Pierre Bourdieu concerns himself with social structures, such as language and ??? and how people are shaped by their experiences within them. Bourdieu views language as a form of symbolic power, and cultural capital. Language is the tool that exhibits power, or position within a field, based on its use, and legitimacy. Bourdieu conceptualizes language. Foucault views discourse as a power that dictates the ways in which our world is structured, but Bourdieu views language itself as the power. Language is part of a person’s habitus. It is one form of capital that a person possesses. There may or may not be an institution that governs over language, but the social structure of language and how a group uses it means that one’s use of language, or access to language also becomes part of a person’s capital. Language is used in a way to differentiate and exclude among people within a field. Language represents a means to move within a field, but it is also a form of capital, which means that like with other forms of capital there is only so much of this specific capital that you are born with, and have the ability to use within a field.

Therefore those within a field that possess a well-formed habitus will be able to move within a field due to the fact that they are positioned within the field to use their capital to move. If language is a form of capital, and it is one way that a person can move up within a field, then this explains the ways in which Bourdieu “sees language ‘an instrument of power and action’ as much as communication” (Grenfell, 179). Those with valued language skills can use language an exclusionary tool due to the fact that “social uses of language owe their specifically social value to the fact that they tend to be organized in systems of differences (between prosodic and articulatory or lexical and syntactic variants) which reproduce” (Bourdieu, 54) This is what makes language a power.

Bourdieu’s work suggests that the power is with language as a result of the value placed upon it by groups within fields. Language and speech are one way to “appropriate one or other of the expressive styles already constituted in and through usage and objectively marked by their position and hierarchy of corresponding social groups” (Bourdieu, 54). These styles that mark position flex the muscle of the dominating group within a field. Placing value upon a specific use or usages of language, while denouncing other usages or dialects, is a form of symbolic violence. This establishing of a hierarchy within language leads to an attempt to legitimize language, or place value upon a specific language usage, which creates a “a semi-artificial language which has to be sustained by a permanent effort of correction, a task which falls both to institutions specially designed for this purpose and to individual speakers” (Bourdieu, 60). Regulating and correcting language usage creates what Bourdieu calls “semi-artificial language.” This use of language to create a hierarchy among users of language is similar to the ways in which Foucault describes the exclusionary tools of discourse. Language becomes a capital that some within a field may have more readily access to than others. Within a field, those with access to this specific type of language, or language usage become a social group with a better position within a field.

Bourdieu sees language used as a form of symbolic capital, or cultural capital, that is one tool used to enact a symbolic violence against people, much in the same way language can be used as a means to move up within a field. Placing higher value on specific language uses or practices is a symbolically violent act.   
 Foucault and Bourdieu each see the elements of discourse and language that make them tools of power. However, each views the use of that power differently. Foucault sees discourse is a system of power that structures everything. Bourdieu views language as part of a person’s habitus and capital. While access to this capital may be determined by one’s position within a field, it is possible to use language to move within a field. This specific concept of language are useful in the field Rhetoric and Writing Studies. It is important to know, and understand how it is that discourse and language shape our world, because each helps to construct our reality. Their use as analytical tools give us the opportunity to know how it is that we come to know information, and what is the system that structures that information within a society.

The concept of mimicry, as discussed by Bhabha, is a way in which the colonizers dominate the colonized. The colonized mimic, and imitate, the culture of the colonizers. Bhabha’s concept of mimicry focuses on the relationships between the colonizers and the colonized Other, but his work in mimicry can be used to analyze the relationships between a dominant group and a group that exists outside of the dominant. The purpose of this paper is to first define and analyze Bhabha’s concept of mimicry, and then to demonstrate that his notion of mimicry can be found in the work of Gross, and her concept of the Caucasion Cloak, and in Imaginative Geography by Said, as it pertains to the relationships between a dominant group, and any group that exist outside of the dominant group.

The domination of the colonized Other by the colonizers occurs through the process of mimicry. Mimicry is “the desire for the reformed Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha114). The reformed Other, or colonized people, are thought to be normalized by the colonizers. The dominant group of colonizers reforms the colonized in their likeness, and culture, but the image is not an exact copy. The colonized must be almost the same as the colonizers to validate their culture and practices, but they must not be identical because if they were they would be able to infiltrate the dominant group. The colonized must be identifiable, so that they can remain an Other. In this example the colonized assume the culture of the dominant group, and therefore attempt to achieve the power and capital associated with the dominant group. The colonized may be similar to their colonizers, but they are never the same. Imitating their colonizers may not result in them achieving any of the same power and/or capital associated with the dominant group, as they are unable to be seen as the same as the colonizers, but the very process of mimicry inherently allows slippage, and as a result the colonized have the chance to be a menace to the overall power structure.

The discourse of mimicry, its very essence, “is constructed around an ambivalence; its excess; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (Bhabha 114). It is that ambivalence, and excess, that allows the colonized the opportunity to usurp the colonizers. The slippage gives the colonized the possibility to use the tools of the master. Bhabha through Lacan reminds us “mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization of repression of difference, but a form or resemblance” (Bhabha 119). Therefore the ambivalent attitude of the colonizers towards the colonized gives the colonized the space for slippage to occur. Slippage can be thought of as a gap available to the colonized enter the discourse of the colonized, and use that gap to resist the hegemonic practices of the colonizers. The result of this slippage is “profound and disturbing,” because the attempt to normalize the colonizers “alienates its own language of liberty and produces another knowledge of its norms” (Bhabha 114).

Bhabha uses the example of the word slave to explain this occurrence. To the colonizers slave refers to property, and ownership, but to the colonized it would represent something very different. To them it would be an example of injustice, power, etc. Therefore what the colonizers and colonized share “is a discursive process by which the excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite)* does not merely ‘rupture’ the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a ‘partial’ presence” (Bhabha 115). The process of mimicry does not allow for the colonized to represent the colonizers. Their ways are not viewed as valuable to the colonizers, and as a result mimicry is more than creating a repeated version of them. It can account for resistance, because the colonized are aware of mimicry. They can use their reformed image to gain access to the dominant group, and then subvert their power. While it is unlikely that the colonized can ever overthrow the dominant group of colonizers they may act, and look like their colonizers, which at least gives them the opportunity to infiltrate, and weaken the power of the colonizers.  
 Mimicry can be found in other relationships between two distinct groups of people throughout history. One such example is the relationship between Mexicans, Mexicans-Americans and Caucasians in the U.S. In “The Caucasian Cloak,” Ariela J. Gross demonstrates the ways in which the Treaty Guadalupe Hidalgo awarded citizenship to the Mexican people living in Texas and California. However, their citizenship did nothing to protect them from Jim Crow laws and practices in the Southwest. The colonized in this example are the newly made U.S. citizens that were racially classified as white, but still subjected to Jim Crow laws. As Gross explains, “whiteness operated as a Caucasian Cloak to obscure the practices of Jim Crow and make them appear benign” (Gross 154). This cloak seemingly protected Mexicans from Jim Crow practices, because they were white by racial classification, but the label of “white,” did not give them the protection afforded to that racial identity.

They were the almost the same, but not quite. They were white, unlike the colonized Bhabha wrote about, but the dominant group found a way to make them different. The Mexicans, and Mexican Americans were othered by the dominant group based on their different cultural and language practices. They made them “white” by law (the same), but to make them not quite the same they separated based on their cultural and language practices. If they were culturally different, and spoke a different language, then Mexicans and Mexican Americans were not white. This way of using language and culture to other a group of people classified as “white” proved to be beneficial to both groups. It allowed the dominant group to openly practice prejudice against them, because “if Mexican Americans were white, then they were represented as long as Whites were” (Gross 155). For example, this allowed for a jury to be made up of whites, and still be considered a group of their peers.

The slippage in this relationship occurs in the varied ways Mexicans identified themselves. They possessed a great deal of fluidity in establishing an identity for themselves. The way in which they were othered by the dominant group set up a battle between the construction of their race as white, and their cultural and language practices. In this sense culture and language were viewed in opposition to their racial classification. This allowed for the idea of mestizaje to form, and as a result of this mixed view Mexicans often identified themselves differently even amongst themselves. In short, no universal identity existed, and so they often times embraced the mixed aspect of their culture, and identity. The fluidity allowed for them to reinforce their own cultural practices as defining their identity, and not the classification supplied to them by their colonizers. This resistance to the labels placed on them by the dominant group allowed for them to view their mestizaje as a positive. They viewed themselves as stronger because of the mixed aspect of their identity, and as a result, Mexican Americans were able to oppose the dominant group by using “a spectrum of languages to identify their racial and national identity, so that it is difficult to know which statements they really meant and which ones were attempts to score points with white lawmakers, judges, or juries” (Gross 157). This is the menace of mimicry, where the opportunity exists for the colonized to use their reformed image for their benefit. The ambivalence towards making them white allowed for them to enter a specific discourse with their colonizers, which resulted in their ability to undermine the hegemony of their colonizers.

Similar uses of mimicry to protect, and validate the existence of a dominant group can also be found in Edward Said’s “Imaginative Geography and Its Representations: Orientalizing the Orient.” Said discusses the ways in which scholars approached studying the Orient through a Western lens. Orientalism is an example of mimicry, because it defines, imagines, and reimagines the region known as the Orient with Western values. Europeans, as a dominant group, force mimicry upon the Orient as means to neutralize its power, and their fear of the unknown. Said uses Levi-Strauss to explain that the “mind requires order, and order is achieved by discriminating and taking note of everything, placing everything of which the mind is aware in a secure, refindable place” (Said 19). The purpose of doing this, according to Levi-Strauss is to give things “some role to play in the economy of objects and identities that make up environment,” because if they have a role to play, then they can not only be understood, but controlled by the dominant group.

The made up environment of the Orient sets up boundaries that not only keep the Orient outside of their world, but also others the region by making it a barbarian land that needed to be categorized, and understood. The result of this mimicry mutes the fear of the unknown because “familiar values impose themselves, and in the end reduces the pressure upon it by accommodating things to itself as either ‘original’ or ‘repetitious,’” and in this case the Europeans are the original, while the people of the Orient are the repeaters. The purpose of the mimicry of the Orient is to neutralize the power of the Orient, and their own fear of the region. This mimicry occurs in the way that “Europe articulates the Orient; this articulation is the prerogative, not of a puppet master, but of a genuine creator, whose life-giving power represents, animates, constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond familiar boundaries” (Said 21). The Europeans colonize the Orient, because they create an image of the Orient that mimics European culture, and in doing so they can also set the Orient as the lesser, reinforcing the idea that they are the supreme group. From this point on “Asia speaks through and by virtue of the European imagination, which is depicted as victorious over Asia” (Said 23). In this sense mimicry benefits the Europeans not just by neutralizing the fear, and power of the Orient, but also in continuing to promote their image as powerful. It reaffirms their existence, and cultural practices, by creating a reformed Other that repeats, but does not represent. However, because slippage exists, the people that make up the Orient are still afforded the opportunity to resist by way of the menace of mimicry. They may reinforce the idea of Europeans as victorious over Asia, but their perceived weakness can be used against the Europeans. If they are dismissed in this way, and seen as a less powerful Other, then Orient when mimicking has the opportunity to undermine the Europeans.

The concept of mimicry holds value in RWS, because it is important for instructors to address the ideas that certain identities have been created out of mimicry. Understanding the role of mimicry in society, and in writing, allows for students to use the tools of the master to disrupt, and resist dominant ideologies. However, it is also of value to writing instructors that they teach students not to mimic for the sake of entering discourse. If we are to mimic, then it must be for a purpose. There is nothing learned when a student mimics with no real purpose, because the work they are presenting is only a repetition and not used for the benefit of disrupting hegemonic practices of a dominant group.

The concept of standard language ideologies, as discussed by Davilla, is a way in which language is thought of as existing in one correct form. These notions of standard language ideology are deeply imbedded in the United States. As a result, there is a constant push toward establishing, and continuing to uphold the single correct from of speaking and writing. These language practices create and/or determine identities for those with language practices that exist outside the standard. SLI does not only affect multilingual students and second language learners. It can also be harmful to monolingual students, but more importantly SLI is damaging to society outside of the academic world. The purpose of this paper is to first define standard language ideologies (SLI), then to analyze the ways in which SLI can create or determine identity through indexicality, and to address the work of current scholars, such as Davila, Matsuda, Mangelsdorf, and Canagarajah that address and/or resist these specific language ideologies.

These notions of standard language ideologies are deeply embedded across the globe, and in the U.S. Davila brings attention to SLI in composition studies in the way the field of “recognizes ‘standard’ edited American English (SEAE) as a gatekeeper that often excludes nontraditional students from academia” (181). This role as gatekeeper leads to the negation of any and all language practices that fall outside of the established standard. Davila through Lesley Milroy views an important characteristic of SLI as an ideology defined by “the belief that there is one and only one correct spoken form of the language, modeled [sic] on a single correct written form” (184). This characteristic of standard language ideology is problematic because it creates a hierarchy of language. SLI demands that everything that exists outside what is considered correct does not have value. This does affects a student identified as a second language learner or native English speaker that speaks a variety of English that is not SEAE. The result is a discrimination against other language practices, both within and outside English language practices. It excludes other language practices as being beneficial to a student’s development based solely on the notion that the standard is superior. Standard language ideologies, according to Davila, “provides the belief system and justification necessary for mandating SEAE and denigrating other language varieties ­­– and the people who use them – and masks the politics associated with such acts” (184). This specific belief system ignores linguistic capital that exists outside the established standard. It creates separation between those that possess the skills to effectively use these specific and accepted language practices, and those that come into the classroom with knowledge of other language practices.

This separation and notion of the one correct form leads to indexicality. Indexicality is defined as “the creation of semiotic links between linguistic forms and social meanings” (183). These identities are the result of people relying on “different types of language practices, language features, or languages in general to determine or create identity, to assign various characteristics to people and social groups” (183). These identities are troublesome because they exist only in response to language practices based on one correct form. If the notion that one correct form persists, then any identity formed based on language practices that are outside the standard would be perceived as negative, because based on the one correct form standard the practices that make up that identity are incorrect. This is especially detrimental because linguistic practices are the basis for assigning identities to people, and the identities assigned are not ones that possess value.

The preference of one language variety over others makes it “common sense to discriminate against other language varieties” (184). This discrimination acts itself out in SLI practices, because such practices assign negative value to other language practices. This continues the function of SLI as a gatekeeper. Those in power can set these standards, and as Mangelsdorf points out “because so many people who speak nonstandard forms of ‘English’ or languages other than ‘English’ are not white, these manifestations of the standard language ideology, for some, serve as coded expressions of racism” (117). The separation created by SLI allows for what Mangelsdorf describes as “a tacit assumption of standard language ideology” that results in the idea that “people must master the language norms in order to participate in mainstream culture” (117). It is clear then why standard language ideologies are associated with dominant power systems. People with language practices that don’t fall in line with SLI are excluded from mainstream culture. This can manifest itself in more places than the classroom. SLI, when acting as a gatekeeper, is constricting to multilingual and monolingual people. It forces speakers, and writers, to use only one variety of the language, because all other forms don’t have value.

With the notion of SLI there is pressure on instructors to adhere to the standard language practices, and expectations are that students should master them. Matsuda discusses the myth of linguistic homogeneity, which is the acceptance of the “dominant image of students in English studies is the assumption that students are by default native speakers of a privileged variety of English from the United States” (639). Therefore, when a student’s writing doesn’t match the dominant image, or standard, it becomes othered. This problematic because of the common goal of composition classes is to assist students in bettering their writing. When an instructor views writing outside of the dominant image as inferior, they make assumptions about their practices. These assumptions about students’ writing are always negative. Language practices that may be helpful in improving students’ writing go ignored if they fall outside of the dominant image. In addition to the dominant image of students’ writing is the practice of language containment. Language containment through the practice of placement exams serves to keep the dominant image in place because it keeps “language differences in the composition classroom from reaching a critical mass,” and it’s this critical mass that would allow for the dominant language to be challenged. Matsuda warns that these practices do not only affect international students, but also what he refers to as “resident second-language writers” and “native speakers of unprivileged varieties of English” (648). Matsuda urges that instructors resist the policy of language containment, and approach the college composition classroom as the “multilingual space that it is, where the presence of language differences is the default” (649). Creating a classroom that is a “multilingual space” will include, as opposed to exclude under SLI practices, more than one language practice. It gives students a space to decide which practice best serves their needs.

Canagarajah introduces the idea that English should be viewed as a “multinational language,” and as such it “belongs to diverse communities,” which adds another layer to the critique of standard language practices. Matsuda brought attention to native-born speakers of an unprivileged English, and Canagarajah urges us to “acknowledge that we are novice speakers of the other’s variety, we will make efforts to develop competence in it (if necessary for our purposes) without expecting the other to defer to our own variety as the universal norm” (590). Even within English there are many varieties, therefore SLI is not something that only affects second-language learners. Canagarajah, like the previous scholars, views SLI practices as detrimental to students’ growth. Instructors that choose to uphold SLI practices in the classroom devalue students’ own languages, and students are thus unable to develop much needed skills in multilingualism, because “classes based on monolingual pedagogies disable students in contexts of linguistic pluralism” (592). It is important then that instructors incorporate code meshing into the classroom.

Code meshing encourages the use of multiple dialects, and does not negate language practices of students that fall outside the standard, which includes more than bilingual, or second language learners. Code meshing, in alignment with the view of multiple Englishes, benefits students that speak a variety of Englishes. Code meshing forces students to “know bring in their preferred varieties in rhetorically strategic ways,” and the value of this is apparent in the way that students must not only know how to incorporate different varieties in the correct context. Cangarajah points out that multilingual students must use these different varieties and “bring them together to serve their interests” (599). This approach to language and writing practices better serves students than negating whatever linguistic capital students bring to the class that falls outside SLI. Code meshing also has value outside of the classroom. SLI, as previously mentioned, does not only have a presence in a classroom setting.

SLI is deep rooted in academia, and society. The hierarchy of language supports systemic discrimination. Resisting SLI proves to be difficult. Mangelsdorf points out that policies enforced in education promote SLI “inevitably support linguistic containment and standard language ideology at the expense of students’ lived languages” (121). This will not change until multiple languages, and linguistic practices are valued in and outside the classroom. For instructors of composition, and the field of RWS, the language practices of second-language learners, and students that use other varieties of English must become part of the classroom. Matsuda urges that instructors make the classroom a “multilingual space.” The challenge isn’t merely resisting these ideologies, or developing practices that value what SLI does not. The challenge is continuing to work on incorporating other linguistic practices when SLI is so ingrained in education, and society that any change will be incredibly slow.

The study SLI are of great importance to the field of RWS. RWS can be the flagship for promoting, accepting, and encouraging multiple language practices in the classroom. RWS can move beyond linguistic profiling. RWS instructors and scholars, should be aware of the role of SLI in education, and the many ways in which their classrooms can include what the established standard excludes.