

# Language, discipline and ‘teaching like a champion’

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This article presents an analysis of various language policy mechanisms currently circulating in secondary schools in England, with a particular focus on those that intermingle ‘language’, ‘standard English’ and ‘discipline’. Although the connections between language, ideology and behaviour are well established within critical educational linguistics, this has not been explored in relation to current education policy in England, which is characterised by an overt focus on standardised English and behaviour ‘management’. In a grounded approach, I explore how the disciplining of *language* correlates with the disciplining of the *body*, based on ethnographic-orientated fieldwork undertaken in a London secondary school and drawing on a broad range of policy mechanisms such as curricula, textbooks, classroom artefacts and Doug Lemov’s *Teach Like a Champion* industry. I show how the current linguistic conservatism found within government policy gets reproduced in school-level policies, pedagogies and classroom interactions, and highlight these relations within a network of policy actors and key terms associated with so-called ‘zero-tolerance’ and ‘no-excuses’ schools. I show how teachers are positioned as language policy managers who work within a system of surveillance, compliance, coercion and control. As such, this article contributes to current thinking within critical language policy and the sociology of education by offering an expanded view of language ideologies in schools, whereby connections between language and discipline are explicitly illustrated and critiqued.

## Discipline and parlance

A school in the north of England lists the following requirements for their staff, as part of their policy on teaching and learning.

### All the time:

- It is everyone’s responsibility to ensure areas are tidy—coats/packed lunches are not on floors, paper towels are picked up, common areas etc. are tidy.
- Staff should model behaviour—i.e. no chewing gum, standard English should be used at all times, dress should be appropriate, mobile phones should not be used.

This extract is illustrative of what Clark (2001) refers to as the ‘disciplining of English’: the idea that in certain spaces, such as schools, people are under policy regulations to use language in a particular way, and that this is ‘part and parcel’ of other behavioural expectations such as hygiene, tidiness, manners and clothing. Language—in this case, the requirement that staff use standardised English ‘all the time’—is *disciplined*, controlled and monitored as part of a wider policy designed to maintain standards, law and order. These debates about language in schools are never just

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about language, but about class, race, power, (in)equality and coercion, with teachers often positioned as a vehicle for the propagation of language ideologies held by government, where English is taught ‘not only as a set of skills *but also as a set of values*’ (Clark, 2001: 32, my emphasis). This has resonances with Cameron’s (2012) notion of ‘verbal hygiene’, whereby attempts to ‘clean up’ language involve a slippage between ‘bad language’ and ‘bad behaviour’, with ‘good grammar’ being used as a metaphor for a bundle of moral terms such as order, tradition and authority.

In this article I expand Clark’s notion of language disciplining and Cameron’s verbal hygiene by applying these to the contemporary education policy in England, using ethnographic-orientated work undertaken in a London secondary school which identified as having a ‘strict’ discipline culture and made extensive use of Doug Lemov’s *Teach Like a Champion* programme. I trace connections between discourses of ‘language’ and discourses of ‘discipline’ across various policy mechanisms such as curricula, textbooks, pedagogies, policy actors and key terms. These mechanisms of language disciplining are explored using methods from discursive approaches to critical language policy (e.g. Barakos, 2016) to reveal how coercion and control are managed through language (Spolsky, 2009), how language ideologies get transformed into language practices (Snell, 2013) and the ways in which language and the body are placed under surveillance and policed (Foucault, 1979; Youdell, 2006; Cushing, 2020a). This requires examining different language policy levels, from macro (e.g. government-produced policy mechanisms) to meso (e.g. school-produced policy mechanisms) and micro (e.g. classroom interaction), to see how policy gets embodied and enacted (Ball *et al.*, 2012). Macro/meso-level policies and textbook extracts are examined using critical discourse analysis (e.g. Fairclough, 2010) in order to reveal how textual choices reproduce embedded ideologies about language. Classroom interactions are examined using interactional sociolinguistics (e.g. Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 2006; Rampton, 2006) to reveal the interplay of language and discipline and how imbalances in power become concretised through talk. Throughout these analyses, Foucault’s work on surveillance, governance and the production of docile bodies runs central, in terms of the various mechanisms which circulate in schools with regard to socially constructed language ‘expectations’, ‘standards’ and the systems by which teachers and students are positioned to conform to these.

This article moves the literature around language education policy and discipline forward in a number of ways. Firstly, I draw explicit links between language and discipline within the context of current education policy in England, marked in particular by an emphasis on standardised English and behaviour ‘management’. Secondly, I show how the disciplining of language correlates and intermingles with the disciplining of the body. Thirdly, I argue that notions of language have been absent from research on surveillance in schools and move towards an augmented, post-panoptic model into which *language* is incorporated.

### **Language, discipline and schools**

Schools have long been spaces where issues of power, discipline and language intersect with one another. Central to this is the *standard language ideology* (Milroy, 2001), a deeply embedded myth which works to socialise teachers into practices where the

standardised form is seen as 'better' than its non-standardised variants. Standardised English is based on and constructed by the repertoires of those who continue to protect it: white, male, middle-upper class, 'native', 'literate' speakers. Given that these speakers typically enjoy social dominance and privileges, this gets indexically mapped on to the standardised forms of language. Critical linguists therefore consider 'standardised English' to be a classed and racialised construct (e.g. Alim & Smitherman, 2012; Rosa & Flores, 2017; Baker-Bell, 2020), committing to a research agenda which exposes the role played by the standard language ideology in perpetuating linguistic and social inequality. The standard language ideology has long pervaded education policy in England, with policymakers adopting a sanitised, depoliticised understanding of language which fails to recognise that standardised English is a social construct and how its aggressive, uncritical promotion serves to undermine and delegitimise non-standardised forms (see Cushing, 2020a).

Schools in England currently work with the policies of post-2010 reforms, introduced under the coalition Conservative–Liberal Democrat government, and from 2015 onwards, under the majority Conservative government. Within these, standardised English is foregrounded across a cluster of policy mechanisms: curricula documents, grammar tests, grammar glossaries, assessment frameworks, political discourse and the *Teachers' Standards* (TS; DfE, 2013). The TS are a set of eight benchmarks for pre/in-service teachers against which their practice is judged during teacher education programmes, appraisals, misconduct hearings and Ofsted inspections. As Page (2017b) argues, the TS are a 'surveillance mechanism' and a 'blueprint' which codify a particular version of measurable, standardised pedagogies. They represent a particularly interesting mechanism in the context of this article, given how they juxtapose 'language' with 'discipline'—for example, TS8 instructs teachers that they must 'manage behaviour', have 'clear rules and routines' and 'exercise appropriate authority', with TS3 including the requirement to promote 'high standards of literacy, articulacy and the correct use of standard English'. As is the case in current policy then, attempts to standardise language intermingle with attempts to standardise behaviour and the body, via a series of disciplinary mechanisms which curtail unpredictability (Foucault, 1979; Youdell, 2006).

Contemporary education in England is characterised by a greater emphasis not just on standardised English but on discipline and 'standards' more broadly (e.g. Maguire *et al.*, 2010). Behaviour policies are 'subordinated to the standards agenda' (Ball *et al.*, 2011), with schools under pressure to 'perform' in line with external accountability systems, accelerated in particular under the National Strategies of Blair's New Labour. From 2010 onwards, the Conservatives gave teachers a 'green light to get tough' (Gove, 2014), granting schools greater legal powers to impose increasingly punitive policies, including the screening and searching of pupils, the use of physical force and the disciplining of pupils outside of school (DfE, 2016). These moves are supported by major financial backing, notably in an untendered DfE grant of £10 million to a scheme led by the UK government's 'behaviour tsar', Tom Bennett (see DfE, 2019), who himself is a vocal advocate of strict disciplinary policies which emphasise 'crackdowns' and deterrence. Through various networks and connections, and important given the focus of this research, Bennett is also linked to Doug Lemov and is a prominent supporter of *Teach Like a Champion* (e.g. Bennett, 2013). Despite

these policy moves, there is no agreed consensus on the levels of disruptive behaviour in English secondary schools, with the national media and political discourse whipping up a sensationalised, moral panic narrative (Cameron, 2012; Jenkins & Ueno, 2017). Wrapped up in the political rhetoric about discipline lies discourse about the need for ‘proper’ English and the ‘rigorous’ policing of grammar—for example:

Visit the most exclusive pre-prep and prep schools in London [...] and you will find children learning to read using traditional phonic methods, times tables and poetry learnt by heart, grammar and spelling rigorously policed, the narrative of British history properly taught. And on that foundation those children then move to schools like Eton and Westminster – where the medieval cloisters connect seamlessly to the corridors of power. (Gove, 2013)

One of the most notable shifts in contemporary discipline discourse has been in the emergence of new key terms, such as ‘no excuses’ and ‘zero-tolerance’. These overlapping terms are generally used to describe systems characterised by absolute teacher control and extreme systems of student punishment (such as extended periods in isolation and/or detention) and tend to be used by schools who align themselves towards so-called ‘traditional’ pedagogies and curricula (see Graham, 2018). Fuentes (2011) explores the deployment of zero-tolerance policies in US schools, tracing their origins from Reagan’s War on Drugs programme in the 1980s, and exploring case studies where students are subjected to a ‘brutally strict disciplinary model that embraces harsh punishment over education’ (Fuentes, 2011: 54–55). Zero-tolerance/no excuses policies are theories of discipline which place responsibility on *individuals* to change themselves, rather than attempting to address structural inequalities at the intersection points of language, poverty and race. They are underpinned by intimidation, incarceration and deterrence, and are typically—but not exclusively—associated with charter schools in the USA and with academies and free schools in England (see Kulz, 2017).

### **‘Champion teachers’ and a language policy for control**

Of particular interest to this article is Doug Lemov’s *Teach Like a Champion* (TLAC) programme, a multi-million-dollar global industry of educational resources including textbooks, a video archive, consultancy services and blogs. TLAC formed an integral part of the culture of the school where the research for this took place. In this section, I begin to conceptualise TLAC as a *language policy*, in terms of language disciplining, surveillance and standardisation.

TLAC is built around 62 ‘techniques’: tightly structured scripts and procedures for the micro-management of classroom discourse, with an overt focus on student control via the deployment of rewards and punishments. These are detailed in Lemov (2015), Lemov *et al.* (2012) and in an accompanying DVD of 75 videos of ‘champion teachers’. TLAC is deeply embedded within a network of institutions and policymakers, including: the Relay Graduate School for Education (a private graduate school for teachers based in New York); the Knowledge is Power programme (a group of public charter schools in largely low-income communities across America); and the Teach for America teacher education programme. It has considerable influence in

UK education, described as a 'teaching bible' by the media (Leslie, 2015), promoted by education ministers who claim Lemov's methods have 'transformed the debate around teacher training' (Gove, 2013) and is a regular reference point as 'research-informed' practice by the founder of ResearchED, Tom Bennett (e.g. Bennett, 2013). TLAC is highly valued by Teach First (a UK-based teacher education programme), with trainee teachers instructed on its mechanisms during their 5-week training programme, in which they are exposed to a neoliberal education ideology based on strict discipline and meritocracy (Elliot, 2018: 272). With its utilitarian and corporate focus on 'grit', 'character' and 'performance' (e.g. Vanker & Bailey, 2018), TLAC is widely used in zero-tolerance schools across the USA and the UK (see Golann, 2018), serving the interests of the DfE in the delivery of their macro-level policies on behaviour management as a cheap, ready-made, quick-fix manual for teachers. Lemov himself is one of the founders of Uncommon Schools (UC), a group of 54 charter schools across the USA who have proudly advertised their zero-tolerance approach to discipline. In August 2020, during the writing of this article, UC published a 'Diversity, Equity and Inclusion' letter on their website (Uncommon Schools, 2020), apologising to students and staff who had suffered traumatic experiences at the hands of their policies and committing to a future agenda of anti-racism and anti-discrimination. This was met with dismay from many UK supporters of the TLAC industry (see Lough, 2020).

Lemov states that the aim of TLAC is to 'expect 100% of students to do what you ask 100% of the time' (Lemov, 2015: 387), achieved through the systematic controlling of students' behaviour and language. The neoliberal discourse of TLAC is characterised by hostile sport and business metaphors (e.g. 'high-performance'; 'cold call'; 'transaction costs'; 'on your marks'; 'strategic investment'; 'hurdle rate'), with an explicit focus on creating a classroom culture of 'discipline and measurability' (Lemov, 2015: 60). Teachers are constructed as 'coaches', 'heroes', 'elites' and, indeed, 'champions' who are engaged in philanthropic and life-affirming work, as neocolonial missionaries whose job is to save poor, 'urban' children (see Gatti & Catalano, 2015). Despite the clear role that *language* plays in the epistemics of TLAC, there is limited research which has considered this in any great detail, and in this article I argue that TLAC is a de facto *language policy* for teachers, and one that is designed to be enacted in classrooms following procedures in the form of scripts, acronyms, metaphors, mnemonics, flowcharts, vocabulary, prosody and gesture. It is a mechanism for turning ideologies into practices whilst representing an explicit effort to manage, control and regulate others' linguistic choices and repertoires (Spolsky, 2009).

## **Methods and data**

Data generation methods for this study were ethnographic-orientated, deriving from time spent in a London school during which I observed lessons, interviewed members of the school community, collected a bricolage of policy artefacts and kept a research journal. My aim was to explore the 'social life' of language policy in drawing on critical, ethnographic methods of data generation (e.g. Johnson, 2009; Heller *et al.*, 2018), including the analysis of local and state policy

mechanisms and their enactment. Ethical approval was granted by my institution and I adhered to the practices outlined in the BERA guidelines (BERA, 2018). All participants signed consent forms and were aware that our discussions were forming part of a research study.

I call the school 'New Urban Academy' (a pseudonym; henceforth NUA), a large academy secondary school (ages 11–18) located in an outer suburb of London and principally catering to a white, working-class student community. The number of pupils eligible for Free School Meals was above average; pupils whose first language was other than English was below average. NUA opened in the early 2000s following targeted intervention under Tony Blair's academisation programme and an 'inadequate' Ofsted rating of the comprehensive school which had occupied the same site. The grounds of NUA were made up of a large, contemporary steel and glass building with an open-plan feel—airy communal areas and spacious classrooms with transparent glass rather than walls, all positioned around a central library and café. All classrooms were fitted with video cameras, justified by management on the grounds that this allowed staff to critically review their own practice, but arguably contributing to a culture of interpersonal and vertical surveillance in schools (see Page, 2017a,b). NUA proudly identified as having a zero-tolerance discipline policy and had built the pedagogical culture of the school around TLAC, after the deputy headteacher had met Lemov at a workshop and had attended multiple ResearchED events which celebrated its approaches. Multiple copies of the book were available in the staff professional development library and various videos were used in staff training sessions. All trainee teachers on placement at the school were given a copy of the book and new staff received 'TLAC training' as part of their induction programme. Many of the teaching staff were graduates of the Teach First programme, talking enthusiastically about the overt influence of TLAC on their practice.

Over the course of one academic year, I made termly visits to NUA, where I observed lessons in different subjects, met with trainee teachers and their mentors, spoke with teachers and students, led workshops for GCSE English students, collected resources used in classrooms/teacher training sessions and collected school policies. I was particularly interested in issues relating to language, including the everyday linguistic practices of students, classroom interaction, language policies and the standardised language 'category-making' processes (Rosa, 2018). I was welcomed into the school and teachers were willing to speak openly about their own histories and approaches to teaching, and how they saw these aligning with the ethos and values found within NUA's policies. I use some of these policies as a springboard to explore other data collected from NUA. Data generated from the 'macro' and 'meso' levels of language policy (TLAC materials and policy extracts) were analysed using critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2010) as a way of uncovering how structural ideologies about language and discipline come to be reproduced and concretised via textual choices and patterns. At the 'micro level' of language policy, tools from interactional sociolinguistics (e.g. Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 2006; Rampton, 2006) were used to reveal the complex interplay of language and discipline in the classroom and to further trace language ideologies across macro/micro contexts. Ultimately, I aim to explore interdiscursive contact

points between language and discipline, and the mechanisms by which language in schools gets placed under surveillance.

### Language disciplining and language policy

I begin with an extract taken from NUA's behaviour for learning policy, in order to illustrate the ways that discourses about language 'correctness' get wrapped up in discourses of standards, surveillance, behaviour and discipline. The policy included:

- Our whole school policy of zero-tolerance is designed to eradicate disruption: so that teachers can teach, and students can learn. There are no excuses for poor behaviour.
- Pupils will receive awards for good behaviour and achievement. Pupils who do not follow our rules will receive sanctions and detentions.
- [...]
- Teachers and students must use correct standard English at all times and answer in full sentences. Poor oracy will be challenged by teachers.
- Slang is not to be used inside the school premises and will be re-modelled and corrected by teachers.
- Students must speak clearly and fluently so they can be understood.
- Subject-specific terminology must be used.
- Teachers will use question flow charts to support students, correct errors and address misconceptions.

A greater understanding of NUA's unique context is important in reading this. Policies are enacted in the *situated*, *professional* and *material* contexts of individual schools (Ball *et al.*, 2012: 20–42), with their own profiles, budgets, demographics, staffing and local concerns, but also within the *external* contexts such as league table positions and Ofsted reports. NUA's policies, including the one above, had been drawn up following an Ofsted rating of 'inadequate', which described the school as having 'serious weaknesses', including in literacy, English and behaviour. The most recent Ofsted report, in which NUA received a 'good' rating, highlighted how staff 'consistently corrected' language 'errors', as well as receiving praise for their 'systematic' and 'rigorous' approach to discipline. As Fuentes (2011: 57) explains, in recent years, zero-tolerance policies are often justified by schools on the grounds that they need to meet 'standards' and produce adequate 'test scores', which certainly played a factor given NUA's successful attempts to raise their Ofsted rating. In many ways, NUA's policies, especially clauses concerning language, were in response to a narrative of failure, constructed in part by external, top-down surveillance systems such as Ofsted. The staff at NUA spoke proudly of the new rating, and an oversized sign in reception with the phrase 'we are a GOOD school' met all visitors.

In the policy above, ideas about discipline and language intermingle, working as a deterrent in discouraging 'poor behaviour' through the use of fear and punishments ('sanctions', 'detentions') and the promise of 'awards' for compliance. The policy reproduces the standard language ideology and the myth that there is a 'correct' (i.e. standardised English) way of speaking, with an uncritical use of the phrase 'standard

English’ and an implicit assumption that (a) students and teachers know what this is, and (b), they are competent in it. Students and teachers are instructed, via the use of a modal verb, that they ‘*must* use correct standard English at all times’ and ‘*must* speak clearly’, with no justification provided for *why* students must do this, and no attempt to explore how and why different contexts require speakers to adapt and adjust their language. Despite their different grammars, speech and writing are conflated as one homogenous entity, most notably in the clause ‘answer in full sentences’, which erroneously assumes that speech is based on the written form. Vague adjectives and adverbs (‘*poor* oracy’; ‘speak *clearly* and *fluently*’; ‘*correct* standard English’) serve to further impose the standard language ideology in the subjective treatment of language, positioning ‘standardised English’ as the benchmark against which other varieties are judged, and constructing ‘non-standardised’ language as ‘non-compliant’ and of ‘poor quality’.

NUA constructs itself as an institution which has physical borders controlling language use (‘slang is not to be used inside the school premises’), resembling other schools who have placed posters on their gates and on classroom walls listing words which are outlawed and ‘banned’ (see Snell, 2013; Cushing, 2020a). At NUA, academic register and standardised English is the legitimate language of the school, not ‘slang’, a policy which I regularly observed being enacted during lessons. Policy here steers teachers towards ‘eradicationist’ pedagogies (Baker-Bell, 2020: 28–29), where the aim is to remove non-standardised language and replace it with standardised forms, which ultimately denies speakers the opportunity to draw on their own linguistic identities and repertoires. Indeed, the policy uses the verb ‘eradicate’ in its initial framing, equating ‘disruption’ with ‘non-standardised grammar’, ‘not speaking clearly’ and ‘slang’. Teachers, too, have their language policed and managed through the use of ‘question flow charts’: tightly structured classroom scripts and procedures for how to respond to ‘errors’ and ‘misconceptions’ which are designed to enforce standardised pedagogies. This mode of language surveillance is explored further in the following section.

Figure 1 is a reconstruction of a poster which was taped onto the corridor and classroom walls of NUA, further illustrating the ways that the school was using



Figure 1. Disciplining the body, disciplining language

language to impose discipline, and further aligning discourses of behaviour with discourses of language.

In addition to language, here students' bodies and movements are arranged, controlled and disciplined by the architecture of the school (Piro, 2008). Students at NUA are required to walk on the left-hand side of a painted line along the middle of the corridor floor in a 'one-way system' and are not permitted to talk to each other whilst moving. Clothing and hairstyles are strictly policed by staff at the school gate and throughout the school day, with sanctions deployed for students who are not deemed to be satisfactorily presented (see also Kulz, 2017: 70–74). Students follow meticulous protocols at the beginning and end of lessons, involving standing up in silence behind their desks before being permitted to sit down and saying 'thank you' to their teachers as they leave. The control of the body and of language is here merged together, concretising Cameron's (2012) 'speaking well is behaving well' metaphor in spatial and material terms: language and discipline are distributed through the entire body, as an intermingling, semiotic assemblage of control (Luke, 1992). The final bullet point of Figure 1, 'Speak in English only', is representative of 'one nation, one language' ideologies (e.g. Shohamy, 2006), where a language is believed to neatly align with a physical territory and used by policymakers as an attempt to construct social cohesion and control. Within this ideology, linguistic diversity is seen as a 'threat', and something to be feared and contained. However, during my time at NUA, I observed multiple moments of resistance from students, who defied the policy in communicating with one another in languages other than English. This subversion of language policy illustrates how policy does not merely 'flow' linearly from macro through to micro level but is met with pockets of resistance along the way.

### **SLANTing, SPEAKing and language policing**

Figure 2 is a reconstruction of a large poster which was taped onto every classroom wall in NUA, as well as being glued onto the back of students' planners.

SLANT is one of 62 techniques in the core *Teach Like a Champion* textbook (Lemov, 2015: 360–361). It was named by Uncommon Schools as one of the policies

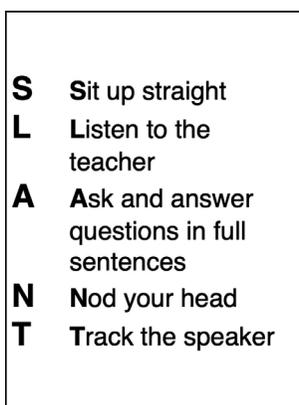


Figure 2. SLANT

which was to be ‘eliminated’ in their recent ‘commitment’ to equality and diversity (Uncommon Schools, 2020). At NUA, I regularly observed SLANT being enacted, with my fieldnotes describing the ways that teachers used it in their classroom discourse or simply and silently gestured to the poster on the wall. Lemov describes SLANT as follows:

Regardless of how great your lesson is, if students aren’t alert, sitting up, and actively listening, teaching it will be like pouring water into a leaky bucket. Although many teachers practice lining up students for fire drills and making sure everyone knows the routine for finding the right bus at the end of the day, many neglect to teach behaviours that are more critical in the long run, those that help students concentrate, focus, and learn.

To maximise students’ ability to pay attention, teachers in top-performing schools and classrooms commonly use sticky acronyms to teach students baseline behaviours for learning. One popular variation is **STAR**:

**S**it up  
**T**rack the speaker  
**A**sk and answer questions like a scholar  
**R**espect those around you

Another common alternative is **SLANT**:

**S**it up  
**L**isten  
**A**sk and answer questions  
**N**od your head  
**T**rack the speaker

One of the best aspects of these acronyms is that they serve as shorthand. Once you’ve taught students how to *STAR/SLANT*, all you ordinarily have to do is use the phrase, and students are able to self-correct. [...] In the best classrooms, the word is deeply embedded in the vocabulary of learning, as a noun (“Where’s my *STAR/SLANT*?”) and a verb (“Make sure to *STAR/SLANT*”).

Because *STAR/SLANT* is such a critical part of a high-performing classroom, you may also consider developing nonverbal signals that allow you to reinforce and correct without interrupting what you’re otherwise doing. For instance, you might fold your hands in front of you to remind students to sit up straight, or point to your eyes with two fingers to prompt students to track when you’re speaking. (Lemov, 2015: 360–361)

Similar-style acronyms for monitoring and controlling language are found throughout other zero-tolerance schools’ policies in the UK and USA, such as *SPEAK* (**S**tandard English; **P**rojection; **E**cho; **A**sk a range of pupils; **K**eep revisiting key knowledge) and *SHAPE* (**S**peak in standard English; **H**Ands away from mouth; **P**roject your voice; **E**ye contact at all times). Janks (2010) critiques a similar but earlier version of SLANT, taken from a primary school classroom in South Africa and shown in Figure 3, where both body and language are placed under surveillance.

SLANT and its variations are here conceptualised as language policies because they function as a set of practices and beliefs for managing and monitoring the

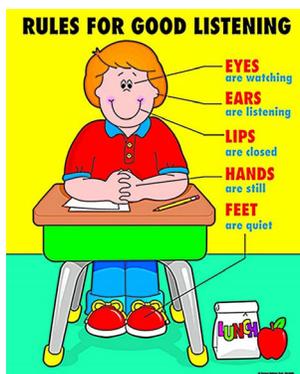


Figure 3. Rules for good listening (Janks, 2010: 51) [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

communicative behaviours of others (Spolsky, 2009), deployed as a way of engineering classroom spaces where speech, writing and gestures are standardised and regulated in intricate detail.

Lemov (2015: 388–393) instructs teachers to ‘show me SLANT’, ‘scan from the front of the room’ and ‘make compliance visible’, crafting a panoptic classroom where students are ‘subtly reminded that you see’. What Figure 2 and the description of SLANT show is how TLAC is essentially a series of routines and scripts for teachers to follow, and so they themselves have their language policed whilst simultaneously policing the language of their students. The teacher here is de-skilled, their pedagogical autonomy curtailed to predetermined chunks of talk, with students’ responses reduced to predictable, measurable patterns. This was the case for the lessons I observed at NUA, where classroom discourse was dominated by teachers, and student responses heavily refereed and managed, placed under surveillance by the mechanisms of SLANT and NUA’s wider policies. Comparing Lemov’s description of SLANT with Figure 2 shows how NUA had adapted it for their own purposes, adding detail such as ‘in full sentences’ as well as re-semiotising it into a highly visible sign. In similar ways to Figures 1 and 3, SLANT juxtaposes the disciplining of the body (‘sit up straight’; ‘track the speaker’) with the disciplining of language and communication (‘ask and answer in full sentences’; ‘nod your head’; ‘ask and answer questions like a scholar’). This is the ‘meticulous control of the operations of the body’ (Foucault, 1979: 137), operationalised through a de facto language policy (Shohamy, 2006) built on coercion and standardisation.

In his critique of TLAC, Stahl (2019) calls SLANT a ‘body pedagogy’, which includes semiotic resources including language, body and gesture, and something that is deeply intertwined with neoliberal policy enactment through the disciplining of the body and measuring its ability to comply. Extending Stahl’s notion of a body pedagogy to include concepts from critical language policy then, we see how TLAC and SLANT become ways of imposing standard language ideologies—including gesture—via carefully crafted routines. The repetition and consistency in which these policies are enacted—as was the case at NUA—eventually works to socialise students and teachers into self-regulation and self-governance, as the paralysing effect of language

policy takes hold. Language here is involved in the production of an affective atmosphere of the classroom, where linguistic and gestural ‘correctness’ is expected and praised, and where the lines between ‘language’ and ‘discipline’ are further blurred.

### **Punching the error**

A further TLAC technique which was widely used at NUA was ‘Format Matters’, which instructs teachers to ‘correct errors’ in students’ language, in particular targeting non-standardised spoken grammar, ‘slang’ and articulation. In similar ways to SLANT, Format Matters works as a language policy because it imposes arbitrary notions of ‘correctness’ and ‘standards’ onto classrooms (see Shohamy, 2006) whilst further constructing cultures of language surveillance. Lemov (2015: 116–118) attempts to justify Format Matters on the grounds that it is exclusively standardised English which counts as being ‘worthy’ to communicate ideas, being ‘the battering ram that knocks down the door to college’. He writes:

Correcting slang, syntax, usage, and grammar in your classroom prepares students to succeed, even if you believe that divergences from “standard” are acceptable and normal, or even if you think there’s no such thing as “standard” [...]. there is a *language of opportunity* [...]. In it, subjects and verbs agree, usage is traditional, and rules are studied and followed. (Lemov, 2015: 117, original emphasis)

The routine for enacting Format Matters in the classroom is in the form of two crude instructions: ‘identify the error’ and ‘begin the correction’ (Lemov, 2015: 118), encouraging teachers to enact remedial notions of linguistic ‘correctness’ as well as publicly stigmatising students for using grammatical and pronunciation ‘errors’. As well as further conflating spoken and written grammar, Lemov (2015: 120–121) bases Format Matters on Bernstein’s (1974) restricted and elaborated codes, lingering work from the 1960s which has been repeatedly critiqued and dismissed by sociolinguists as harbouring deficit, classist and racist stances on language (e.g. Jones, 2013; Rosen, 2017). Bernstein suggests that working-class speakers’ language is ‘restricted’ and underdeveloped as a result of their narrow social experiences, whilst middle-class speakers’ language is indicative of intellectual stimulation. Lemov reconceptualises ‘elaborated’ codes as ‘collegiate’ codes to which all students must be conditioned into using. In the UK, Ofsted adopt a similar belief towards standardised English (Hubbard, 2020). Despite Lemov’s claims that ‘correcting’ language serves to assist students in gaining entry to university, a sociolinguistic view would argue that it only serves to further entrench social and educational inequality, as well as pathologising and stigmatising non-standardised language (e.g. Snell, 2013). Via the machinery of Format Matters, students are coerced into ‘self-correction’ through tools and techniques of governmentality: the organised crafting and managing of others’ behaviour, which leads to the eventual internalisation of rules and self-governing (Foucault, 1979). This is not just verbal hygiene, but verbal *stigma*—with young people’s language, which according to Lemov can be ‘plagued by tangled syntax’ (Lemov, 2015: 117), branded as deficient under the neoliberal veneer of ‘opportunity giving’ and ‘entry to college’.

During assemblies and training sessions held at NUA that I observed, teachers and students were shown the Format Matters video from the TLAC DVD, illustrating how the technique gets micro-enacted in the classroom. This features a Black male teacher (Mr Williams) 'correcting' the speech of a young Black student (Shakir). The 'correction' here is of the verb 'gots', a grammatical feature of African-American Vernacular English (e.g. Wolfram, 2004). The clip shows various sentences and words written on the board, with the sentence 'The bat flew through the night' being the focus of attention at this particular moment. My own transcript of the interaction is below, where S2 is another student, sat next to Shakir. Transcription conventions can be found in the Appendix.

- 1 Mr W: the clue is?
- 2 Shakir: flew flew
- 3 Mr W: flew (.) excellent
- 4 Shakir: so it gots to be the one that
- 5 Mr W: it gots to be?
- 6 Shakir: oh (.) it (2)
- 7 S2: ((whispers)) has
- 8 Shakir: it ha::s to be the one <xxx>
- 9 Mr W: excellent Shakir

Figure 4 is a screenshot of this interaction, taken during Shakir's 2-second pause on line 6.

This interaction lasts just 14 seconds. In a physical embodiment of language surveillance and disciplining, Mr Williams stands over Shakir, hands in pockets and gazes directly at him with a look of concern and waits, whilst Shakir's classmate turns to whisper him the 'right answer'. The other students silently continue with their

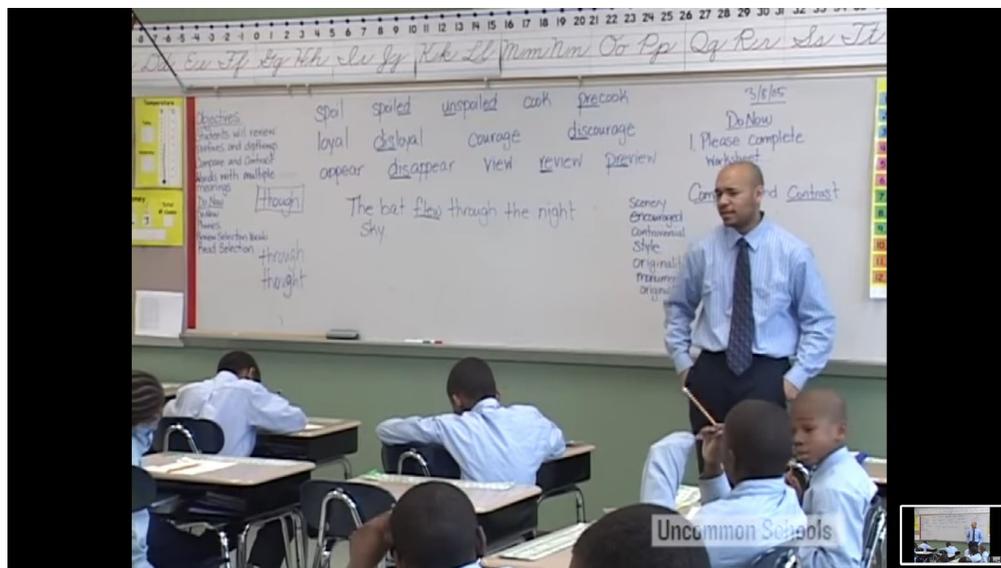


Figure 4. Language policing and 'Format Matters' [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

work, apparently quite used to this practice, suggesting they have become socialised into these kinds of procedures and that language policing is an everyday experience for them. Similar interactions were observed during my time at NUA, with my own fieldnotes describing how teachers would regularly discipline students for using non-standardised grammar and slang, the result of which would often be students looking embarrassed, ashamed and unwilling to contribute further.

A micro-analysis of the exchange using interactional sociolinguistics (e.g. Ramp-ton, 2006) shows how TLAC gets translated into classroom practice and works as an ‘oppressive language and educational policy’ (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 2005: 271). Here I use the Format Matters exchange as evidence of language-based struggle and surveillance, especially in classrooms where teachers are granted disciplinary licences through TLAC materials and zero-tolerance language policies. On line 1, the intent of Mr Williams is to elicit the answer from his students, with them inferring this from his rising intonation. Shakir speaks with excitement in his enthusiasm to participate, repeating ‘flew’ in quick succession, and then on line 4, overlapping Mr Williams in his eagerness to respond. However, Mr Williams’ intent on line 5 is clear: the intervention and eradication of a non-standardised form that he deems to be unacceptable in his classroom, despite the fact that this interrupts the process of learning and ends Shakir’s enthusiastic willingness to engage. Mr Williams provides Shakir with simultaneous inferential cues for what he is looking for: the interruption of Shakir, prosodic emphasis on the ‘error’ word of ‘gots’, as well as gestural cues in his concerned look. Shakir’s exclamation (‘oh’) on line 6 suggests he realises that something he has said has been deemed to be institutionally unacceptable, yet requires assistance from a classmate in the form of a whisper (line 7), after pausing to think for 2 seconds. In Figure 4, we see Shakir’s friend urgently look on, as he verbally passes him the ‘answer’ whilst Mr Williams waits for him to ‘self-correct’ (Lemov, 2015: 118). Here, Shakir’s friend becomes part of the interpersonal surveillance system, monitoring and policing the language of other students. Throughout TLAC, Lemov insists that teachers need to be ‘relentless’ in building a ‘no opt out’ classroom culture (Lemov, 2015: 90) and so Shakir knows that he is going to remain under Mr Williams’ gaze until he has answered ‘correctly’. This eventually arrives with a sense of relief, using emphasis and the elongation of the vowel (‘ha::s’), which he is rewarded for by Mr Williams on line 9. Mr Williams here is enacting what Lemov (2015: 187) calls ‘position for power’, instructing teachers to manipulate their bodies so that students know they are being physically and linguistically monitored at all times to ‘build [a] subtle but pervasive control of the classroom environment’. The surveillance and policing of ‘noncompliant’ classroom language are here carried out by verbal and gestural means, via the grafting on of ‘standard’ grammar and linguistic ‘capital’ (Bourdieu, 1991).

Ironically, Shakir’s non-standardised construction could have been the source of a meaningful exchange about language, especially given that the class are studying prefixes and suffixes, all the participants in the class are Black African Americans and the speech of these communities have long been stigmatised in schools (e.g. Baker-Bell, 2020). Of the exchange, Lemov (2015: 118) writes that Mr Williams ‘reinforces the language of opportunity’ in the way that he ‘punches the error’ whilst ‘maintaining a neutral and nonjudgmental tone’. According to Lemov, the ‘language of opportunity’

is 'standardised English', or to use Alim and Smitherman's (2012) more politically accurate term, 'White Mainstream English'. It is unclear why such a violent metaphor is required to talk about young people's language, nor how a teacher can 'punch' an 'error' in a neutral and non-judgemental way, especially if such practices are guided by the aggressive TLAC language of business and sport. My fieldnotes from NUA reveal a number of cases where Format Matters was enacted in the classroom and corridor, serving as further evidence that Lemov-inspired language surveillance and disciplining is widespread in schools, with TLAC sitting as a policy driver which reinforces standard language ideologies under a benevolent guise of 'improving behaviour' and helping students in 'advancing to college and beyond' (Lemov, 2015: 121).

### **Discussion: language, law and order**

Recent policy moves have granted schools in England political and financial powers to 'get tough' on behaviour, and this article has explored this in relation to the disciplining and surveillance of language. I began by exploring Clark's notion of 'language disciplining' and Cameron's 'verbal hygiene' in relation to current education policy, and then used these concepts to uncover the connections between language, law and order in a London secondary school.

As was the case during my time at NUA, language policies in schools are discursively constructed through texts, interactions and pedagogies. They are enacted in accordance with the local contexts of individual schools and shaped by vertical policy drivers including Ofsted and examination boards but also teacher beliefs and ideologies. A particularly powerful ideology within these policies is that of the 'standardised language', which this article has attempted to expand from beyond traditional conceptualisations of 'language' (i.e. speech and writing) to include movement, gesture and appearance. In this expanded view, attempts to standardise language are wrapped up in standardising the body, framed as a 'civilising force' and intermingling under a general veneer of behaviour management, order, regulation and 'appropriateness' (Foucault, 1979; Youdell, 2006). The *Teach Like a Champion* industry is a particularly available and prominent weapon in the surveillance and disciplining of language, sold on the educational marketplace to teachers as a 'toolkit' which will 'transform students [...] into achievers and believers, and rewrite the equation of opportunity' (Lemov, 2015: 2). Part of this 'achievement' and 'opportunity' involves the grafting on of what Whitman (2008) calls 'new paternalism': highly regulated attempts to make students think, act and talk in accordance with white, middle-class behaviours. In this way, TLAC and 'strict' language policies do nothing to address existing systems of social hierarchies and the domination of normative language practices, but perpetuate them through the insistence that racialised and classed young people assimilate towards a socially constructed 'standard', achieved through the stigmatisation, eradication and *outlawing* of literacies (see Rosa, 2018). These processes of physical and linguistic standardisation under the guise of emancipation and 'social mobility' are characteristic of many academies in the UK (see Kulz, 2017) and charter schools in the USA (see Stahl, 2019).

The surveillance, disciplining and policing of language is an overlooked part of research within the sociology of education, and I suggest its incorporation into post-

panoptic models such as that of Page (2017a,b), which offer a multi-dimensional assemblage for conceptualising how performance and behaviour get monitored and controlled within schools. *Language* is an important addition here, cutting across Page's tripartite model of 'vertical', 'horizontal' and 'intrapersonal' surveillance (Page, 2017a: 995), being operationalised through a range of technologies and mechanisms including curriculum documents, Ofsted inspections, teacher standards, school policies, posters and signs on walls, textbooks, classroom scripts and classroom cultures of so-called 'appropriate' language. This assemblage can function as a 'hidden', de facto language policy (Shohamy, 2006) or an explicit list of language 'rules'. At the centre of this dense web of disciplinary mechanisms sits standardised English: a racialised and classed social construct which operates under the myth that it is easily identifiable and assessed, as well as being fetishised as 'superior quality' and equated with academic and economic 'success'. For these reasons, it presents a particularly visible and audible modality to be placed under surveillance. In schools such as NUA, students are constructed as 'successful' by conforming and adhering to these systems of language surveillance, under a promise of rewards (i.e. educational and employment prosperity) and a threat of sanctions (i.e. language stigma, pathologisation and chastisement). Under similar systems of language disciplining, such as the Teachers' Standards, the classroom scripts and body management routines of TLAC and 'standard English only' school-level policies, teachers work under sets of criteria on which their linguistic performance is judged, managed and placed under surveillance.

## **Conclusion**

Through a grounded approach, I have shown the mechanics of language disciplining in policy texts and how this gets enacted in classrooms and corridors. I have examined how discourses about language get wrapped up as part of wider discourses around discipline, how standardisation processes intermingle both language and the body, and how language itself is disciplined through various channels of surveillance. In particular, no-excuses and zero-tolerance-style policies, together with the *Teach Like a Champion* industry can work to aggressively perpetuate the standard language ideology, which has material consequences in relation to language-based discrimination and an increasing culture of verbal stigma and surveillance in schools. This article has shown how this type of language prejudice manifests at both structural and individual levels via a cluster of mechanisms, from government-produced policy documents through to school-level policies, textbooks and micro-level classroom interactions. Although this article is based on data generated from a single school, the global popularity of TLAC and the prevalence of 'standard English only' clauses in school behaviour policies (see Cushing, 2020b) would strongly suggest that the findings are generalisable across a much wider variety of settings.

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## Ethical guidelines

Ethical approval was granted by my institution and I adhered to the practices outlined in the BERA guidelines (BERA, 2018). The names of participating schools have been anonymised.

## Conflict of interest

There was no conflict of interest in undertaking this research.

## Data availability statement

Research data are not shared.

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## Appendix

Transcription conventions:

(.), short pause

(2), longer pause in number of seconds

underlined text, emphasis

::::, elongated vowel

indentation, overlapping talk