuss and reflect on the complexities of academic language as a variety among many. Meanwhile, differentiating the terms "academic language" from "standard English" seems to assert that academic language does not necessarily have to be standard English. While using scare quotes for the first mention of standard English signals a critical eye toward what's considered standard, dropping those scare quotes in its more instructional section (discussed below) could confuse that critical stance for students.

Definition

Although all three textbooks bring varying levels of attention to academic language, only *Everyone's An Author* defines it with a statement of exact meaning. It concedes that "defining Standard Edited English is in many ways a matter of cataloging things you shouldn't do" (45), before breaking down the "standard" and "edited" definitions separately. It defines the standard variety of any language as the "one used in formal contexts, including academic

ones, by people who are well educated" (45), and it defines edited English as a variety "that has been looked at very carefully" (46). This concrete definition follows logically after the concrete name, Standard Edited English. Since *Everyone's An Author* especially means to teach flexibility of writing styles in the digital age, it seems logical to define and categorize one of these styles. However, the definition does create strict boundaries for what this style of writing is or can be: for example, *Everyone's An Author* presents the language that is to be used in academic writing as the language of "people who are well educated," which not only begs the question of how much education makes one "well educated," but could also communicate to students that they need more education (or a different educational background) to be able to write in an academic setting.

For *Norton* and *They Say, I Say*, not defining academic language, like not naming it, could signal two different value sets: a lack of definition could assume that the exact meaning of academic language is implied or understood by all. Contrastingly, the lack of definition could assume that there is no exact meaning and providing one is too constraining. Of the two texts that did not define academic language, *Norton* seems to lean toward the first interpretation and *They Say, I Say* seems to lean toward the second, especially because *Norton* only includes a brief one-paragraph blurb on the subject, while *They Say, I Say* spends a whole chapter exploring academic language.

Characterization

The way each textbook characterizes academic language is usually tied to other writing issues like correctness, style, and formality and often by how it can or should function, and each textbook's characterization of academic language seems to fall on a sliding scale of value judgments, with one end of this scale embracing traditional notions of academic language and the other end rejecting these traditional notions. Just as situating its discussion of academic language under the subheading "Careful attention to correctness" suggests, *Norton* equates academic language with correctness. It also asserts the need for this correctness across academic contexts, levels of formality, and genres by suggesting this "correctness" be followed "whether you're writing something formal or informal, in an essay or an email..." (23). Thus, *Norton* would fall on one far side of the scale: although *Norton* situates its paragraph in a list of features for academic writing, by equating this language with correctness, the discussion spills into other contexts and levels of formality as well, and implies there are incorrect ways of writing.

Unlike *Norton*, *Everyone's An Author* stresses that academic language is "more rather than less formal" and is "the one used in formal contexts" (45). It goes on to characterize academic language by its function in academic writing. For example, it notes that "the ability to use the standard variety of a language marks its user as educated," and it also discusses the logic behind having a standard language: "If everyone can agree on and follow the same basic conventions...we'll be able to communicate successfully with a broad range of people" (45). It immediately concedes, though, that this "standard" (it uses scare quotes here only) varies between countries and changes over time, so while "valuable in many ways," Standard Edited English can't guarantee "perfect communication" (45). It's important to note, too, that at the end of *Everyone's An Author's* list of key features for academic writing, it admits that all of these features, which presumably include Standard Edited English, "depend on what your purpose is in writing and on the audience you wish to reach," and it also concedes that "the U.S. way of writing academically is not the only way. Nor is it a better way. Rather, it is a different way" (52). Therefore, *Everyone's An Author* seems to attempt a more balanced characterization somewhere in the middle of the scale: it acknowledges the functions of academic language, but it also acknowledges its limits, especially in a global context. Although its characterization of academic language still associates formality of language/contexts with education, the scare quotes in recognizing "standard" English's limitations complicates this heightened value.

Meanwhile, *They Say, I Say* characterizes academic language on two levels: how it usually functions and how it could function differently if blended with colloquial styles. It states clearly that "academic writing in most disciplines today is no longer the linguistic equivalent of a black-tie affair" (128). The first level of characterization, then, is academic language that has not been blended with other styles or dialects. It characterizes this level with adjectives like "sophisticated," "rigorous," "professional," "formal," "dry," "scholarly," "safe," "conventional," "specialized," "high," "straight," and "standard." On the flip side, *They Say, I Say* emphasizes that academic language *should* be "relaxed, easy to follow, and even a little bit fun" (121) and characterizes this type of blended academic language with adjectives like "relaxed," "informal," "everyday," "personal," "imaginative," "adventuresome," "colorful," "popular," "low," "unconventional," and "opened." It goes on to recognize the functions of this type of blended language, including "inject[ing] greater force," adding "liveliness," "underscoring a point," and making a "political statement" about the way "society unfairly overvalues some dialects and overvalues others" (125). Like *Everyone's An Author*, *They, Say, I Say* also ends its discussion by noting that "what counts as 'standard' English changes over time" (128). *They Say, I Say*, then, would fall on the far side of the scale counter to *Norton*: it advocates for a more blended approach. Like *Everyone's An Author*, *They Say, I Say* also signals a clear stance about the fallibility of academic language when it acknowledges that today's standard will not always be tomorrow's standard, and that audience and purpose matter when it comes to language choices. While *They Say, I Say's* explicit recognition of the ways some

varieties are unfairly valued over others is to be applauded, the exaggerated separation between the adjectives used to describe the two types of academic language can potentially undermine this recognition: in promoting the blended language, it semi-condemns the non-blended language, which can confuse the point of different language varieties promoting different identities and serving different purposes.

Features & Examples

None of the textbooks offers a holistic or systematic list of linguistic features associated with academic language. Instead, all three textbooks mention some seemingly random linguistic features to demonstrate their characterizations, and most of these features are rather broad. For example, *Norton* lists the features "complete sentences," "appropriate capitalization and punctuation," and correct spelling. It also notes that "academic writing is no place for texting abbreviations" (23). Similarly, *Everyone's An Author* also lists the conventions of "spelling, grammar, and punctuation" before mentioning that "the kind of abbreviations and other shortcuts you use all the time in text messaging or posting to social media sites usually aren't appropriate" (45), and "slang" and "contractions" are also listed as sometimes inappropriate. It also includes the features of spelling and subject-verb agreement as brief asides. In *They Say, I Say*, the linguistic features are also mentioned briefly and only for the characterization of the more traditional academic language: "big words, long sentences, and complex sentence structures" (121) as well as "specialized phrases" (124). The features of the blended academic language do not include linguistic terms/analysis but are instead discussed as blended writing styles or formal/informal mixings.

The lack of specific linguistic features in all three textbooks can in part be explained by the textbooks' role as rhetorics instead of handbooks or grammar guides. (In fact, *Everyone's An Author* does include a separate section later in the textbook that reviews some common grammatical structures.) Another interpretation, of course, is that there is an assumption of what correct or appropriate conventions of grammar, punctuation, and spelling are, or that students must have an idea of these conventions by the time they are in the FYC classroom. What especially seems to signal value, though, is both *Norton's* and *Everyone's An Author's* move to exclude texting and/or slang as possible linguistic features in academic language. In this way, they situate their discussions of academic language as a response to—and a stark contrast from—a language variety in which many students are most likely more fluent. On the other hand, in line with its more negative characterization of traditional academic language, *They Say, I Say* does not mention linguistic features in terms of correctness or appropriateness like *Norton* and *Everyone's An Author* but instead creates a sharp contrast between the two varieties of traditional and blended academic language.

As for examples or illustrations of what academic language looks like, *They Say, I Say* is the only text that includes direct examples in its discussion about academic language. It includes five short excerpts (some a paragraph, some only a sentence) from different academic texts that demonstrate the kind of blended academic language they suggest. *Norton* and *Everyone's An Author* do not have examples or illustrations when they discuss academic language, although they do include sample papers in the MLA and APA style guides that are presumably written in the academic language they describe. Because *They Say, I Say* presents an alternative suggestion for academic language, and because it does not include sample papers or grammar guides in other section of the text, it seems logical that it would include examples/illustrations of what this blended language might look like right in the chapter. Including these examples might also signal the need to show students what academic language does or can look like instead of assuming that everyone is on the same page about what language is: as *Norton* asserts, "correct" or, as *Everyone's An Author* asserts, that of the "well educated."

Instruction

As would be expected of the textbook genre, all three textbooks include direct instruction of how students should use the academic language they describe, and it's easy to see how the other categories of representation, as well as each textbook's stated purpose, result in their ultimate instructions to students, likewise laden with value judgments. *Norton* includes two direct instructions concerning academic language: 1) "...you should almost always write in complete sentences, use appropriate capitalization and punctuation, and check that your spelling is correct." 2) "If you're quoting someone, you can reproduce that person's language exactly, but in your own writing you should try hard to be correct—and always proofread carefully" (23). Because *Norton* characterizes academic language as correctness across contexts without definition, much discussion, or examples, it seems logical that its instruction would be as simple as urging students to be correct and to proofread (with the only exception being when it is quoting someone else who may have been incorrect). This brevity also mirrors *Norton's* mission to provide "enough structure without too much detail" (p. iii), but what *Norton* considers to be "enough structure" for its representation of academic language seems to imply that everyone already understands what correct language is and that academic language should follow those ideals. Thus, *Norton* seems to be valuing and promoting a status-quo conception of academic language.

Likewise, *Everyone's An Author* ends up making only two direct instructions after the overarching instruction in the heading to "Use Standard Edited English": 1) "You'll have to write out 'with respect to' rather than 'wrt,' and you'll also want to avoid ☺ and other emoticons." 2) "Few of us pay such careful attention to our writing when we tweet, text, or email—but we *all* need to do so with our academic writing" (45-6, emphasis in original). Although not a direct suggestion, *Everyone's An Author* also mentions that writers who especially grew up speaking a different variety than the standard or a different language usually re-read their writing "several times with great care...to ensure, for example, that every verb agrees with its subject" (46). These instructions mirror the textbook's goal in responding to an increase in online authorship: both direct instructions are in comparison to how one might write online. By situating its instructions about using academic language in comparison to online language, *Everyone's An Author* seems to be meeting students where they are and drawing on the knowledge they already have; however, this move sets a stark contrast between academic language and online language, possibly implying that they are mutually exclusive. Likewise, the emphasized "all" in "...but we *all* need to do so with our academic writing" (46) could signal solidarity with students (i.e., students and experienced scholars alike have to double-check their academic language), but it could also signal that academic language is one-size-fits-all at all times. These tensions suggest that *Everyone's An Author* recognizes the complexity of academic language, but, similar to *Norton*, the ultimate instruction to "Use Standard Edited English" still values a status-quo assumption of what academic language is.

Finally, *They Say, I Say* includes more direct suggestions throughout its chapter than *Norton* or *Everyone's An Author*, but the following sentence encompasses most of these suggestions: "Although we don't want to suggest that you avoid using sophisticated, academic terms in your writing, we encourage you to draw upon the kinds of expressions and turns of phrase that you use every day when conversing with family and friends" (121). The overall suggestion to blend languages in order to "enliven academic writing and even enhance its rigor and precision" (122) comes with a few caveats: for example, the chapter makes it clear that not "*any* language" (122, emphasis in original) can be used in academic writing, nor should one avoid learning "more rigorous forms of expression" (122). Likewise, the chapter suggests that when words are "weighted by an official screening body," a writer will want to "err on the safe side, conforming as closely as possible to the conventions of standard written English" (127). In conclusion, then, *They Say, I Say* ultimately instructs writers to "always take into account your likely audience and your purpose in writing" (128) to know when and how much to blend languages. Thus, *They Say, I Say's* instructions challenge the status-quo of academic language the most of the three textbooks, so it is careful to hedge with phrases like "we encourage" instead of second person commands, and it also includes caveats at the beginning and the end of the chapter. This hedging and these caveats warn students of the risk in straying from homogeneous forms of academic language, which could undermine the suggestion to blend languages in the first place. However, the lengthy discussion and multiple examples of scholars who do write in blended languages help counteract those tensions. Just as *Norton* and *Everyone's An Author*'s instructions mirror the textbooks' goals, *They Say, I Say's* suggestion to blend languages fits its mission of making academic writing more accessible for students, but the hedging, caveats, and back-and-forth between instructing students to use the blended language and standard English could ultimately confuse what languages are being valued and why.

Taking overall stock of this comparative analysis, we see that each textbook's representation of academic language signals value judgments that are situated within each textbook's overarching purpose. For example, *Norton's* representation across categories boils down to the subheading title: "careful attention to correctness." But this quick suggestion fits the field guide format for students and teachers to use on-the-go without much deliberation. Meanwhile, *Everyone's An Author* reveals the tensions in a balanced representation of academic language: Naming and defining academic language positions it as a variety among many but could also remove flexibility; characterizing academic language's functions and limitations presents it as complex but could also confuse; describing academic language in comparison to online varieties helps students make connections but could also position those varieties against one another. In its purpose to encourage responsible authorship in the digital age, this balanced (although sometimes contradictory) approach encourages students to think through the reasons behind certain language choices and recognize the complexity of those choices across contexts but ultimately understand the importance of "Using Standard Edited English." Lastly, *They Say, I Say* represents academic language on two levels—traditional and blended—to overcorrect the value that has been placed solely on traditional academic language, but in doing so it similarly promotes its own approach to academic writing at the expense of others. This claim that writing for academic contexts "doesn't mean setting aside your own voice," though, does align with *They Say, I Say's* mission to make academic writing transparent and approachable for students.

Implications

What I hope this comparative analysis reveals, first of all, is that no representation or discussion of academic language can be neutral. These three textbooks' sections on academic language are not particularly long, they are

couched in myriad other writing issues, and they are presented as relatively straightforward; however, my analysis shows that each representative choice—from the name, to the characterization, to the instruction—carries value judgments. Because language is so intimately tied to ways of knowing and being, any representation of language is politicized. Just because we do not explicitly recognize the values and ideologies driving our representations of academic language does not mean they are not there. To ignore these tacit language ideologies in our professional artifacts and pedagogical materials, then, can be to unintentionally work against our larger commitments toward an inclusive and socially just FYC.

Second, given our extensive scholarship illuminating the politics of academic language, parts of this comparative analysis should be rather troubling. For example, Norton's number one best-selling rhetoric, the *Norton*, equates the language to be used in academic writing to "correctness," and it implies this correctness should be followed across writing situations. This directly contradicts our knowledge about language varieties being neither correct or incorrect —neither right or wrong—but instead situated in different contexts, purposes, and audiences. It additionally carries a strong implication that any language variety that does not match their conception of academic language is "incorrect," which delegitimizes students whose home language is further removed from this undefined academic language of correctness. Along the same lines, these textbooks largely associate academic language with those who are "well educated," which implies users of other language varieties cannot engage educated spaces or are inherently uneducated (and thus must leave their home language—and identities—behind in order to be educated).

Furthermore, we should especially be concerned about the lack of definitions, linguistic features, and examples across the three textbooks. Is the widespread conception of academic language so secure and so understood that we find it unnecessary to present the linguistic features or provide examples? The lack of features and examples shows just how tacit our understanding of what academic language is and should be—to the great disadvantage of students who are further removed from this language or who have not extensively experienced it in the past. Finally, these textbooks largely ignore the "why" behind their explanations or instructions, a feature of textbooks that has generally been critiqued: Students should always "try hard to be correct," but why? Students should avoid emoticons in formal settings, but why? Students should make sure all subjects agree with all verbs, but why? Relaying direct instructions without any exploration of the "why" behind them merely passes on tacit language ideologies to students without recognizing their politics, their origins, or their possibilities. Of course, parts of this textbook analysis are also to be applauded, such as when these textbooks recognize that their representation of academic language is not *the* way but a *different* way; when they concede that academic language is not stagnant but changes over time; and when they motion toward the purpose of this academic language, like communication across spaces (although the obvious question still remains: whose communication?). However, the gaps between our scholarship on academic language and these textbooks representations are still rather clear. Finding these gaps is step number one; continued conversation and intentional revision is step number two.

Finally, while I have focused on textbooks in this analysis, I am advocating for this kind of systematic and proactive analysis across our professional artifacts and pedagogical materials. What values lie behind our representation of academic language in our prompts? our rubrics? our peer review guides? our syllabi? our TA training materials? our program course goals? Likewise, I have focused on academic language in this article, but what other tacit ideologies are lurking in our professional artifacts and pedagogical materials that do not align with our scholarship's commitments towards socially just and inclusive FYC classrooms? How do they (re-)create the documentary reality of our programs and classrooms, and is our scholarship urging us in another direction? This approach takes a critical eye and a proactive stance. It may mean revising our materials more often than we would like; it may mean guiding our students through explicit discussion and critique of those materials we do not control (like program-wide textbooks or course goals); it may mean including more model artifacts and materials with our scholarship to make the connections more concrete and accessible. Most importantly, investigating our professional artifacts and pedagogical materials for their tacit ideologies means confronting our own tacit ideologies so we can better unify our values across the spheres of research, teaching, and administration that we traverse.

Notes

1. For a more historical and contextual account of "Student's Right to Their Own Language," as well as the general movements and results of this policy, see Wible and/or Bruch and Marback. While SRTOL is not a focal point in this paper, it has served as the impetus for both scholarship and pedagogy that informs the direction of this argument. ([Return to text.](#))

2. For more extensive cross-disciplinary resources concerning language varieties in educational settings, see the CCCC Language Policy Committee's 2006 updated annotated bibliography for SRTOL. ([Return to text.](#))

3. It's worth mentioning that I have used all three of these textbooks in my own FYC courses; each offers valuable explanations, instructions, and resources in different ways. My point in this paper is not to discredit these textbooks but instead to show that they are not neutral in how they represent and value language. ([Return to text.](#))

4. Interestingly, there is a separate discussion of standard edited English in this section of the textbook titled "Standard edited English: the default choice" (643) that offers a much more nuanced and skeptical definition and characterization of standard edited English; it also doesn't offer any instruction but instead tells readers that "appropriate use of language most often depends on the context" (643), and the choice to follow or not follow rules can come with "consequences" (644). Though the text uses the same term in both spaces, the representation differs drastically between the two, and in this paper, I focus only on the one in the "Academic Writing" chapter since it is associated with academic writing. ([Return to text.](#))

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