Raciolinguistic socialization and subversion at a predominantly white institution

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and Educational Studies

Swarthmore College

May 2021

Abstract

By interviewing current Swarthmore students on their linguistic experiences at Swarthmore College, I investigated how students with diverse linguistic practices interact with the raciolinguistic ideology of academic language at a predominantly white institution. Ultimately, I argue that Swarthmore's linguistic climate perpetuates the academic language raciolinguistic ideology by equating academic language with academic performance. In response to this linguistic climate, students whose linguistic diversity is not appreciated by the institution either conform to or subvert the expectations for academic language in the classroom in order to survive and succeed. Students expressed four main approaches to responding to the linguistic climate: 1) conforming by performing sociolinguistic labor (Holliday and Squires, 2020), 2) finding and creating participation spaces outside of the main classroom discourse, 3) identifying safe participation spaces created by figures of authority, and 4) subverting the academic language ideology in the main classroom, despite the institution's linguistic expectations.

Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by thanking Rikker Dockum in the Linguistics department for advising me throughout this thesis process, reading my many drafts, and for hyping me up. In the Educational Studies department, I would like to thank Elaine Allard for her continual guidance and support as my thesis advisor. I would also like to thank Brook Lillehaugen and my peers in my Linguistics senior thesis seminar for being the sounding board where many of my ideas developed. All of your feedback was invaluable and greatly appreciated.

I am so indebted to Miranda Weinberg and Dylan Clairmont, the research team with whom I designed this project and collected data with. Miranda, thank you for taking me under your wing after one conversation during office hours about our contradancing connection; I am so grateful that you took a chance on me. Without both of your constant teamwork and support, this project would not have been possible at all.

そして、社会言語学を私に最初にご紹介して下さった今村先生に感謝申し上げます。It was in your class where I started to fall in love with not only sociolinguistics, but also my identity as a multilingual Japanese American speaker. The understanding of Japanese sociolinguistics you gave me was key in my acceptance of my own linguistic diversity.

I would also like to thank Mark Lewis for introducing me to the field of raciolinguistics, but more importantly, for always giving me the peace of mind to confidently pursue whatever my heart desired. Thank you for always supporting my endeavors and believing in me when I didn't.

Finally, I am so thankful to all my friends and family for making me laugh and keeping me sane, not only as I was writing this thesis, but throughout my entire time at Swarthmore. I could not have done this without you.

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1. Introduction

In this thesis, I investigate how linguistically diverse students navigate the raciolinguistic ideology of academic language as they enter the college environment. I specifically investigate current Swarthmore students' language experiences on campus at Swarthmore College in order to understand the linguistic struggles happening immediately around me as well as to provide immediate and directed feedback to my institution based on my research. My guiding research questions are as follows:

- How do students learn to "speak like a college student"?
- How do students interpret and interact with dominant raciolinguistic ideologies in the higher education context?
- What role do professors, other figures of authority, and students themselves play in confirming or subverting these raciolinguistic ideologies?
- What are the implications of raciolinguistic socialization for students' understandings of who belongs and who can succeed in higher education?

During my time here at Swarthmore, I have been assigned in multiple Linguistics courses to write linguistic autobiographies detailing my life experiences surrounding language. As a multilingual speaker, the effects of my own language practices on how I am being perceived by others has always been at the back of my mind, and I have always defined much of my identity and been defined in terms of the language I use. Thus, I always appreciated the opportunity to re-examine my language using a critical lens through these assignments and start to deconstruct the harmful language ideologies that I had internalized throughout my life, allowing me to become more comfortable with my own linguistic diversity. While most of these linguistic autobiography assignments remained between the student and the professor, in my Linguistic Diversity class, we had the opportunity to read our peers' anonymized versions of the linguistic autobiographies. In reading everyone else's assignments, we as a class came to a disturbing conclusion: all of us had experienced some sort of discrimination or feeling of insecurity because

of our language practices. Another unsettling conclusion: most of these negative experiences had occurred in schools.

Since then, I have become increasingly curious about how students navigate academic environments with their language practices. In talking to more and more friends and students, I realized that these were not just common experiences amongst the students in my class, but for almost everyone that I brought the topic up with who had a diverse linguistic repertoire. This left me wondering: why does everyone feel like their own language practices are not enough for school? In an environment that celebrates diversity, why is linguistic diversity not being recognized or appreciated in the classroom? How do students overcome these barriers in academic contexts in order to succeed and learn?

I begin by exploring the history of research in raciolinguistics, of academic language as a raciolinguistic ideology, and of raciolinguistic socialization, especially in the context of academic discourse, in Section 2. I continue by discussing the importance of researching the language experiences of linguistically and racially minoritized students in higher education environments. I will then present my methodology in Section 3 and quotes from my research data drawn from interviews and language journals in Section 4. Ultimately, I will argue that Swarthmore's linguistic climate perpetuates the academic language raciolinguistic ideology by equating academic language with academic performance. In response to this linguistic climate, students whose linguistic diversity is not appreciated by the institution either conform to or subvert the expectations for academic language in the classroom in order to survive and succeed.

2. Background

Raciolinguistics, the study of race and language, represents "a commitment to analyzing language and race together rather than as discrete and unconnected social processes and employing the diverse methods of linguistics to raise critical questions about the relations between language, race, and power" (Alim, 2016, p. 5). Thus, in order to understand the language experiences of racialized and linguistically minoritized students, one must take a raciolinguistic perspective, which "interrogates the historical and contemporary co-naturalization of language and race" (Rosa and Flores, 2017, p. 622). This raciolinguistic perspective builds off of work on raciolinguistic ideologies, which examines how race and language ideologies work together to frame racialized speakers as linguistically inferior based on their race and identity rather than their actual language practices (e.g. Chaparro, 2019; Holliday and Squires, 2020; Rosa, 2016; Rosa, 2019; Rosa and Flores, 2015). In particular, a raciolinguistic perspective centers how the white gaze is "attached both to a speaking subject who engages in the idealized linguistic practices of whiteness and to a listening subject who hears and interprets the linguistic practices of language-minoritized populations as deviant based on their racial positioning in society as opposed to any objective characteristics of their language use" (Flores and Rosa, 2015, p. 151). Thus, considering students' language practices alone is not enough; these language practices must be understood through the context of the interlocutors' environment, including the effects of the white gaze.

This research study, as an investigation situated at an elite higher education institution that is also a predominantly white institution, primarily centers on students' interpretation of academic language. Academic English is often framed as a "more advanced and more complex version of varieties of English used in non-school settings" (MacSwan, 2020, p. 29). Flores

(2020), however, argues that academic language is not a set of objective and distinct language practices, but instead a raciolinguistic ideology rooted in European colonialism that has historically been used to deem racialized speakers of language as inferior. Flores continues by saying that "whether one is positioned as successfully engaged in academic language is primarily determined by the white listening/reading subject whose perceptions have been shaped by histories of colonialism that continue to frame racialized speakers as coming from communities with linguistic deficiencies that need to be policed and corrected" (p. 25). Baker-Bell (2020) further articulates this raciolinguistic ideology by saying that "the ubiquity of whiteness in schools erroneously positions White Mainstream English-speaking students as academically prepared to achieve because their cultural ways of being, their languages, their literacies, their histories, their values, and their knowledges are privileged in the classrooms. From this assumption, linguistically marginalized students of color are falsely positioned as linguistically inadequate because their language practices do not reflect White Mainstream English" (p. 20). Thus, academic language must be understood as a raciolinguistic ideology that immediately disadvantages racialized speakers not based on their language practices, but instead based on their identity.

I reject the notion of academic language as an objective categorization of language and as a linguistic standard to be achieved in the classroom. I additionally reject the dichotomous framing of 'academic' versus 'non-academic' that has traditionally dominated discussions of language in the classroom. For example, Cummins (2013) argues for a distinction between basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) in students' acquisition of a second language (p. 10). However, arguments attempting to dichotomize these as separate and differentiated linguistic practices, such as grammatical

complexity and content-specific vocabulary, have been disproven to be arbitrary distinctions that occur in everyday speech as well (Flores, 2020; MacSwan, 2020). Throughout my thesis, I use the term 'academic language' not as a means of validating this false dichotomy or differentiating from students' home language practices, but specifically in reference to the academic language raciolinguistic ideology.

Language socialization refers to the process through which "the acquisition of language and culture are intertwined and mutually interdependent" from the moment a person enters a social environment; in other words, people learn how to use language in socially acceptable ways while simultaneously learning these norms through language (Burdelski and Howard, 2020, p. 3). While language socialization research is often focused on the socialization of children (e.g. Mangual Figueroa and Baquedano-Lopez, 2017), one must arguably be socialized into new social environments throughout life, including when entering new academic environments like college. Thus, language socialization into academic discourse communities has become an increasingly important research focus for understanding how students learn the language norms of the classroom (e.g. Duff, 2010; Fujieda, 2019; Kobayashi et al., 2017; Morita, 2009) as well as social environments in school (e.g. Bigham, 2010).

However, there have been relatively few studies at the intersection of language socialization and race, or the study of raciolinguistic socialization, which "refers to the ways children are socialized into spaces with existing raciolinguistic ideologies" (Chaparro, 2019, p. 3). Given that the field of raciolinguistics is still relatively new, few studies have examined academic discourse socialization through the lens of academic language as a raciolinguistic ideology, and the studies that have been conducted mainly focus on K-12 education (e.g. Chaparro, 2019; Flores, 2020; Rosa, 2019; Rhodes et al., 2020; Seltzer, 2019). Thus, the study of

raciolinguistic socialization in higher education contexts is necessary to understand the power struggles that linguistically minoritized students are facing in the college classroom. As Charity Hudley and Mallinson (2018) point out, "students do not leave their language patterns behind when they graduate from high school, and, yet, there remains a lack of specialized understanding of how language variation affects teaching and learning in higher education" (p. 178). Yet, studies have provided evidence that students with diverse language practices do navigate higher education facing more linguistic challenges; for example, Dunstan and Jaeger (2015) report that having a stigmatized "dialect can influence participation in class, degree of comfort in course, perceived academic challenges, and for some, their beliefs about whether or not others perceive them as intelligent or scholarly based on their speech" in college students (p. 778).

Therefore, researching students' language experiences on college campuses is crucial given that elite higher education institutions are working to increasingly diversify their student bodies (Holland and Ford, 2021), thus also increasing the demand to create linguistically inclusive learning environments on college campuses. This research is especially important given that institutions like Swarthmore, as liberal arts colleges and predominantly white institutions originally built to serve elite white male students, help to uphold and perpetuate these dominant ideologies by continuing to privilege the use of the elite white male academic language. In supporting the academic language ideology, elite colleges often fail to recognize, support, and accommodate the linguistic practices of the increasingly diverse student population, putting racialized students at a disadvantage in the classroom and reproducing existing power structures based on race, class, and gender. Thus, for students whose natural language practices are not reflected in the classroom, "identity work and the negotiation of institutional and disciplinary ideologies and epistemologies are core aspects of the production and interpretation of academic

discourse" (Duff, 2010, p. 170). By investigating the language experiences of students who do not fit the elite white male mold of a student that these higher education institutions were originally built to serve, we can observe how they navigate these raciolinguistic ideologies as they are socialized into college as well as the repercussions of these reproduced power structures for individual students.

Charity Hudley and Mallinson (2018) have asked linguists to investigate the "concerns surrounding diversity and inclusion within linguistics and higher education, [providing] a call to action for other linguists seeking to carry out such work on the campuses of their own colleges and universities." (p. 176). Researchers like Holliday and Squires (2020) have heeded this call, illuminating the additional linguistic efforts Black students take at predominantly white institutions and reaffirming that "racism on campus (as elsewhere) must be understood to have a linguistic component" (p. 15). By following in their steps and listening to underrepresented student voices on Swarthmore's campus, we can illuminate the linguistic racism happening in classes and obtain valuable insights into how we can best support linguistically diverse and minoritized students, making pedagogical and environmental recommendations to build a more inclusive learning environment.

3. Methodology

In this section, I will first give an overview of the methodology of the two studies that comprise this thesis's data sets. Then, I will go more in-depth on the two separate but related data sets. The first set of data is the Upper-Year Study: a study conducted in the summer of 2020 consisting of research participants who were all upper-year students at Swarthmore College. The second set of data is the First-Year Study: a study conducted in the fall 2020 semester consisting of research participants who were all first-year students at Swarthmore. I will also give an overview of the research participants for each study. Afterwards, I will introduce the context of these two studies, Swarthmore College. Finally, I will discuss the nature of the data as well as my own positionality as a researcher in these studies.

I wanted to investigate students' language socialization into Swarthmore as well as how students interacted with the academic language ideology in their classes. To reiterate, the research questions that frame my research are as follows:

- How do students learn to "speak like a college student"?
- How do students interpret and interact with dominant raciolinguistic ideologies in the higher education context?
- What role do professors, other figures of authority, and students themselves play in confirming or subverting these raciolinguistic ideologies?
- What are the implications of raciolinguistic socialization for students' understandings of who belongs and who can succeed in higher education?

In our studies, we used a combination of surveys, interviews, and language journals to collect data on language experiences at college in order to learn directly from the students themselves. We used the Qualtrics online survey tool to create and conduct our surveys with the aim of identifying potential research participants. For all interviews, we used the Zoom video conferencing software to conduct and record the interviews as well as generate initial transcripts. Finally, we facilitated the language journals through a shared Google document with our

participants. After our data collection, we manually reviewed all transcripts for accuracy and coded for common themes in the interviews and language journals. Thus, all quotes presented in the analysis come from the interviews and the language journals; survey responses will not be included in the data analysis.

3.1 The Upper-Year Study

In order to investigate students' language experiences on campus, we decided to first interact with upper-year students at Swarthmore. We first created a preliminary survey which consisted of four open-ended questions regarding students' language backgrounds and language experiences during college. The survey also asked for basic demographic information and interest in participating in an interview. These survey questions can be found in Appendix A. We piloted the survey with 16 people, either recent Swarthmore alumni or current students at other elite liberal arts colleges in the United States, in order to confirm that our survey questions were eliciting relevant responses.

We then posted this survey to the "Swarthmore College 2019-2020" Facebook group, which served as the main forum of public communication between students during the 2019-2020 academic year, especially following the transition to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We received 49 responses from upper-year students. From the students willing to participate in a further interview, we identified potential interview candidates based on their survey responses, particularly looking for a diverse range of students from underrepresented and minoritized backgrounds.

We chose eleven students to participate in a semi-structured, 30-minute, one-on-one interview conducted by one of the three researchers. Our inspiration for these interview questions came from previous research on language socialization in higher education contexts (Dunstan

and Jaeger, 2015; Prichard, 2016). We mainly asked students to illuminate experiences in which they believed that their languaging practices affected how others perceived them, including but not limited to discrimination, bias, and microaggressions. Additionally, although not in our original research design, we also became interested in how students' in-class participation changed after the shift to online learning due to the pandemic and asked questions about students' Zoom experiences as well. This interview protocol can be found in Appendix B.

Our eleven upper-year interview participants came from a wide range of backgrounds. The interviewees included eight people who identified as female and three people who identified as male. When asked how they identified racially, one student identified as "Brown", three students identified as "Asian", one identified as "Mixed", three identified as "Latinx", one identified as "Black", and two identified as "White." Four identified as a first-generation low-income college student. The interview participants and the data set are not representative of the demographics and the experiences of the entire Swarthmore student body; instead, we aimed to center linguistically diverse voices in order to illuminate the experiences and stories that often go unheard on Swarthmore's campus.

3.2 The First-Year Study

Following the Upper-Year Study, we identified a number of themes that warranted further research and thus decided to conduct a second study in the Fall 2020 academic semester. We aimed to further investigate the experiences of first-year students as they were socialized into Swarthmore's environment. The preliminary methodology for this study was very similar to the Upper-Year Study, asking broadly about students' language backgrounds and experiences. This survey can be found in Appendix C. We created and posted a preliminary survey modeled on the preliminary survey from the Upper-Year Study to the "Swarthmore College 2020-2021"

Facebook group, specifically targeting first-year students. We received four responses and selected all of the respondents to participate in the study. Although we lacked a range of participants to choose from, our four participants do in fact come from the wide range of underrepresented and minoritized backgrounds and identities that we were aiming for in our data set.

With each of these first-year students, we first conducted a semi-structured, one-on-one initial interview about a month into the fall semester. The interview questions for this initial interview were similar to the questions we asked in the summer interviews; we mainly asked students about how they believed their language practices affected how others perceived them, as well as asking them general questions about their first semester at Swarthmore. This interview protocol can be found in Appendix D.

We then asked our participants to spend fifteen minutes each week to complete a weekly language journal regarding any thoughts or experiences about language pertaining to their life at Swarthmore. Participants were free to write about anything they wanted to, but we also provided weekly journal prompts to help them get started. These journal prompts ranged from asking students to reflect on a notable language interaction from the week to asking about potential shifts in their language usage since arriving at college. These weekly journal prompts can be found in Appendix E.

We also conducted one hour-long semi-structured group interview with the goal of facilitating a conversation between our participants about their experiences surrounding language socialization on campus. The two student researchers of the research team conducted and facilitated this group interview. We had anticipated conducting multiple group interviews, but we

were only able to find time for one due to the conflicting schedules of the participants and researchers.

Finally, we conducted a semi-structured, one-on-one final interview with each participant after the conclusion of the fall semester. The questions we asked in this interview aimed to follow up on themes and comments from the participants' earlier interviews and language journal entries as well as to hear reflections from the participants on their first semester at Swarthmore as a whole. This final interview protocol can be found in Appendix F.

Our four first-year participants represent a diverse range of backgrounds. The interviewees included two people who identified as male and two people who identified as female. When asked how they identified racially, one student identified as "Black", one identified as "Middle Eastern", one identified as "Asian", and one identified as "White/Latinx." Three of the four participants identified as a first-generation low-income college student. The interview participants and the data set are not representative of the demographics and the experiences of all first-year students at Swarthmore, but they again center linguistically diverse voices.

3.3 Swarthmore College

We conducted this research at Swarthmore College, an elite small liberal arts college located in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. Swarthmore College is built on the traditional and unceded territory of the Lenni-Lenape called Lenapehoking and was founded in 1864. Swarthmore's mission is to provide "learners of diverse backgrounds a transformative liberal arts education grounded in rigorous intellectual inquiry and empower all who share in our community to flourish and contribute to a better world" (Swarthmore College, 2021). Swarthmore had an enrollment of 1,667 students in the 2019-2020 school year with a student-to-faculty ratio of 8:1

(Swarthmore College, 2021). Swarthmore has historically been ranked as one of the country's top liberal arts colleges. One national ranking system ranked Swarthmore as the number one best liberal arts college in 2021 (Nietzel, 2021), while another ranked Swarthmore as third-best in the nation (USNews, 2021). As demonstrated by their mission statement, Swarthmore has been outspoken about its diversity and inclusion efforts, such as its focus on admitting first-generation college students and dedication to the accessibility of the college experience, citing that they "deeply value the range of perspectives that this commitment brings to our campus community" (Swarthmore College, 2021).

3.4 Data context and research positionality

The nature of these methodologies and data sets means that these narratives from the students' interviews and language journals cannot be taken as objective truths. Mallinson et al. (2017) note that self-reports of one's linguistic tendencies may be inaccurate, arguing that interviewees' "answers will reflect the degree to which [they] wish to associate themselves with the groups that are perceived to use the features, rather than genuine levels of usage" (p. 160). The actual language practices of our participants are, however, arguably irrelevant to this study, especially considering that academic language is not a set of objective and measurable language practices. Instead, we are interested in the students' personal experiences, thoughts, and emotions regarding how they perceived language and language ideologies. Freebody (2003) argues that self-reports from participants during interviews are "not literal descriptions of independent social realities, nor are they simply neutral outcomes of standard, 'normal' interpretive procedures to do with questioning and answering" (p. 134). Interviews themselves are communicative events in which normal communicative norms are suspended in favor of "a set of role relations, rules for turn-taking, canons for introducing new topics and judging the relevance of statements,

constraints on linguistic form" and more (Briggs, 1986, p. 48). Given that our data is entirely composed of students' self-reports, we must remember that these narratives presented are a reflection of the students' interpretations of the social setting, power dynamics, and the research questions presented to them throughout the study. For example, we intentionally made an effort to avoid perpetuating any language ideologies by deliberately refraining from labelling language practices in our survey, interview, and language journal questions; this included refraining from using the term "academic language." However, participants may still have interpreted language ideologies implicitly from our research questions. Thus, the research environment of these interviews and language journals, the questions that we asked, and the context that we provided to our participants certainly influenced the information that these participants shared with us.

I also want to acknowledge my positionality as a researcher in this study. Firstly, I am a fourth-year student attending the same college as all of our research participants. Additionally, my research team consisted of myself, another fourth-year student at the college, and a Linguistics professor at the college. Given the small student body and close-knit community that are characteristic of small liberal arts colleges, we all have a variety of pre-existing relationships with some of the participants. This all positions the three of us as insiders of the college community to which our participants belong. Our insider positionality gave us a shared body of knowledge as our participants and also provided us with personal insights regarding the Swarthmore environment. As a multilingual Asian American student and child of immigrants, furthermore, I personally related to many of the linguistic experiences that our research participants described in their interviews and language journals. Thus, my identity may have further positioned me as an insider depending on the research participant. This means that participants with whom the researcher had previous relationships and who may have perceived

the researcher as having similar experiences to them might have shared more information, whereas those with few perceived connections to the researcher may have shared less. However, as a researcher and an upper-year student to most of the research participants, I was in a position of power, meaning that participants may have been framing their answers in order to best appeal to us researchers. Finally, my analysis of this data is only one possible interpretation of this data; other interpretations are possible and valid.

4. Analysis

In this section, I will first provide an overview of the overarching themes that I identified in interacting with our participants. Then, I will use students' quotes from interviews and language journals to discuss Swarthmore's linguistic climate, which includes the dominant raciolinguistic ideology of academic language in the classroom, and how students understand this linguistic climate. Afterwards, I will continue to use students' quotes to analyze four prominent themes regarding the different ways in which students respond to this linguistic climate in their academic work: 1) conforming by performing sociolinguistic labor (Holliday and Squires, 2020), 2) finding and creating participation spaces outside of the main classroom discourse, 3) identifying safe participation spaces created by figures of authority, and 4) subverting the academic language ideology in the main classroom, despite the institution's linguistic expectations.

Unfortunately, the interviews and language journals highlighted that the language standards and expectations set by the institution, as well as by higher education and academia overall, fail to recognize the diverse language practices of their students. These expectations often became barriers for students to participate and engage with the content material in class because the dominant raciolinguistic ideologies perpetuated by the institution continue to label their language practices as 'non-academic' and inappropriate for use in the classroom. Thus, students illuminated their additional efforts in participating in class due to the institution's lack of acknowledgement and support for these diverse language practices. Students with language practices that do not match those of the expected academic language ideology that is dominant in higher education essentially have two options: subvert the raciolinguistic ideology, or conform to institutional expectations of academic language. For the context of this thesis, subverting the

academic language ideology means when students use language that they feel more comfortable using but that may not necessarily be deemed appropriate in the classroom due to the prevalence of the elite white male listener.

I will now analyze how students learn these language expectations in college and how they respond to the linguistic climate with example quotes from the interviews and language journals below. All students will be referred to using pseudonyms.

4.1 Linguistic climate at Swarthmore

In order to talk about how students are actively conforming or subverting the academic language ideology, I will first establish students' understandings of the linguistic climate at the higher education institution, as illustrated by their quotes in their interviews and language journals. Linguistic climate is a term defined by Holliday and Squires (2020) as "the everyday manifestations of both language use and language ideology in the campus environment" (p. 4). Thus, the linguistic climate encompasses students' perceptions of existing language practices and of language expectations on campus. This linguistic climate then influences how students interact with and respond to the surrounding language use and ideology in the classroom. For example, one student, Rose, discusses in (1) how she perceived the language expectations of the institution as early as during Swatstruck, Swarthmore's annual admitted students event. Swatstruck allows admitted students to come visit and experience the campus in the April of the last year of high school before making the decision of committing to the institution. She talks about how this early experience on campus has influenced her language practices in classes today.

1

> Rose: "I do think that I've upped my academic speak when I'm in [college] classes versus high school classes. I feel like a lot of people probably do that because you just feel like

it's college, you have to. I don't know. I always had this image of what college discussions were like. Or like when I went to Swatstruck and I sat in on a class, like what are these people talking about? So I was like, I have to model that."

Even as an admitted student who had yet to formally enter and be socialized into the Swarthmore community, Rose perceived "academic speak" as something that "you have to" perform in higher education contexts. This also implies an understanding that language which falls outside of "academic speak" does not belong in the college classroom. The fact that she mentions specifically "upping" her language in college classes versus high school classes does demonstrate some equating of "academic speak" and academic performance, especially at a higher education level. In their study of a small liberal arts college which is comparable to Swarthmore, Holliday and Squires (2020) similarly found that "elements of the linguistic climate at [the liberal arts college] produced different anxiety for students, because of the strong associations between language itself and academic performance" (p. 13), supporting the idea that these elite institutions do perpetuate this ideology. Furthermore, Rose's quote in (1) provides an example of our participants' overwhelming tendency to describe language in the classroom as "academic" in their narratives. We deliberately refrained from labeling language practices in our questions for and interactions with the participants in order to avoid perpetuating any language ideologies. However, this framing of language as "academic" and "non-academic" by the students is an emic category in the data, with the emic description representing "the view of one familiar with the system and who knows how to function within it" (Pike, 1967, p. 38). Thus, the students' framework demonstrates the extent to which these students have been socialized into this academic language ideology that prevails in this linguistic climate.

When asked to give advice to future Swarthmore students coming from similarly diverse linguistic backgrounds, another student, Noom, discussed how to learn about the language expectations of the linguistic climate and access the discourse community in (2).

2

> Noom: "I think much of the Swarthmore setting is preconditioned on students communicating in the so-called academically rigorous way. You know, like write a certain way, don't use contractions, don't use things that convey novice-ness in your language such as putting phrases like 'in conclusion' in the last paragraph. So these are the things that you need to kind of like learn at Swarthmore. These are the things that you may learn to do in the past, but it's expected that you do not do that or you abandon those kinds of practice at Swarthmore. So by interacting with professors, you have experience with the academic setting and you get experience to the point that you can enter the discourse community of the academics at Swarthmore."

Noom explains that there seem to exist certain prescriptivist rules and expectations within the community that students have to follow in their language for class, such as "don't use contractions" in writing. Although he is specifically talking about writing rules in (2), one can imagine that there exist prescriptivist rules for speaking as well. Again, by equating actions like "putting phrases like 'in conclusion' in the last paragraph" with "novice-ness", there exists some equating of "academically rigorous" language with higher-level thinking and intelligence. However, Noom also demonstrates some individual understanding that "communicating in the academically rigorous way" does not necessarily equate to one's academic performance by using the qualifier "so-called." Just because the student recognizes this distinction, however, does not mean that the Swarthmore community or the institution as a whole is able to separate language from academic performance. Thus, an individual understanding does not mean that one is exempt from the perceived language expectations, meaning that students often may still feel obligated to conform to the norms of the linguistic climate. Noom then goes on to say that the way to learn these "preconditioned" expectations is to interact with professors as figures of

authority within the higher education institution and in academia. Thus, as figures of authority, these professors are also the ones who help to establish the linguistic climate and set the language expectations.

Another student, Hope, described learning to understand the expectations of the linguistic climate as a survival tactic for fitting into the higher education context in (3).

3

> Hope: "Just coming into freshman year, everyone's trying to flex on each other intellectually, which is very stressful. Like that's why a lot of people feel like they don't belong here or they're not good enough, like I guess feelings of inadequacy and just trying to make up for that with what you can, which is like verbally, I guess. Like in class, you try to prove yourself and you learn immediately because it's kind of like a survival tactic. Like you want to fit in; everyone's trying to fit in. What is everyone doing? What are the people who have been in college for a few years doing? And they're speaking like this and they're contributing valuable things to the classroom and you're like, oh, I want to do that. But I don't want to sound dumb doing it. So it's a lot of imitation, like there's a lot of words that you learn immediately or buzzwords like smart-sounding words like hegemony, dichotomy, those were thrown around like crazy. To be honest, I had to look both of those words up. The first time I heard that I was like, why is everyone nodding? Does everyone understand that?"

Just like Rose in (1), Hope in (3) echoes the sentiment that language expectations within the institution seem to be imposed onto students from the very beginning of their college lives. Students understand very early on that the elite and competitive academic environment where others "flex on each other intellectually" makes the college classroom a place you have to "survive" in. Hope poses "sounding dumb" as a primary concern, demonstrating that use of language and academic performance seem to be heavily linked in this environment, setting seemingly-high stakes expectations for language. Indeed, the focus seems to be more on using "smart-sounding words" to impress others with language instead of with the content of their words, showing that what is deemed a "valuable" contribution in class may be based more on language than content itself, especially as the student references "making up for feelings of

inadequacy verbally." By observing and imitating the language practices of upper-year students as models of those who have already succeeded in this competitive and elite academic environment, students are socialized into this academic language ideology. The feeling that "everyone understands" the "smart-sounding words" further sets the expectation that one must work to achieve this academic language like everyone else in order to survive.

Finally, when asked about their perception of language diversity, one student, Antoine, reported being surprised at the lack of linguistic diversity on campus in (4).

4

> Antoine: "I would have liked to see a bit more language diversity. Back in my high school, despite prominent white culture, there was actually very diverse and big international population. So it was pretty common to just go down the hallway to hear people speaking English, of course, and then French and then Portuguese, and, of course, Spanish, and different dialects from Asia. And so, I haven't seen that at all here. . . I think that just that lack of language diversity is something that did strike me."

Although this first-year student in (4) speaks only basing his experience off of a semester during the pandemic when the entire student body was not present on campus, many upper-year students also expressed similar sentiments about the lack of language diversity on campus. Upper-year students discussed feeling like there was a lack of space to use their own linguistic practices both inside and outside of the classroom as well as a lack of representation of their language diversity in the institution's faculty, staff, and physical environment as a whole. Overall, there seem to exist few models of linguistic diversity on campus for first-year students to observe and be socialized into the norms of. This unfortunately may be sending a message to first-year students that linguistic diversity does not belong in the classroom or in the higher education context. Thus, the lack of space for linguistic diversity, combined with an ideology

that equates academic language to academic performance, makes it seem like academic language is the only viable option in the classroom.

Overall, based on the narratives provided by the interviewed students, Swarthmore's linguistic climate is one that equates academic language with academic performance and intelligence. Students learn about this linguistic climate through observing and imitating figures of authority within the environment, whether that be upper-year students or professors. There also seems to be a common narrative amongst students that everyone understands, is capable of, and is using academic language except for them, heightening expectations of using academic language. Finally, the lack of linguistic diversity on campus may further limit students' perceived options for language in the classroom. The process by which students learn and internalize these expectations is important because Chaparro (2019) argues that "raciolinguistic socialization brings to the fore the way that … children are socialized in the ways that reinforce perceptions of language use and ability that are intimately tied to racialization and to class position" (p. 3). Given academic language's history rooted in colonialism, this linguistic climate which privileges the academic language ideology thus encourages students to socialize into dominant linguistic patterns and ideologies that ultimately perpetuate white supremacy and reproduce existing power structures. After being socialized into this linguistic climate, students must decide how to interact with and respond to the climate; it is here where students must decide to either conform to or subvert these expectations of the linguistic climate.

4.2 Conforming by performing sociolinguistic labor

One option students take in response to their surrounding linguistic climate is to aim to adapt and conform to the expectations of academic language present on campus. As previously discussed, the raciolinguistic ideology of academic language is rooted in the language of elite

white male speakers. Thus, when students' language practices and furthermore their identities do not align with the mold of the elite white male student that predominantly white higher education institutions originally intended to serve, they are often faced with the burden of needing to exert extra energy into monitoring and maintaining their language. Holliday and Squires (2020) define this concept as sociolinguistic labor, or "the physical, emotional, and psychological effort put into deploying sociolinguistic resources in a way that is meant to satisfy others" (p. 4). Although Holliday and Squires' (2020) usage of this term was solely in response to their analysis of Black students and their language practices at predominantly white institutions, the narratives told by our interviewed students demonstrate that the concept of sociolinguistic labor can arguably be applied to the experiences of many different racialized and linguistically-minoritized students who do not fit the elite white male mold of a college student.

When asked how her language background affects her ability to perform in class, one student, Adriana, demonstrated the need to perform sociolinguistic labor based on their experiences in class assessments in (5).

5

Adriana: "I hate exams and sometimes that may be because of my language background, but also just because it is the way that I am. I struggle to explain stuff, and I often like lose points because I thought I say something but then that wasn't quite what I said, and I'm like no, but I said this. I know this. I understand this. This is what I wanted to say. 'Oh, but it could have been a little bit more clear or you could explain more, or something like that.'"

Adriana, an international student from Latin America, "struggles to explain stuff" on exams not because of a lack of understanding of the content material being tested, but because she cannot figure out how to get her language practices understood by her professors. She believes that she is conveying her understanding clearly, but she often "loses points" because she "could have been a little bit more clear or explain more" in the eyes of her professors. This

mismatch in language between the speaker and the listener conveys to her that her language practices do not match the expectations of the institution's linguistic climate and that she needs to match her surrounding linguistic climate to succeed. This perpetuates the idea that content understanding is not enough to succeed in this higher education environment; meeting the language expectations of the institution also proves to be critical in assessments of academic performance. Adriana later on mentioned that her professors have never reconsidered or re-evaluated her exam grades based on later discussions of what she was trying to say on her exam answers, instead just telling her to "try to be more specific next time." Unfortunately, these interactions demonstrate that the students themselves know they understand the content material, but in order to convey this understanding to professors, they must match the linguistic expectations of academic language in order to prove their understanding to the predominantly white listener. In communicative acts, both the speaker and the listener must take responsibility for their communicative burden and try their best to communicate effectively with their interlocutor; however, Lippi-Green (2012) argues that "members of the dominant language feel perfectly empowered to reject their responsibility, and to demand that a person with an accent carry the majority of the burden in the communicative act" (p. 72). In Adriana's narrative, the listeners of the professors and the institution as a whole put in little effort to understand its linguistically diverse students and meet them where they are at. This places the communicative burden entirely on the students in the transaction of communication to change their language to match that of the white listener, requiring the performance of sociolinguistic labor.

Students are cognizant of this extra sociolinguistic labor they often have to perform in the classroom, as demonstrated by Lina's thoughts in (6) below.

6

Lina: "I'm kind of scared by the degree that I've stopped thinking about it as much. But like freshman year I was like always on guard about how I pronounce certain things and trying to like blend in. . . So I was a lot more aware of it my freshman year, but I noticed that I have a higher guard up like in the classroom. Just because I want to make sure that I'm coherent by the standards of, I don't know if it's like imposed standards or just like perceived standards, but the standards of what I hear other people around me sounding like, if that makes sense."

Lina feels the need to "blend in" and adjust her language practices, working to avoid sounding as if she does not belong in higher education given her status as an international student. She emphasizes making sure she is "coherent" not by her own standards of communication, but by the standards of those listening to her language practices, defined by how "other people around" her sound in the surrounding linguistic climate of the school. Her feeling of having a "higher guard up in the classroom" reflects her active focus and energy in her sociolinguistic labor of striving to meet these expectations, an additional effort which is not necessarily experienced by those who fit the mold of an elite white male student that the institution was built to serve. Instead, the institution simply expects all students to achieve the same academic language, and students internalize this communicative burden. Similarly, Hope echoes the same sentiments about how much effort performing sociolinguistic labor can be in (7).

7

Hope: "It takes me a long time to formulate sentences in class. Like, I'll pause and think about it like this, and then every time I say something, I usually apologize after. I'm like, I'm sorry. Like, does that make sense? Like, was that clear? And stuff like that. Yeah, it's very clear that I'm trying really hard to sound more intellectual, I guess."

Like Lina in (6), Hope in (7) expressed "trying really hard to sound more intellectual," demonstrating that sociolinguistic labor requires active and conscious work. The fact that the student feels the need to "apologize" for her language to her professors and peers again

demonstrates that the adjustment of language is for the benefit of the listeners, not for herself. Another student, Yiying, reflected on feeling this communicative burden to perform linguistically by saying, "I feel like I have the responsibility to say something right instead of making mistakes." Yiying also talked about refraining from talking in class to avoid wasting the time of her peers. Thus, she felt a "responsibility" not necessarily to herself but to her peers to "say something right" and perform this sociolinguistic labor to match the language of their surrounding linguistic climate. The burden of this effort is placed on the student, but ultimately it is the listeners, not the speaker, who benefit from the efforts of sociolinguistic labor. This fits Holliday and Squires (2020)'s definition of sociolinguistic labor as something "meant to satisfy others" (p. 4); these are actions that students feel they must take because the school and its linguistic climate fail to recognize and accommodate their own natural linguistic practices. Had the institution adapted to and accommodated the linguistic practices of their linguistically diverse student population, there would be no need for these students to exert this extra effort to match expectations of academic language; instead, the onus is placed on the students to adapt and conform to the expectations in order to appease others in the linguistic climate.

Finally, Noom's example in (8) suggests that even performing sociolinguistic labor may not be enough to be perceived as a linguistic equal in the classroom for students with diverse linguistic practices.

8

> Noom: "In terms of conveying ideas and complexity of thoughts, I have no problems at all. . . If people pay attention to what I say and also make an effort to ignore the accentuated language I use, complexity of thoughts and the ideas would be conveyed with clarity. But then, like the example made in a math class is not about the language per se but the way I speak. So it's not about the language, it's not about the words, like the syntax, the words, or the sentence structures I used, but more about how like the accent in which I spoke. So in that math class example. . . the format of the class was a flipped

classroom. So everyone would do homework and problem set beforehand and we would have a discussion about like, is this problem easy now? If it's okay, then we should move on and then focus on the problems that a few members of the group had difficulties on. But I noticed that when I try to present my ideas or say potential solutions, it's much more difficult. Not the way I communicate it. So it's much more difficult to convey what I said, not because of my understanding of the [math concept] or my English skills, but because it seems that people don't ponder what I said as seriously if compared to those who speak with more so-called like American or maybe white accent."

Noom, an international student from Asia, knows that he himself fully understands the math concepts being discussed in class but has difficulty conveying this understanding to his peers in this math class because people do not seem to consider what he said "as seriously if compared to those who speak with more so-called American or maybe white accent." He says that his difficulty in being understood lies not in his "language, words, syntax, or sentence structure" but in his stigmatized accent, over which he has no control. His actual language practices are on par with those of his "American or maybe white" peers, but he is not perceived as a linguistic equal due to his identity as a racialized man. Because his language practices are not taken seriously by his peers, neither are his ideas on the content material of the course, again equating academic language with performance in this environment. Noom is performing sociolinguistic labor to try to appeal to his peers, but oftentimes this is not enough due to the idea that the perceiver may judge linguistic ability more on racial identity than actual language practices, proving that "altering one's speech might do very little to change the ideological perspectives of the listening subjects" (Flores and Rosa, 2015, p. 152). Thus, it will never be enough to expect students to adapt and conform when the expectations are unreachable; the goal must be to change the linguistic climate and the listening practices of the perceivers to not discriminate based on language.

4.3 Finding and creating participation spaces outside of main classroom discourse

Another way that students have learned to work around the expectation for academic language and lack of recognition for diverse language practices in the classroom is by looking for other avenues for participation outside of the main classroom spaces and discourses. Thus, in their interviews, our first-year participants frequently identified liminal spaces as safe and inclusive learning environments where they were able to subvert raciolinguistic ideologies and use language practices they felt more comfortable with. These liminal spaces are spaces within the institution that blur the line between academic and non-academic settings. They are separate from the main academic classroom discourse, allowing students to be released from the burden of academic language expectations, but do not necessarily occur outside of the main classroom or class-sanctioned spaces. They are also separate from non-academic spaces outside of the classroom such as the dining hall but still seem to be environments that center peer-to-peer social interactions. One of the participants, Antoine, succinctly sums up and gives examples of these liminal spaces in (9) below, describing his engagement in a liminal space for his philosophy class.

9

>   Antoine: "In the [Zoom] chat, which is completely public, we're just joking around and we're saying, 'Oh, you know this philosopher would like this for sure.' And we're just making a bunch of jokes. So the class just continues on, some people read. And I guess it offers more opportunities for interaction, but the way I think of it is that chat box, especially when it's public, that's just students kind of leaning over and whispering in each other's ears their thoughts about what's happening, but everyone can hear it."

Although liminal spaces may take on different forms between in-person and Zoom instruction, they all serve the same purposes of giving space for students to relax from institutional expectations and bring their identities to the content material. Because students

perceive these liminal spaces to be outside of the bounds of official classroom expectations, they feel more comfortable straying from academic language expectations that are often present in official classroom discourse. Thus, while these interactions described in (9) might not be deemed appropriate in an official class discussion due to expectations around academic language, the liminal space of the Zoom chat allows students to make connections with the content being discussed in class through multiple different angles that are still academically relevant. For example, the students' abilities to make connections to philosophers in their Zoom chat side conversation described in (9) clearly demonstrates their understanding of the content material, even though joking about class materials and their authors is generally not perceived to be within the bounds of academic language. However, Blackledge and Creese (2010) argue for the parodying of classroom discourse in unofficial class spaces as an active meaning-making strategy of the dialogic process (p. 143). Thus, these interactions are proving to be valuable for students precisely because they do not fit into the mold of what we expect to hear in a college classroom. By abandoning academic language expectations in these liminal spaces, students can interact with the content material in a variety of ways that feel personally relevant and accessible to them, thus boosting student engagement.

While these peer-to-peer interactions in these liminal spaces may seem trivial and sometimes even distracting from class, they give students the agency to take control of their own learning by allowing them to make meaning of the content material in their own ways. This benefit is demonstrated in (10) by Azra:

10

> Azra: "In this class, I wish I knew more of the mathematical jargon to be able to fully articulate what I'm doing in the problem. Since the other people in my breakout room also don't know the proper terms for what we're doing in the class, it's okay that I use simple terms."

Many students discussed having difficulty communicating in class because they felt as though they did not have a solid grasp on the terminology or academic language that was expected of them, saying that this often caused them to hesitate from participating or to not participate altogether. However, (10) demonstrates how these liminal spaces such as Zoom breakout rooms provide the opportunity to separate one's ability to learn and make meaning of the content from one's ability to use what is deemed to be "the proper terms" for a given classroom context. Gutierrez et al. (1999) argue that hybrid spaces in between the official and unofficial discourses of the classroom are key zones for learning and meaning-making in the classroom. In this liminal space, the lack of expectations around the use of academic language allows students to engage and learn more because they are able to focus on the content material instead of how they are being perceived. Thus, what was not accessible in the main classroom becomes accessible in the inclusive space of the breakout room, demonstrating that students benefit from having space to engage with the content material that is separate from any expectation or assessment of linguistic practices.

Many students echoed this sentiment that they valued being able to engage with the content material in a low-stakes environment without feeling the need to perform linguistically to meet expectations of academic language. For example, another student, Karin, highlighted finding this space through their liminal breakout room discussions in (11).

11

> Karin: "The interactions in this class are my favorite because we are left to ourselves [in the breakout room] for the most part and the conversations are casual. Usually our responsibilities in class are to complete problems on a jamboard, which provides a good opportunity to first discuss ideas informally with the group, then document in writing a more formal answer. I appreciate this aspect because I feel that formal and informal

descriptions require different approaches to the material and to experience both heightens my overall understanding."

Again, the liminal space of the breakout room allows Karin to focus on the content material first and foremost without being preoccupied with how they are being perceived by the predominantly white listener. Thus, having this space to discuss before having to record their responses for submission acts as a useful scaffolding technique that allows them to brainstorm their ideas. Having this peer-to-peer interaction of the liminal space integrated into the structure of the class allows for another level of the negotiation of meaning as well. The students are then able to translate their 'informal' discussions into 'a more formal answer' only after they have solidified their understanding of the content material. On the other hand, a main classroom discussion would have forced students to simultaneously consider the content material and juggle the classroom expectations of academic language, thus creating more barriers for entry into the discussion. Karin even recognizes the value of being able to make meaning of the content material in multiple different manners, showing that being able to express concepts in academic language is not the only way that students themselves recognize value in their academic work.

Not only do these liminal spaces give students space to negotiate meaning on their own linguistic terms, they also provide crucial opportunities where students can express their identities in manners not available in the main classroom, as shown in (12).

12

> Karin: "I've been becoming quite good friends with the other 2 freshmen in my [language] class, especially over the last few weeks as we lose the stamina needed to get through each class with our sanity intact. We often communicate through a group chat during class, which has been a good way to show off our real human brains that are not just arrays of pixels submitting an ungodly number of assignments each week."

The liminal space of this class group chat removes the need to perform linguistically for the elite white male listener of academic language that is ever-present in the classroom while still providing students the safe space to interact with the academic class. This lack of expectations allows these students to connect with their peers and express themselves more openly than they would be able to in the main classroom as they are not limited to performances of academic language. These spaces, however, also allow students to build a support network that encourages them to stay engaged with the class and the content, demonstrating the importance of peer networks in students' socialization into a higher education context (e.g. Zappa-Hollman and Duff, 2015). These liminal spaces are important spaces for meaning-making, but also tend to be safe spaces for students to maintain motivation and interest in their academic work together. The fact that students have gone out of their way to foster these inclusive liminal spaces in order to aid their learning, which is especially hard during a period of online learning when peer-to-peer interaction is limited anyway, demonstrates that students do indeed recognize the benefit of these liminal spaces as useful supports for their classes.

These quotes from first-year students have shown us the importance of these liminal academic spaces in giving students the opportunity to abandon the elite white male listeners' expectations of academic language present in college classrooms. Thus, these liminal spaces allow students the agency to take a more active role in their learning, engage with the material through methods that feel personally relevant to them, and help students stay motivated and engaged in their classes. However, a raciolinguistic perspective is necessary in understanding exactly why students are feeling more comfortable outside of the main classroom. The racialized, classed, gendered language expectations and structure of academic language rooted in white supremacy are making main classrooms linguistically exclusionary and inaccessible, forcing

students that do not necessarily fit the elite white male mold of a student to look for other avenues of learning and engaging with the content material. Students are finding ways to engage with the content in these liminal spaces but should not have to resort to finding alternative ways outside of the classroom in order to feel seen linguistically. Instead, main classroom discourses and spaces should work to become more linguistically inclusive and accessible for all students.

4.4 Identifying safe participation spaces created by figures of authority

Another theme that emerged in the students' narratives was recognizing the effects of professors' attitudes and identities in creating a safe space for linguistic diversity in the classroom. Many of our upper-year participants felt that a professor's attitude towards academic language and academia in general could drastically change the expectations of a classroom and thus create an inclusive space where diverse language practices are more accepted. Professors, as figures of authority in a position of power in the classroom, have considerable influence over the linguistic expectations of the classroom, including the power to change them to expectations that resist institutional or societal norms (e.g. Lyons-Burns, 2015). For example, Rose discusses how little remarks from the professor regarding the language used in course materials can have a big impact in (13).

13

> Rose: "I find it really helpful when professors acknowledge that things are just written in a ridiculous way. I have a professor who would just be like, 'this just didn't make any sense.' Just not pretending that things aren't completely obscure and obtuse because sometimes it feels bad when you're doing a reading, you come in and everyone's trying to pretend like they completely understood it when it just didn't make any sense. So I've really appreciated when professors are like, 'I acknowledge this was a hard reading' and or 'I acknowledge that this was a hard whatever.'"

Many students spoke about how they felt that the language used in course materials was often needlessly verbose and a barrier to understanding the content, as in (13). This can reinforce

dominant expectations of what language is "supposed" to look like in academia, inadvertently heightening expectations for language use during class discussions and assignments as well. These heightened expectations are reflected in students' tendencies to "pretend like they completely understood" the readings in order to be perceived by the institution as capable, or in their decision not to participate altogether. However, by simply acknowledging the difficulty of these materials, the professor can signal to the students that these "obscure and obtuse" readings do not set the standards for language in their classroom, easing any pressure that the readings might have caused. This opens up space in the classroom for students to not be perceived against this false expectation, but it also allows for critiques of the materials and the accessibility of the language used, like the professor modeled.

Another student, Hope, mentioned another instance in which a professor's words and actions can make students feel more comfortable in the classroom in (14).

14

Hope: "I think just setting the standard off the bat. Like some professors are very obviously professional, they come in like very exact syllabus. And then I have other professors who come in like, 'hey dude' like 'hey guys what's happening' like 'blah blah blah I'm going to say the word fuck. Is everything okay with that?' It just makes everyone more comfortable immediately when professors come in casually like that because you're like, okay this person, I can be myself around them. I can have these intellectual discussions because this is an intellectual. This is a person who works in higher education like academia and they're behaving kind of the way that I behave outside of the classroom. So I'm more comfortable to talk just anything that comes off my mental state instead of trying to formulate these complicated sentences and that's probably the things that have helped me in the past. It's just when my professors dismantle that expectation but maybe even like as an institution, just like having these conversations about accessibility in language like off the bat like orientation, maybe just doing so, too. Yeah, doing small things like being casual in the classroom, while still being respectful, still having something to say, not feeling the pressure of using eight letter words in every sentence, I guess."

While the professor in (13) acknowledges the difficulty of the reading, the type of professor described in (14) outright disrupts dominant narratives about what a professor is like and thus of dominant ideologies of language in higher education. By introducing themselves in this manner and swearing, which is not what one would typically expect of a professor on the first day of class, they set the atmosphere and expectations through bringing their identities and linguistic practices that do not conform with the academic language ideology into the classroom. This immediately conveys to students that their classroom is a space where students too are welcome to bring their identities and authentic selves into the classrooms instead of having to perform the language of an elite white male student all the time. The professor conveys through their actions that competency in class will be assessed on content material, not linguistic practices. The dismantling of the expectation for "complicated sentences" and "eight letter words in every sentence" are "the things that have helped [Hope] in the past," allowing students to be themselves and bring their own diverse linguistic repertoires into their work in the classroom.

One student, Barfi, also speaks to the benefit of professors verbalizing their own identities and humanity in their classes in (15).

15

> Barfi: "I remember my Israel-Palestine professor would tell us stories of the trip from Palestine and other similar stories from his own personal life. That really helped. Again, any sort of story I think would help. So whenever a professor tries to break the monotony of that class and brings in any personal touch, personal examples, personal anecdotes. I think that really helps students to speak up."

By telling stories and bringing personal touches to the classroom, the professor acknowledges the human side in themselves and in all of their students. hooks (2014) argues that "when professors bring narratives of their experiences into classroom discussions it eliminates the possibility that [professors] can function as all-knowing, silent interrogators. It is often

productive if professors take the first risk, linking confessional narratives to academic

discussions so as to show how experience can illuminate and enhance our understanding of

academic material" (p. 21). Similarly, instead of mandating linguistic performances that align

with dominant expectations of academic language present in the institution, this professor's

choice to tell personal anecdotes exemplifies the professor's value of personal identities and

experiences in making meaning of the content material and making connections. This signals to

students that their diverse identities and their linguistic practices, too, are enough to "speak up"

and participate meaningfully, just as the professor modeled.

While many students recognized the effects of professors' tangible actions that help to

create a more welcoming learning environment, some students also recognized that the

professors' identities and linguistic practices themselves could also have an impact on their level

of comfort in the classroom. Barfi reflects this sentiment in (16).

16

> Barfi: "I think a lot of my professors were from different cultures. For example, I had
> Professor X who was from India. I had two professors from China. Professor Y was from
> the UK. And all of them had very pronounced accents from where all they were from,
> and I felt a lot more comfortable speaking. . . I think that was one thing that encouraged
> me to speak more because all of them had their own accents. They hadn't changed them
> at all."

The presence of the professors' accents helped students to dismantle the expectations of

the monoglossic nature of the academic language ideology that exists in higher education.

Monoglossic language ideologies treat languages as distinct and separate entities that do not

interact with each other (Garcia, 2009, p. 7). Within the academic language ideology, these

monoglossic language ideologies manifest by privileging one seemingly monolithic standard for

acceptable language in the classroom, which Flores and Rosa (2015) link to the white speaking

and listening subject (p. 151). Therefore, through their noted accents, the professors defied the white listening subject's expectations for a monolingual academic language and thus removed the students' expectations for academic language as well. This allowed students to focus on engaging with the content material instead of being preoccupied with how they might be perceived by their professor or peers. Not only were these expectations lessened, but Barfi also felt a sense of solidarity and security in knowing that their professors also did not necessarily fit the monolingual mold of academics that have historically dominated higher education contexts. These professors therefore also serve as a model for students, showing that in order to succeed in academia and be recognized as intelligent, one does not necessarily have to model the speech of an elite white male academic; understanding of the content material is sufficient.

Lina comments directly on the effects of their professor's accent on how they themselves are perceived in class in (17).

17

> Lina: "I've never gotten remarks about my accent in a class where the professor also had a non American accent. Whereas if everyone in the class speaks the same and sounds the same, that one individual student who's trying to convey themselves is gonna stick out."

Not only does a professor's identity and linguistic practices help to make students feel more comfortable using their linguistic repertoires, but Lina has also experienced a noticeable decrease in microaggressions from others regarding their linguistic practices in these classrooms in comparison to those in which the professor does not subvert the academic language raciolinguistic ideology through their identity. This decrease in microaggressions certainly contributes to creating a more inclusive learning space. Lina feels as though when a professor's identity goes against what is expected in the college classroom of a predominantly white

institution, breaking the norms becomes the norm, opening up space for students in the class to do so as well.

All of these reflections on figures of authority in the classroom come from upper-year students who have had more in-person class experiences; having been in college for longer, these students have had more time to reflect on what works best for their learning. Thus, the narratives of these upper-year students demonstrate the effects a figure of authority can have in making their classrooms a tangibly more inclusive and welcoming space for those with diverse linguistic repertoires. Subverting the academic language raciolinguistic ideology in the main classroom becomes much easier for students to do when a figure of authority in the classroom subverts the ideology themselves.

4.5 Subverting the academic language ideology in the main classroom

Although the majority of students expressed discomfort with using their more everyday linguistic repertoires over the expected academic language in the classroom, two students in particular were adamant about defying these expectations and speaking however they wanted to during class. Both students spoke on the intentionality of their choice to participate in a manner that felt most natural to them. One of these two students is Hope, an upper-year student. She said, "When I first came to Swarthmore. . . I just had trouble putting my thoughts into words because I was always trying to make myself sound more proper, if that's a thing. But since then, I've kind of just lost that I think." (18) below reflects her thinking regarding how she overcame this barrier of always trying to make herself sound "more proper."

18

> Hope: "I think it was kind of just understanding that whenever people speak in class, like just because they sound like more proper or just have the terminology to explain what they're saying, doesn't mean what they're saying is actually like particularly of like more

value, I guess. Yeah, like if I can get the point across speaking the way that is comfortable for me and everyone else understands it, then that's fine on my end."

Hope recognizes that sounding "proper" does not equate to a speaker's intelligence; in other words, this student recognizes that dominant ideologies of academic language are merely myths and do not correlate to her value as a student at all. Instead, she chooses to participate in a manner that prioritizes her own comfort and her understandability through speaking more naturally over any performance of sounding "proper" for the elite white male audience of a higher education context. Understanding and internalizing that academic language does not indicate intelligence has allowed her to see the value in her own linguistic repertoire and almost acts as a coping mechanism to the fact that the institution does not see the same value in her language practices in the classroom. She has learned to embrace her own linguistic repertoire, even if the institution as a whole has not reached the same conclusions as her regarding the fake performativity of academic language. She has freed herself from these expectations of academic language internally despite these expectations still existing in the physical space of the main classroom around her, relieving her from this burden and allowing her to participate more freely and openly in the main classroom.

The other student who was very clear about defying the expectations of academic language in the classroom, a freshman named Tommy, justified his choice to do so in (19).

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Tommy: "Sometimes I speak very casually, and I know some people, they like to speak professionally with those, you know, big words and I'm not saying they show off, but I guess some of them was just raised that way, to speak coherently and use big words, professional words. But for me, my philosophy has always been keep it simple. So I always speak in the simplest way possible, just enough for you to know what I'm talking about. I understand Swarthmore has a lot of people that, how I say, they have a strong academic background. So sometimes they speak in the way that makes you feel like they

are some kind of, you know, very educated people and honestly, I don't mind that. But that's not the way I want to. And when it's required, I'll do that. But usually I just think that takes too much energy and it's not necessarily good for the conversation, because would you prefer a normal conversation casual talking or like a conversation when they talk about like using words that you never heard in your life?"

Just like Hope from (18), Tommy also recognizes that one's value as a student and a human being is not determined by one's ability to use "big words" or "speak professionally." Conforming to the expectations of academic language by performing the sociolinguistic labor takes "too much energy" for Tommy; he is able to perform when necessary, but he realizes that he does not need to do so all the time in order to succeed in school. His comment about how some students "speak professionally" to "show off" demonstrates his understanding of the performativity of academic language. Therefore, he places value on how he perceives himself and his thinking, not how others perceive his linguistic practices. Not only that, but he also recognizes that speaking in that manner is "not necessarily good for the conversation" because of its lack of accessibility. These understandings allow him to succeed in overcoming the academic language expectations set by the institution unlike many other students at the institution who have internalized these expectations. He has learned to boost his self-confidence of speaking during class and to value his own linguistic practices on his own.

These two students show that students can create space for themselves in the main classroom to use their own linguistic repertoires instead of conforming to the linguistic expectations set by the institution and higher education as a whole. However, they are the exception, not the majority; most students still expressed in their narratives that they are hesitant to bring their own linguistic repertoires into the classroom and prioritize performing to the language expectations set by the institution. Additionally, they reached these conclusions about the falseness of the academic language ideology on their own rather than with the help of the

institution. The institution still does not demonstrate they value the linguistic practices of their diverse students. Expecting students to overcome these linguistic barriers on their own instead of working as an institution and a society to break down these barriers is unacceptable.

5. Discussion and conclusion

In this thesis, I have analyzed students' language experiences at Swarthmore in order to understand how students interact with the academic language raciolinguistic ideology. I identified that Swarthmore's linguistic climate is one that, due to the elite academic expectations, equates academic language with academic performance, thus pressuring students to conform to the expectations of academic language on campus. These expectations are exacerbated by a lack of visibility of diverse language practices on campus, providing few models of linguistic diversity for students as they are socialized into the academic environment. In response to this linguistic climate, students whose linguistic repertoires do not match the expectations of the institution seem to take four main approaches: 1) conforming by performing sociolinguistic labor (Holliday and Squires, 2020), 2) finding and creating participation spaces outside of the main classroom discourse, 3) identifying safe participation spaces created by figures of authority, and 4) subverting the academic language ideology in the main classroom, despite the institution's linguistic expectations.

I want to lead by saying that the linguistic repertoires that these students bring with them to the classroom are more than enough to engage with and make meaning of the content material presented to them in their courses. As discussed previously, the institution's privileging of the academic language raciolinguistic ideology perpetuates a false dichotomy between 'academic' and 'non-academic' language (Flores, 2020) that students have internalized, and this is reflected in their tendency in the interviews to overwhelmingly frame and compare their own language usage with the perceived expectation of academic language, as if academic language is the only acceptable option in the classroom. In reality, these students are perfectly capable of excelling in

the classroom as they are; the question lies in whether or not the institution accepts and appreciates their diverse language practices and accommodates accordingly.

Rampton (2006) argues that in academic classrooms, certain roles and certain patterns of activity come to be expected, but "generic expectations and actual activity seldom form a perfect match, and the relationship between them is an important focus in political struggle" (p. 31). As demonstrated by Swarthmore's linguistic climate, the expectation on this campus is that students use academic language. However, these student experiences of being socialized into the linguistic climate demonstrate that in any language socialization context, newcomers have the option and the agency to subvert the norms they are socialized into. This subversion of norms is expected given that "newcomers or novices are also active agents of socialization and change who can disrupt or challenge the status quo when it does not seem to accommodate them or their interests, aspirations, or communicative repertoires" (Burdelski and Howard, 2020, p. 252). Given the current status quo of racialized, gendered, and classed language expectations present in Swarthmore's linguistic climate, it should not be surprising that the majority of the interviewed students felt the need to look for alternative avenues and methods of participation in their classes. However, as demonstrated by the student narratives, this challenging of the status quo requires additional effort on the part of the students, unfairly giving them another factor to juggle in their academic work.

The fact that students are feeling it necessary to exert additional linguistic efforts in order to succeed in college clearly demonstrates that elite higher education institutions like Swarthmore are not linguistically inclusive learning environments. This makes this elite higher education as a whole inaccessible to the many diverse populations that these institutions pride themselves on including. Prichard (2016) even argues that elite higher education institutions,

including top liberal arts colleges like Swarthmore, have a standardizing influence on language that is less present at regional and local colleges because of their privileging of academic language (p. 107). Furthermore, the quotes from students' interviews and language journals demonstrate that much of evaluation and assessment in this elite higher education context is dependent less on understanding of the content material and more on speaking in manners that align with this standardized and idealized academic language expectations of the linguistic climate. This relates to Menken's (2006) argument that the practice of teaching to standardized tests enables a language policy where language proficiency and content understanding are assessed as one, disadvantaging English language learners. In many of our examples, students similarly argued that they knew the content material but that they were not able to express this understanding using the expected academic language, preventing the listener from perceiving the full extent of their knowledge.

Thus, institutional expectations surrounding academic language are linguistic barriers that these students have had to exert additional effort in order to learn how to navigate and overcome on their own. Navigating these expectations is exhausting and often stressful work; to quote the despair of one of the interviewed students, "I couldn't understand how to get myself understood." Thus, the success of these students points not to the success of the institution in supporting and accommodating the diverse student body, but to the strength, resilience, and resourcefulness of the students in withstanding an educational system that was not originally built to serve them. However, focusing energy on overcoming these linguistic barriers often comes at the expense of being able to participate and engage authentically with the content material, putting extra burden on these students even beyond language expectations. Additionally, the onus of overcoming the dominant forces of these raciolinguistic ideologies

should not fall on the students in the first place. It should be the institutions that are working to abolish the racist structures and ideologies that work within its system, including but not limited to the academic language raciolinguistic ideology. To echo the work of Flores (2020), "what needs remediation is not the cultural and linguistic practices of racialized communities but the listening/reading practices that continue to inform mainstream representations of these practices" (p. 29).

Lewis (2018) critiques Labov's principle of error correction which has dominated sociolinguistics research, articulating that "efforts by sociolinguists focusing on individual beliefs [about race] are not sufficient to dismantle white supremacy in the United States" (p. 330). Thus, dissemination of my or any research findings is not enough to spur social change as this only targets the individual; societal structures and systems must be overhauled in order to combat racism and white supremacy. This includes higher education institutions like Swarthmore, which must work to create more linguistically inclusive environments by moving past the academic language ideology and by shifting to a model that recognizes and uplifts students' natural language practices. More research is needed to see how institutions can work to overcome these harmful raciolinguistic ideologies, centering listening practices of the institution instead of falsely scrutinizing students' production of language.

I want to note that any recommendations made in this thesis will not entirely solve the problem of creating more linguistically inclusive higher education environments, because only dismantling the forces of white supremacy in our society will do that. However, our interviewed students did voice recommendations for peers, professors, and the institution as a whole that could help make academic spaces more inclusive on a smaller scale; namely, subverting raciolinguistic ideologies about academic language. As noted previously, students described

feeling more comfortable in spaces where professors and other figures of authority subverted the academic language raciolinguistic ideology through their actions in a variety of ways: acknowledging the difficulty of the language in course materials, sharing personal anecdotes in class, and overall presenting oneself as a human being first and foremost. While these actions may seem minor, they seem to signal to students that the classroom is a space where they too can be human, learning authentically instead of putting up a facade for academia. Furthermore, students with diverse linguistic repertoires also reported feeling more comfortable in classes where the professors also reflected their own linguistic diversity in their classrooms, such as having an accent. Thus, representation of diverse linguistic practices and diverse identities matters in signaling to students that linguistic diversity is welcome in academia and in creating a more inclusive higher education context overall. Along with creating more inclusive spaces, however, Swarthmore must also examine its own listening practices and question its tendencies to evaluate students based on their language practices versus their competencies in content understanding.

It is important to note that we conducted this research project during the unprecedented circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic and the era of online learning. The socialization experiences of our interviewed first-year students, who experienced their first semester in college online, were much different compared to those of our interviewed upper-year students, whose experiences occurred largely in-person and before the pandemic. The era of Zoom learning certainly complicates the ability to provide a holistic learning environment, and especially liminal spaces, which come about much more naturally in-person. To equate these experiences would be unfair and minimizing. For example, the Zoom chat is, as a space for student conversations to be broadcast publicly to the entire class, arguably a new liminal space

introduced in the context of online learning that does not have much of an equivalent in in-person learning environments. Breakout rooms have more of an in-person equivalent to group work, but they seem to be more liminal as they are not an immediately visible space to the professor and peers as groups might be in the classroom. Thus, more research on language socialization in online learning environments is necessary to fully understand the implications of students' pandemic learning experiences on raciolinguistic ideologies and power in the classroom. Whether online or in-person, classroom observations to triangulate students' self-reports during interviews and language journals would also help provide more insight into how these socializing experiences actually occur.

Ultimately, this research underscores the existence of racist ideologies in higher education institutions and highlights the inequity of students' experiences as a result of these ideologies. Higher education institutions owe it to their diverse student populations to foster inclusive and accessible learning environments; this must include recognizing students' diverse language practices. Institutions must take an active role in imagining and creating an academic environment where "the goal of teaching and learning with youth of color [is] not ultimately to see how closely students could perform White middle-class norms but to explore, honor, extend, and, at times, problematize their heritage and community practices" (Paris and Alim, 2014, p. 86). I can only hope that illuminating students' experiences of linguistic struggle in the classroom will lead to introspection and the beginning of a dismantling of racist linguistic ideologies at Swarthmore, in higher education, in academia, and beyond.

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Appendix A

Upper-Year Study Survey Protocol

1. What is your language background? (What languages do you speak? Do you speak a specific regional or social variety of these languages? etc.)

2. Do you think the way you speak has changed while you've been at college? If so, how?

3. Have you ever felt that the way you speak has influenced your ability to perform in a class in a positive or negative way? What happened?

4. Have there been moments when someone at Swarthmore commented on the way that you speak? What happened? How did it make you feel?

5. What is your class year?

6. What are your (prospective) major and minor(s)?

7. Do you identify as FG/LI (first-gen/low income)?

8. Are you a student athlete?

9. What kind of high school did you attend? (e.g. private, charter, international, under-resourced public, highly ranked public, etc.)

10. How do you describe your race?

11. How do you describe your gender?

12. How do you describe your sexuality?

Appendix B

Upper-Year Study Interview Protocol

- Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?

- What are some things you do at Swarthmore?

- Can you tell me a little bit about your language background?

- Have you ever felt that the way you speak has had an influence on the way that your peers, professors, etc. perceive you? If so, how do you think it influenced them?

- Have you ever experienced bias, discrimination, or microaggressions based on how you use language?

- How did you navigate this situation?

- How did it affect your college experience?

- Are there certain environments (at Swarthmore?) in which you feel more/less comfortable than others because of how you speak or because of how others speak? If so, what are those environments?

- Do you think the way you speak has changed at all since you came to Swarthmore? If yes, how?

- Has this change been intentional?

- If an upper-year student, how has it changed while at Swat?

- For this and others that are similar to what we asked on the survey, could say, "In the survey, you wrote about [your experience of x y & z] - could you say more about how that happened?

- Are there differences in your language compared to your friends or professors?

- How was it to participate in class on Zoom?

- How did it feel to bring your Swarthmore linguistic practices into your home (or wherever you were)?

- Assuming you were home for the latter half of the spring semester, did Zoom lead to any conversations with your family about newly acquired linguistic practices at Swarthmore?

- Do you feel like you participate the same as you did when you were in class on Zoom, or has it changed? If it has changed, how?

- One of the things we want to do is come up with some recommendations for action/the college. Could you give me examples of class policies or assignments that you found linguistically inclusive or exclusionary?

- What are tangible steps that Swarthmore community members can take to make Swarthmore a more linguistically welcoming place?

- What advice would you give to future students with your same linguistic background before they come to Swarthmore College?

- If you were conducting this research, what question would you ask? In other words, what do you wish you were asked that you weren't?

Appendix C

First-Year Study Survey Protocol

1. What is your language background? (What languages do you speak? Do you speak a specific regional or social variety of these languages? etc.)

2. What is your educational background? (Where did you go to school? What kind of schools? (public, private, parochial, magnet, well-resourced, under-resourced, etc.))

3. Have you ever felt that the way that you speak has influenced your ability to perform in an academic situation (e.g., a class, exam, social situation at school) in a positive or negative way? What happened?

4. What are your prospective majors/minors (if you have them)?

5. How do you describe your race/ethnicity?

6. How do you describe your gender?

7. Do you identify as first-generation/low income?

Appendix D

First-Year Study Initial Interview Protocol

- Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?

- Can you tell me a little bit about your language background?

- How did you end up at Swarthmore?

- Had you given much thought to the way you speak (accent, dialect, etc) before you came to college? If so, what were those thoughts, and what prompted them?

- In what ways do you feel your language practices are different than others at Swarthmore?

- Have you ever felt that the way you speak has had an influence on the way that your peers, teachers, professors, etc. perceive you? If so, how do you think it influenced them?

- Have you ever experienced bias, discrimination, or microaggressions based on how you use language?

- If they need a prompt - what about in high school? Is that different in Swarthmore?

- How did you navigate this situation?

- How did it affect your college experience?

- Are there certain environments (at Swarthmore?) in which you feel more/less comfortable than others because of how you speak or because of how others speak? If so, what are those environments?

- How has your experience of the first weeks of college been?

- On campus? Off campus?

- How are your classes going?

- How is it to participate in class on Zoom?

- What are different classes like?

- For anyone who's remote - how is it to participate in classes from home? Lead to conversations about language?

- For anyone on campus - how is that?

- How did you choose what classes to take? Are there certain courses in which you would feel more/less comfortable enrolling because of the way you speak?

- Impressions of how people speak? Write? Upper-year students? Faculty? Other peer students?

- Do you have any expectations for if/how your speaking/writing/language will change during college? If yes, how?

- Has this change been intentional?

- Are there differences in your language compared to your friends or professors?

- Do you have any role models, people you want to speak or write like?

- What are things that could be done differently/are done well?

- One of the things we want to do is come up with some recommendations for action/the college. Could you give me examples of class/campus policies or assignments that you found linguistically inclusive or exclusionary?

- What are tangible steps that Swarthmore community members can take to make Swarthmore a more linguistically welcoming place?

- Is there anything else you wanted to bring up? What do you wish you were asked that you weren't?

Appendix E

First-Year Study Language Journal Prompts

Week 1: Describe an interaction you had in the past week with a professor or classmate that made you notice something about how you or other people spoke or participated in the conversation.

Week 2: What classes are you taking? Who are the instructors? What kinds of interactions happen in these classes? What are expectations around language (spoken, written, participation norms) in each class?

Week 3: How have your professors navigated election day, recent events in Philadelphia, and the Haverford Strike? Have they explicitly acknowledged that these things are happening? Have they canceled classes? Have there been any class discussions? Have you talked about these events with peers outside of class?

Week 4: Have you picked up any new vocabulary/phrases/ways of speaking since you arrived at Swarthmore (virtually or in person), or have you noticed any Swarthmore-specific ways of speaking that you haven't adopted?

Have you shared any new vocabulary/phrases/ways of speaking with members of the Swarthmore community, or have you refrained from using certain ways of speaking while at Swarthmore (virtually or in person)?

Week 5: Have you encountered any new ways of talking about identity or activism while you've been at Swarthmore? Or have you introduced others to ways of talking about identity or activism? Are the ways that you would describe yourself or others different from or the same as they were before you started college? How have interactions around terminology surrounding identity and activism taken place?

Week 6: It's the last week of the semester! Looking back on the semester, what have you learned about communication and participation at Swarthmore? Do you feel the same about speaking in classes compared to the first week? Have you picked up on any new communicative practices? Were there any particular interactions or moments that showed you something about communication at Swarthmore? Describe some of the changes that have occurred this fall.

Week 7: What are the differences and similarities between classes held remotely and in-person classes? What advice would you give to a student starting remote learning with a background similar to yours? How can professors make online classes linguistically welcoming environments where students feel comfortable participating?

Appendix F

First-Year Study Final Interview Protocol

- How did the semester go?

- You already did the first interview (group conversation), journaled - so you know what kinds of things we're interested in; do you have any thoughts or reflections you want to share?

- What did you learn this semester? About yourself/others/Swarthmore?

- What were the environments where you learned the most?

- What kinds of situations/interactions did you learn most from?

- We asked in the fall: Have you ever felt that the way you speak has an influence on the way that your peers, teachers, professors, etc. perceive you? If so, how do you think it influenced them?

- Has your answer changed/stayed the same?

- We asked in the fall: Do you have any expectations for if/how your speaking/writing/language will change during college?

- Has your answer changed/stayed the same? Do you think you're meeting your expectations?

- How do you feel Zoom classes affected your first semester?

- What do you feel was "missed" by Zoom classes? What do you feel like you would have learned/done differently had classes/clubs been in person?

- What are some norms of interaction on Zoom (that might be different from in person)?

- Do you participate in Zoom classes like you would in in-person situations?

- (for those who were on campus) Did you notice a change in classes / participation in class change when you moved off-campus vs. when you were on-campus?

- Do you feel like you fit in on campus? What influences those feelings?

- What does "fitting in" even mean over Zoom?

- Does the way you speak influence how much you feel like you fit in on campus?

- Who / what influenced your language choices during fall semester? (peers/professors?)

- A lot of Swatties experience feeling like they're not enough/right/"the admissions mistake"/an impostor - did you encounter that?

- Impressions of how Swarthmore students/community members speak: what did you think prior to coming here vs. what are your impressions now?

- What does it mean to speak like a Swattie / college student?

- Do you speak like a Swattie? Can you speak like a Swattie?

- What type of speech and writing do you feel is valued in your classes?

- Do you feel that your language practices were valued in the classroom?

- Do you feel like you can use all of your language skills (dialects, languages, etc.) in the classroom? At Swat?

- Does the way you speak in class match the way you want to communicate?

- Are there certain times in college when you change the way you speak? What influences these decisions and why? How do you change the way you speak in the classroom? Around friends?

- Do people expect you to speak in the way that you do? How do people expect you to speak, and does the way that you speak actually match that expectation?

- Do you find the language used at Swarthmore to be accessible to you? In what ways?

- What do you wish you knew going into Swarthmore that you had to learn over the course of this semester?

- If they seem interested, this could be a place for recommendations to incoming students, professors, etc.

- Has being at Swarthmore changed your feelings (positively or negatively) about your own language background and abilities?

- Is there anything else you wanted to bring up? What do you wish you were asked that you weren't?