ABSTRACT

KARISSA WOJCIK. Dialect Influence in the Composition Classroom: A Study of Writing Instructors' Beliefs and Knowledge on Language Diversity. (Under the direction of Professor Walt Wolfram and Stephany Dunstan, PhD.)

Within the university setting, there is a specialized “academic discourse” that students, faculty, and staff are expected to use and sustain. This discourse consists of a “standardized” from of English that rarely, if ever, is the language used in our everyday lives, especially in our everyday speaking and writing. When students enter the university, they are expected to be fluent already in the academic discourse of standardized English in order to be successful.

First year writing is one of the only courses required of nearly all freshmen. Therefore, First Year Composition and Writing, Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), and Writing Within the Disciplines (WID) program administrators and instructors work with almost all incoming freshman and, therefore, confront the wide variety of linguistic diversity on their campus. However, while many calls to action and proposals for students’ right to write in their own language have been issued in the past, do these instructors follow through with them? Do instructors understand when a student is using a dialect feature in their writing or do they see it as a mistake? In order to help students succeed in the university, we need to change the way we talk about language, especially in the composition setting. The goal of this study was to examine language attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge in the composition setting in order to gather information on what instructors know about language diversity and how they incorporate linguistic diversity in their composition classrooms.