

The Results of the National Heritage Language Survey: Implications for Teaching, Curriculum Design, and Professional Development

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Abstract: *This article reports on a survey of heritage language learners (HLLs) across different heritage languages (HLs) and geographic regions in the United States. A general profile of HLLs emerges as a student who (1) acquired English in early childhood, after acquiring the HL; (2) has limited exposure to the HL outside the home; (3) has relatively strong aural and oral skills but limited literacy skills; (4) has positive HL attitudes and experiences; and (5) studies the HL mainly to connect with communities of speakers in the United States and to gain insights into his or her roots. We argue that a community-based curriculum represents an effective way to harness the wealth of knowledge and experiences that HLLs bring to the classroom and to respond to their goals for their HL.*

Key words: *community-based curriculum, heritage language (HL), heritage language attitudes, heritage language learners (HLL), motivations*

Introduction

A comparison of the U.S. Census Bureau data of the censuses of 1990 and 2000 as well as the Community Estimates of 2007 and 2008 reveals that this country has been experiencing an unprecedented increase in immigration, which results in an increase of speakers of languages other than English and correspondingly larger enrollments of “heritage speakers” of these languages in classes of world languages. For example, according to the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey

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1 figures of 2008, several languages posted significant increases in speakers in the past 20 years. Spanish (34,559,894), Chinese (2,465,761), Tagalog (1,488,385), Vietnamese (1,332,633), Korean (1,051,641), and Russian (864,069) are among these languages (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009, n.p.). This creates a steady stream of students who speak a language other than English at home and enroll in classes of world languages to gain literacy and improve or maintain their home languages. Instructors have been concerned with teaching these students who, as we show, may require a different curriculum because of their specific proficiencies.

This article reports on a national survey of heritage language learners (HLLs) that aims to inform the design of curricula, materials, and professional development projects in the area of heritage language (HL) teaching.¹ The survey offers an unprecedented look at the linguistic profiles, goals, and attitudes of college-level HLLs across different languages and geographic regions in the United States.² The ever-growing presence of HLLs in foreign language departments has created an unprecedented need for this kind of information as well as for clarity regarding basic terms and issues surrounding HL teaching.

Wiley (2001) explained the importance of the label “heritage language learner”:

The labels and definitions that we apply to heritage language learners are important, because they help to shape the status of the learners and the languages they are learning. Deciding on what types of learners should be included under the heritage language label raises a number of issues related to identity and inclusion and exclusion. . . . Some learners, with a desire to establish a connection with a past language, might not be speakers of that language yet. (p. 35)

The labels applied to the learners and languages that fall under the domain of “heritage language teaching” vary considerably, depending on the importance assigned to learners’ ability to speak the HL.

Fishman (2001, p. 81) defined HLs “as those that (a) are LOTEs (languages other than English) and that (b) have a particular family relevance to the learners.” Van Deusen-Scholl (2003, p. 222) used the term “learners with a heritage motivation” in reference to those “raised with a strong cultural connection to a particular language through family interaction.” Hornberger and Wang (2008, p. 27) defined HLLs as “individuals who have familial or ancestral ties to a particular language that is not English and who exert their agency in determining whether or not they are HLLs (heritage language learners) of that HL (heritage language) and HC (heritage community).” Valdés (2001, p. 38) defined a heritage speaker in a U.S. context as an individual “who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or merely understands the heritage language, and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language.”

Polinsky and Kagan (2007) framed their discussion of terminology by proposing a broad and a narrow definition of *heritage language*.

1. A broadly defined HL is part of that person’s family or cultural heritage, the language may not have been spoken in the home, and the person has no functional proficiency in the language and would most likely have to study that language as an L2 learner. A typical example is someone whose family immigrated to the United States in the 19th or early 20th century. As a third or fourth generation born in this country, the person may have an “ethnic” or cultural interest in the language but no ability to speak or comprehend it. The definitions put forward by Fishman (2001), Van Deusen-Scholl (2003), and Hornberger and Wang (2008) all fit the broad definition of *heritage languages*.
2. A narrowly defined HL “was first in the order of acquisition but was not completely acquired because of the individual’s switch to another dominant language” (Polinsky & Kagan, 2007, p. 369).

Unlike broadly defined heritage speakers, who are like second language (L2) learners, linguistically speaking, narrowly defined heritage speakers bring to the classroom some measure of competence in the language. Isurin and Ivanova-Sullivan (2008) compared vocabulary data from a narrative by HLLs and L2 learners matched for proficiency and found that HLLs “clearly had fewer lexical gaps” and “a more diversified range of vocabulary than the L2 learners, including the use of synonyms.” The authors stress that HLLs did not only “describe the events chronologically but they also interpreted them, using a full range of lexical, syntactic, and discourse means such as adjectives, various types of subordinate clauses, particles, interjections, etc.” (p. 81). Polinsky and Kagan (2007) agreed with Valdés that heritage speakers’ aural proficiency is stronger than their competence in other modalities. As for speaking, they proposed that heritage speakers “fall within a continuum, from rather fluent speakers, who can sound almost like competent native speakers, to those who can barely speak the home language” (p. 371).

The survey described in this article assumes Polinsky and Kagan’s narrow definition. That is, it focuses on learners who have some functional abilities in their HL, as its

factors that have been shown to correlate with competency in the HL, specifically (1) generational status in the United States, (2) the age at which HL learners acquired English, (3) the order in which they acquired their HL and English, (4) the language(s) they speak at home, and (5) the amount of schooling and other input received in the HL.

Regarding generational status, research indicates that competency in the HL declines with each generation in the United States, creating a bilingual continuum (Silva-Corvalán, 1994). Typically, the foreign-born retain strong skills in the HL, while second- and especially third-generation speakers show evidence of incomplete acquisition and loss of linguistic structures. Beyond the third generation, few HL learners retain a functional command of their language (Fishman, 1991; Silva-Corvalán, 2003; Veltman, 2000). Valdés (2000) captured this continuum in the following chart, which also serves to represent different types of HLLs. Having some level of proficiency in their HL, all the learners represented in quadrants 2, 3, 4, and 5 fit the narrow definition assumed in the survey, while those in quadrant 6 only fit the broad definition.

Valdés (2000, p. 386) graphically represented bilinguals of different generations in the chart below:

| | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| First Generation | 1. Monolinguals in HL A | 2. Incipient Bilinguals Ab |
| Second and Third Generation | 3. HL Dominant AB | 4. English Dominant Ba |
| Fourth Generation | 5. English Dominant Ba | 6. English Monolingual B |

HL—heritage language; Aa—heritage language; Bb—English

purpose is to contribute to the design of methodologies and curricula that build upon the linguistic skills of these learners. As we show, these skills span a wide range of levels, as measured by students’ self-ratings. Their attitudes, goals, and experiences surrounding their HL also vary significantly, as measured through both closed and open-ended questions. We also probed learners on background

Age plays a critical role in HL acquisition. In rough terms, the earlier a child comes into contact with the dominant language (English) and starts to use this language more than the HL, the more compromised his or her knowledge of the HL will be (Montrul, 2008). This may happen because contact with the dominant language diminishes access to input in the HL

during the “critical period” for language acquisition, when the learner’s grammatical system is being formed. If input is diminished before the closing of this period, the child’s HL grammar will not develop to a mature state and will be susceptible to attrition (Montrul, 2006, 2008). On the other hand, if a child receives sufficient input during this critical period, the grammatical system will reach full maturity. For similar conclusions regarding Russian, see Polinsky (1997, 2006) and Polinsky and Kagan (2007). In general, core elements of the syntax are acquired well even with reduced input in childhood. However, non-core properties require substantially more input throughout childhood (Montrul, 2008). The order or sequence of acquisition of a bilingual’s two languages, i.e., whether they are learned simultaneously or sequentially, is also consequential. Research indicates that simultaneous bilinguals—individuals who are exposed to two languages from birth or before age 3—have more problems with core elements of the HL grammar than sequential bilingual children—individuals who learn their second language during childhood after acquiring the structural foundations of their first language (Montrul, 2008; Silva-Corvalán, 2003). It is believed that the grammatical superiority of sequential bilinguals may stem from the fact that they receive more input in the home environment than simultaneous bilinguals. This allows them to form more complete grammatical systems.

Demonstrating the importance of input in the home environment, Mueller (2002) and Silva-Corvalán (2003) found that children who spoke only Spanish at home had a better command of their HL than those who spoke both Spanish and English. Other input-related factors that have been shown to correlate with a better control of grammatical phenomena include having two or more years of schooling abroad, speaking the HL outside the home, traveling abroad, and community support (Fairclough, 2005; Kagan, 2005; Montrul, 2008). The survey sought information on all of these factors.

Survey Methodology and Overview

The survey was conducted by the National Heritage Language Resource Center (NHLRC) in 2007–2009. The NHLRC piloted the survey during the design stage with 10 respondents and later with a class. The researchers analyzed the responses and modified the survey accordingly. After opening the survey to universities across the country, the researchers recruited students through their HL instructors, who took their language classes to a computer lab for HL students to complete the survey.³ Some instructors assigned the survey as homework. The researchers acquired a number of responses through listserv announcements and general advertising of the survey on the NHLRC Web site as well as announcements of the survey at national conferences. This survey was confidential, administered online through <http://www.surveymonkey.com>, and consisted of 45 discrete-point questions and two open-ended questions. As previously mentioned, these questions addressed students’ attitudes, goals, and experiences surrounding their HL, background factors that have been shown to correlate with competency in the HL and students’ self-ratings in the HL and English. The open-ended questions probed students’ particular experiences with their HL in school and their HL community. The researchers read the first 500 answers and sorted them according to themes. The researchers assigned a code for any theme mentioned by five or more respondents, while they assigned a catch-all “other” category for those with fewer than five respondents. Subsequently, the researchers coded all open-ended answers for these themes.

As of the writing of this article, the researchers had collected information from 1,732 students. A large majority of the respondents came from California. Specifically, 72% were from the University of California (i.e., UCLA, Irvine, Davis, Berkeley, etc.) and 12% from the California State University system (Long Beach, Fullerton). For some languages, the geo-

graphical distribution was different. For example, 72% of the Russian responses came from outside of California, mainly from New Jersey and New York. Overall, survey responses from outside of California came from a wide range of institutions.

The researchers were careful not to overwhelm the survey by any one language. We made a concerted effort to contact teachers of less commonly taught languages. The survey remains online and available, and we added more data after we tallied and analyzed the results for this article. We hope that the publication of this article will also help us get more data from across the country.

The survey represents 22 languages in all. The number of responses per language varied widely, from several hundred in Spanish and Mandarin to a handful in languages such as Ilokano, Polish, and Portuguese. This range of variation was largely a function of three factors: (1) demographic realities in California and the nation, (2) the availability of courses in particular languages from which to draw respondents, and (3) the willingness of individual instructors to enlist the participation of their students. Table 1 lists the languages making up 94% of the responses.

The responses, as shown below, (1) reveal key commonalities across HLLs and HLL contexts, (2) point to language-specific particularities, and (3) attest to the heterogeneity of profiles that HLLs bring to the classroom.

Focusing first on the commonalities, the next section offers a general profile of HLLs as a group. Following this, the discussion focuses on differences between HLLs by nativity and/or age of arrival in the United States, and language. Finally, to illustrate the heterogeneity of respondents we profile the variety of responses obtained in three different language classes. In each of these discussions, the presentation of the results follows the general organization of the survey, focusing on background factors, issues of language usage and proficiency, and attitudes and goals.

TABLE 1

Heritage Languages Spoken by 94% of Respondents

| Language | Percent | n |
|----------------|---------|-----|
| Arabic | 1.6% | 28 |
| Armenian | 3.4% | 58 |
| Cantonese | 10.2% | 174 |
| Hindi/ Urdu | 1.4% | 24 |
| Japanese | 1.1% | 19 |
| Korean | 7.8% | 134 |
| Mandarin | 15.7% | 268 |
| Persian | 3.5% | 60 |
| Russian | 12.7% | 205 |
| Spanish | 23.1% | 396 |
| Tagalog | 6.5% | 111 |
| Thai | 0.6% | 11 |
| Vietnamese | 6.6% | 113 |

Language Usage and Proficiency

A large majority of the respondents were born in the United States (61.5%) or arrived in this country before their 6th birthday (18%). Not surprisingly, English was by far the most commonly used language by the respondents: 58.9% spoke it most of the time, and 70.1% used it most of the time with their friends. On the other hand, only 13.2% of respondents reported speaking English only at home with their parents. In this context, the bulk of respondents (45.9%) used a combination of their HL and English or just their HL (39.5%).

The overwhelming majority of HLLs (70.2%) reported making exclusive use of their home language up until age 5, when most children start school in the United States. HLLs therefore were largely sequential bilinguals. Thereafter, this use declined sharply such that by age 18, only 1.3% of

TABLE 2

Responses to Survey Question: “What language did you use most in the following periods in your life?”

| Age | English | HL | Both |
|-----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| 0–5 years old | 11.2% (171) | 70.2% (1074) | 18.7% (286) |
| 6–12 years old | 27.5% (419) | 18.9% (288) | 53.6% (817) |
| 13–18 years old | 44.0% (667) | 4.0% (61) | 51.9% (787) |
| 18+ years old | 44.4% (658) | 1.3% (19) | 54.3% (805) |

HLLs (*N* = 19) used this language to the exclusion of English. This is not surprising, given the fact that most respondents were schooled in the United States and were enrolled in a mainstream American university at the time of the survey. It is interesting to note that after they started school, HLLs split into two distinct groups with regard to their linguistic practices. As shown in Table 2, slightly more than half of the respondents continued to use their HL alongside English, while a smaller but significant number reported using English to the exclusion of their HL.

As children, most respondents (71.3%) had the benefit of having been read to in their HL by parents or relatives. A large majority (80%) also reported having traveled to their HL country at least once. One-fourth of these had visited that country three to five times, and 11.8% actually visited once a year. However, a significant majority of respondents (58.6%) did not attend a community or religious school in the United States, and an even larger number (74.1%) had no experience attending school in their HL country.

HLLs who used their HL during the college years did so primarily in the oral/aural domains (e.g., talking on the phone, listening to music, watching a movie). Notably, half never read in their HL or spent fewer than 15 minutes per week reading in this language outside of class. By contrast, the bulk of respondents (39.5%) spent more than 2 hours per week reading in English

outside of class, and only 11.7% spent 15 minutes or less reading outside of class. Note also that the overwhelming majority of respondents (84.5%) never accessed the Internet in the HL or accessed it only rarely. In all, respondents spent significantly less time using their HL than using English. However, the HL still got a lot of use, albeit in confined ways, namely, orally and in the context of the home. Not surprisingly, respondents considered their oral skills in the HL to be significantly stronger than their literacy skills (see Table 3).

As shown in Table 4, this ranking was replicated with English. However, the overwhelming majority of respondents rated their skills in English in the advanced to native-like range across the board.

Attitudes and Goals

Respondents held overwhelmingly positive attitudes about their HL. They were far more likely to agree with positive characterizations of this language (Nos. 1–6, Table 5), than with negative ones (Nos. 7–11). Likewise, when asked to relate an experience in school, home, or neighborhood involving their HL, many respondents offered examples where this language made it possible to connect with others better or proved to be of practical value. Examples 1 and 2 below show how the HL served to connect respondents with their peers, family, and community members. Example

TABLE 3

Respondents' Self-Assessment of HL Knowledge in Four Skills

| Skill | None | Low | Inter- mediate | Advanced | Native-like |
|-----------|-----------|-------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Listening | 0.5% (8) | 4.2% (65) | 27.5% (424) | 31.0% (478) | 36.8% (568) |
| Speaking | 1.0% (15) | 16.8% (259) | 37.8% (582) | 24.3% (374) | 20.1% (310) |
| Reading | 4.0% (61) | 28.8% (444) | 39.6% (611) | 15.4% (237) | 12.2% (188) |
| Writing | 4.8% (74) | 40.3% (620) | 36.2% (557) | 11.3% (174) | 7.5% (115) |

3 illustrates how respondents used their HL in the school setting to help others.

Example 1: Knowledge of my heritage language has helped me outside of school in that I've been able to communicate and connect with my family and the greater Ethiopian community. It has given me a sort of privacy setting in public as well in that (since not many non-native Amharic speakers know the language) I have the confidence and assurance of maintaining a private conversation (to the extent that I can speak Amharic well enough to maintain it). Knowledge of my heritage language has also helped me at church in that I have been able to understand parts of and follow along in the sermons (which are partly held in Amharic). Perhaps the most important thing to note about knowing my heri-

tage language is that it has allowed me to communicate with my family (especially because many older relatives, like my grandmothers, speak very little to no English at all).

Example 2: It is very helpful. I met most of my friends because we all knew how to speak Russian and we were all coming from the same place of moving to America when we were little kids. I also find that my heritage language has helped make school more enjoyable. We would always laugh about a joke in Russian or something else that the English students couldn't or wouldn't understand. It made school fun!

Example 3: Several times the knowledge that I have of my HL has been to the benefit of teachers that had problems because of the language barrier

TABLE 4

Respondents' Ratings of Their Abilities in English by Skill

| | None | Low | Inter- mediate | Advanced | Native-like |
|-----------|----------|-----------|-------------------|-------------|--------------|
| Listening | 0.1% (2) | 0.0% (0) | 4.9% (75) | 18.5% (285) | 76.5% (1179) |
| Speaking | 0.1% (2) | 0.2% (3) | 7.8% (120) | 19.5% (301) | 72.3% (1114) |
| Reading | 0.1% (2) | 0.5% (8) | 8.2% (126) | 20.8% (321) | 70.3% (1083) |
| Writing | 0.1% (1) | 1.1% (17) | 12.7% (195) | 21.3% (327) | 64.9% (998) |

TABLE 5

Respondents' Attitudes Toward Their Heritage Language

| | | |
|-----|--|-------|
| 1. | It's an important part of who I am. | 85.2% |
| 2. | I find it useful. | 88.5% |
| 3. | It has made school more enjoyable. | 46.4% |
| 4. | It has helped me make more friends. | 51.6% |
| 5. | It's a valuable skill. | 88.9% |
| 6. | It's a necessary skill. | 70.7% |
| 7. | At times I feel embarrassed. | 30.0% |
| 8. | It's been a barrier to learning English. | 7.3% |
| 9. | It has made school more challenging. | 18.9% |
| 10. | It has made school less enjoyable. | 2.4% |
| 11. | It has made it more difficult to make friends. | 2.4% |

between them and new students that spoke mainly Cantonese. So in the end I ended up sitting next to them, being the big buddy, or whatever it was. In the end, it showed how much I really knew my language, even though it was easier to get the point across if I had explained it, but I still had a long way to go if I wanted to be fluent in Cantonese.

These findings mirror closely those of Cho (2000). Reporting on a survey of second-generation Koreans, she noted:

In addition to wanting to communicate with family, friends, and community, and a desire to hold on to one's Korean heritage, a number of the respondents mentioned the career benefits of being bilingual as a reason for their desire to acquire the HL. . . . Having developed one's HL was also shown to provide advantages for individuals when interacting with the community, such as knowing the Korean language provided, for some, the freedom to express their feelings and thoughts to HL speakers at any given moment; and knowing their HL allowed them to serve the community. (p. 374)

To be sure, there were negative responses in the survey. Some students gave examples of their life being made difficult by their being perceived as different (see Example 4), while others lamented their lack of knowledge of the HL (see Example 5). Example 6 offers a glimpse of a student who could see both negative and positive sides to HL knowledge.

Example 4: Socially, my heritage doesn't hinder me. However, I think that as an elementary and middle school student, having an Asian heritage has made it somewhat difficult for me. Although I was born here, and speak English with no accent, administrators often tested me for ESL even though I explained many times that my English was fine. In fact, I learned to never put down that Vietnamese was my first language, because that just caused more trouble and landed me in ESL programs that slowed down my education.

Example 5: There was one incident when my lack of spoken Hmong caused me problems at school. One Friday evening a student organization held a Hmong medical workshop where med

students would take on the role of doctors and students would pretend to be taking an elder, parent, or non-English-speaking individual to see the doctor. Students had to play as interpreter between doctor and the non-English-speaking participant. When it would come to my turn, I would have difficult [sic] speaking in Hmong and I felt embarrassed and ashamed of myself that I couldn't speak my language fluently.

Example 6: I can remember an incident when I would be made fun of for knowing Mandarin. Kids would tease me and tell me that Chinese sounds like "Ching Chang Chong." Then they would make up sounds and ask me if they had said anything in Chinese. There have also been times when knowing Chinese had come in handy. I was in an International Cultures class, and I was able to teach the class how to write simple characters in Chinese.

As to their reasons for studying their HL, respondents' top priorities were (1) to learn about their cultural and linguistic roots (59.8%), (2) to communicate better with family and friends in the United States (57.5%), and (3) as a purely pragmatic goal, to fulfill their language requirement (53.7%). A significant number (49%) also cited professional reasons, though there were notable differences between languages with regard to this goal. We discuss these differences in the section on specific languages below. For now, suffice it to say that from a linguistic standpoint, these goals present very different levels of difficulty. For example, "fulfilling a language requirement" is a far more attainable goal than preparing for a career or job. It bears noting that "to communicate better with family and friends abroad" was ranked significantly lower than "to communicate with family and friends in the United States" (47.1% vs. 57.5%). This was true even for Spanish speakers, who traveled to their countries of origin with great frequency. Finally, students' most commonly cited learning objectives

were (1) to increase their vocabulary (68%), and (2) to improve their writing (65.6%).

In summary, the profile of the typical HLL that emerged from the data in this section was that of a student who has largely positive feelings and experiences with his or her HL and whose reasons for studying this language are primarily personal, rather than academic or professional.

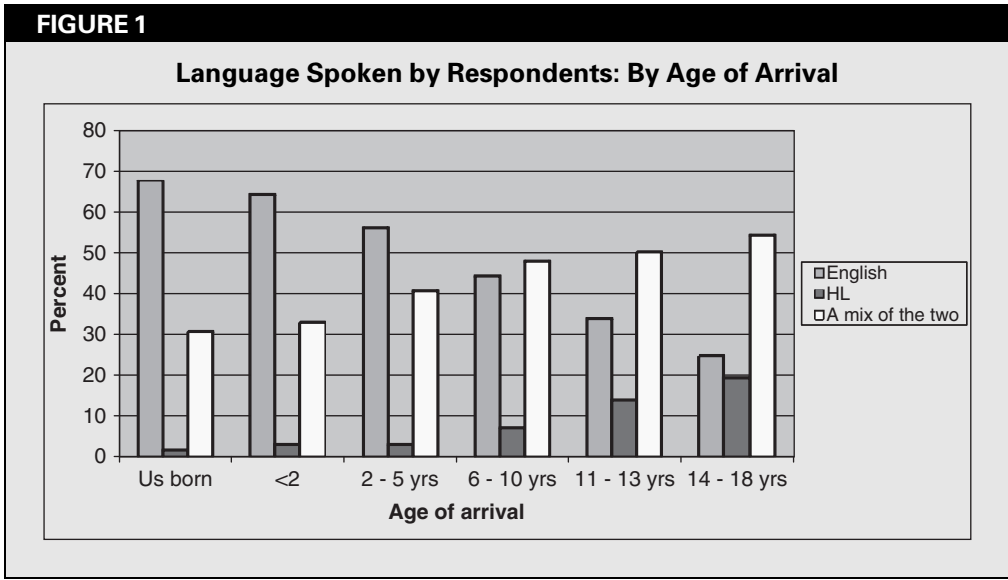
HLL Profiles: Differences Relating to Place of Birth and/or Age of Arrival

Respondents' place of birth (i.e., the United States or abroad) and, for those born abroad, their age of arrival in the United States, played an important role in matters of usage and proficiency. As shown below, as respondents' age of arrival in the United States went up, so did their use of the HL, either alone (represented in dark gray), or in combination with English (represented in light gray; see Figure 1). Conversely, the younger they were when they arrived in the United States, the less likely they were to use their HL and the more likely they were to use only English.

As shown in Figures 2 and 3, the same pattern held with parents and friends; namely, late arrivals were more likely to use their HL than the U.S.-born and early arrivals. These graphs also serve to illustrate a point made earlier: The home environment heavily favored the use of the HL, either alone or in combination with English (we discuss Tagalog, the notable exception to this pattern, below). In contrast, peer interactions overwhelmingly favored English, to the virtual exclusion of the HL.

Respondents' place of birth and/or age of arrival in the United States also affected how they rated their own HL abilities. Predictably, older arrivals rated their HL abilities as higher than younger ones or the U.S.-born (see Figure 4).

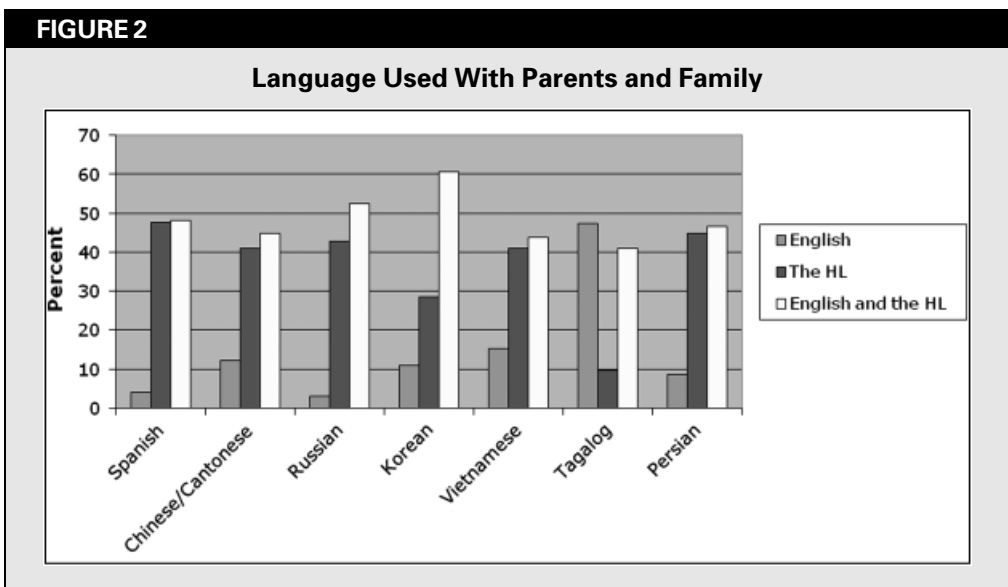
Finally, place of birth and/or age of arrival also had a bearing on how much use HLLs made of the written registers in their HL. Specifically, the later the age of arrival,

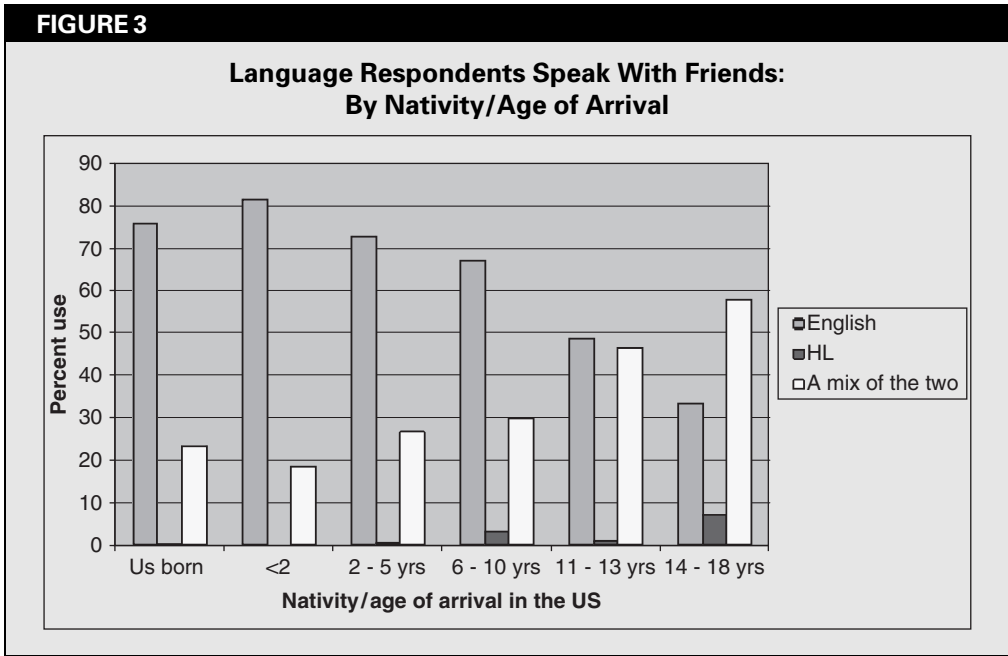


the higher the amount of time spent reading and surfing the Internet in the HL. In reference to the amount of time spent reading in English outside of class, it is interesting to note that the majority of HLLs reported spending about two hours per week, regardless of their place of birth or age of arrival. As such, the amount of time spent reading in English remained constant across HLLs, while HL reading time varied considerably by nativity and/or age of arrival (see Figure 5).

HLL Profile: Language-Particular Differences

A language-by-language analysis yielded interesting differences in background and usage between HLLs. In this section we report on languages with 60 or more respondents, namely Spanish, Mandarin/Cantonese, Russian, Korean, Vietnamese, Tagalog, and Persian. Following the general outline of the survey, we describe



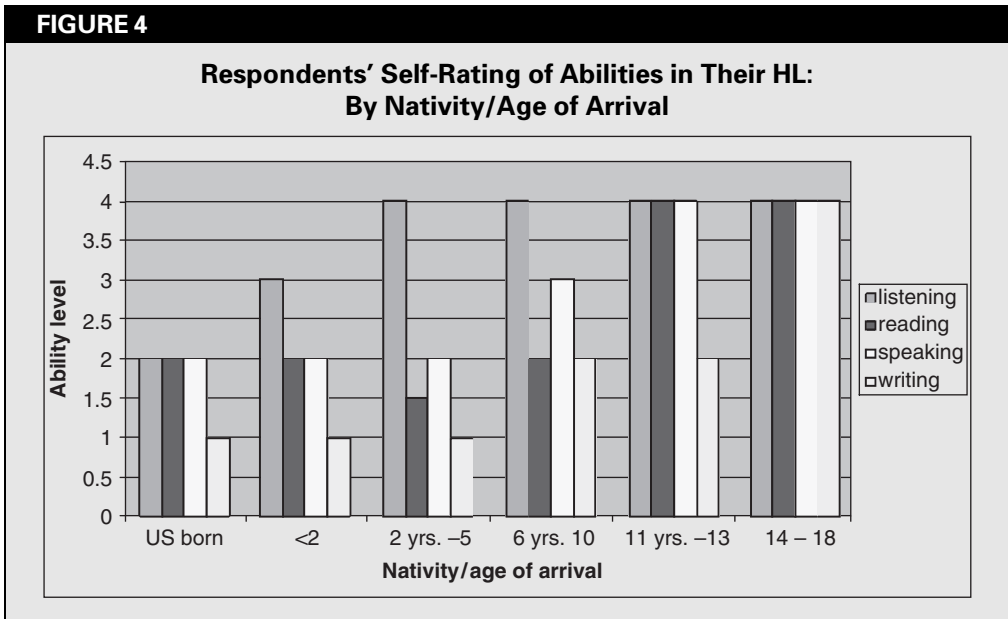


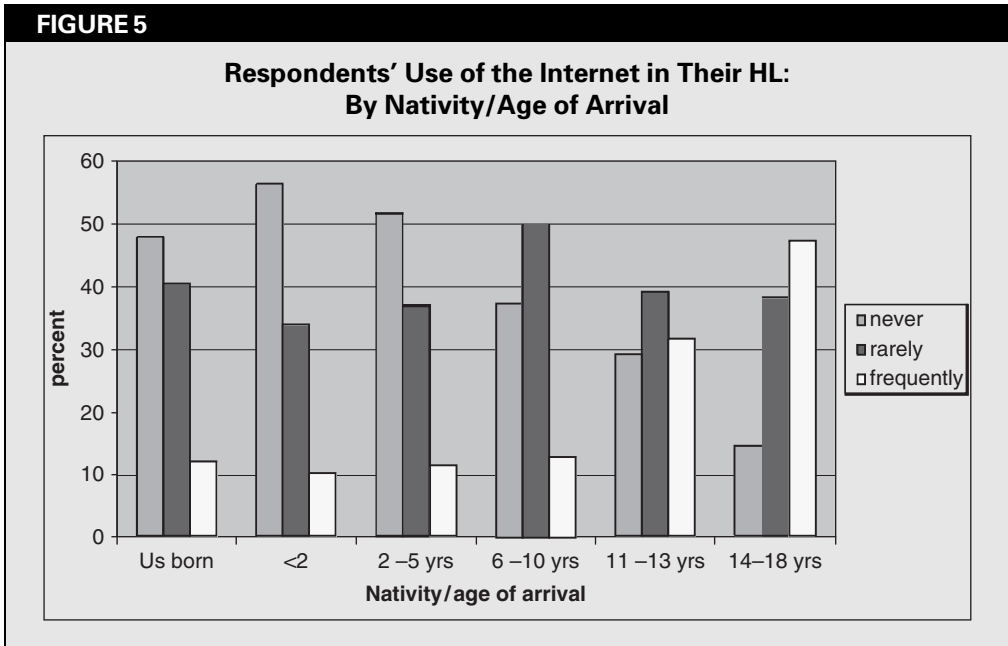
background factors, literacy, and goals. In each case, we focus on the characteristics that distinguished HLLs of these languages from those of respondents as a whole.

Spanish

The overwhelming majority of Spanish-speaking HLLs were born in the United

States (75.3%) or arrived before age 11 (18.9%). However, this did not necessarily translate into diminished exposure to the Spanish language. Quite the opposite, relative to other survey respondents, Spanish-speaking HLLs made frequent use of their home language, but only in informal (i.e., non-academic) contexts. Notably, 30.8% of





Spanish-speaking respondents visited their country of origin once a year, and another 31.1% had visited three to five times. Indeed, the Spanish-speaking were the least likely of the survey respondents to have never visited their country of origin or to have visited it only once. Spanish speakers were also the least likely to report that they never read or accessed the Internet in their HL. In addition, the overwhelming majority (95.5%) used Spanish at home, either exclusively or in combination with English.

In contrast, Spanish-speakers' exposure to formal or academic Spanish was significantly more limited. Notably, nearly one half (45.5%) had no experience studying their HL language either in their country of origin or in a community or religious school in the United States, and 81% never attended school in a Spanish-speaking country. Despite this, the overwhelming majority of these students rated their literacy skills in Spanish in the range of intermediate to native-like (95.5% for reading and 86.5% for writing). This was likely due to a combination of two factors. First, Spanish, being highly phonetic, is relatively easy to read and write. And second, literacy was taught in the

home environment, as evidenced by the fact that Spanish speakers were more likely than other respondents to have learned to read in their HL before English (50% vs. 36.8%). They were also more likely to have been read to by a parent or relative in the HL than the average survey respondent (78.5% vs. 71.0%) (see Zentella, 2005, for literacy practices in Spanish-speaking homes). Regarding their aural skills, most Spanish-speaking HLLs rated themselves in the range of advanced to native-like (99.2% for listening and 66% for speaking). As for their reason for studying their HL, Spanish HLLs, along with Japanese, Mandarin, and Cantonese HLLs, were the only respondents for whom professional goals outranked personal goals. Specifically, 71.1% of Spanish speakers said they were studying their HL with a future career or job in mind. Other reasons were the same as in most languages: to communicate better with family and friends in the United States (50.2%), to learn about their cultural and linguistic roots (48.9%), and to fulfill a language requirement (47.3%).

In all, Spanish-speaking HLLs can be characterized as having high levels of exposure to their HL, relatively high self-reported proficiency levels in the oral/aural

and written modalities, and ambitious goals for their HL. This profile is not surprising, given the proximity to Latin America and the significant demographic, social, and economic presence of Spanish-speakers in the United States (Carreira, 2002).

Mandarin and Cantonese

As was the case with Spanish, the overwhelming majority of Mandarin and Cantonese HLLs were either born in the United States (69.5%) or arrived in this country before age 11 (24%). However, these learners' exposure to their HL was considerably more limited than that of Spanish speakers. For example, only 10.5% visited their country of origin once a year, compared to 30.8% of Spanish speakers. In addition, 45.3% never read in their HL and 82.2% never accessed the Internet in this language or accessed it only rarely.

In reference to schooling, 31.2% attended school in China and almost half (45.8%) had never attended a community or religious school in the United States. At the same time, it is interesting to note that many of those who attended a community or religious school (27.9%) did so for four or more years. The overwhelming majority of Mandarin and Cantonese HLLs rated their reading (84.1%) and writing skills (89%) in the range of low to intermediate. In sharp contrast to their literacy skills, they assessed their aural/oral skills mostly in the intermediate to advanced range (75.3% for listening and 65.8% for speaking).

As previously mentioned, a substantial majority (61.9%) of Mandarin and Cantonese HLLs cited professional goals as their primary reason for studying their HL. These ambitious goals present a significant pedagogical challenge, given their reduced levels of exposure to their HL and limited proficiency in the written and spoken modalities of their language.

Russian

A large majority (75.95%) of Russian-speaking HLLs were born abroad but arrived in

this country at a fairly young age (42% were 5 or under, and 27.8% were 6–10 years old). In comparison to early arrivals from other languages, Russian HLLs received significant exposure to their HL in the home environment. In particular, they had the distinction of being the least likely of respondents to use English to the exclusion of their HL at home. In addition, they were the most likely to have been read to in their HL by a parent or relative (93.1%), as well as the most likely to live with their parents during college (57.2%). And, as was the case with Spanish, a little more than half first learned to read in their HL (56.4%) or learned to read in English and Russian at the same time (11.5%). With regard to schooling, Russian-speaking HLLs presented a mixed profile. They were both the most likely to have attended school in their country of origin (37.5%) and the least likely to have attended a community or church school in their HL in the United States (15.8%). Most rated their reading and writing skills in the low to intermediate range (68.5% for reading and 71.5% for writing). At the same time, many also rated themselves as advanced to native-like in these areas (21.9% for reading and 21.2% for writing). In contrast, 89% of respondents rated their listening skills in the range of advanced to native-like, and 69% rated their speaking abilities as intermediate or advanced.

Their three main reasons for studying their HL were (1) to communicate better with family and friends in the United States (64.6%), (2) to learn about their cultural and linguistic roots (59.1%), and (3) to communicate better with family and friends abroad (44.5%). At 36%, professional reasons ranked fifth, after fulfilling a language requirement (39.6%). In this way, Russian HLLs' goals were less ambitious than those of Chinese- and Spanish-speaking HLLs, who prioritized making professional use of their language.

Korean

With 75.9% being American born and 19.8% having arrived in this country before age 11, Korean HLLs presented a nativity/age of arri-

val profile remarkably similar to Spanish HLLs. However, they rated their HL skills considerably lower than Spanish speakers. Specifically, a large majority (78.2%) rated their listening skills in the intermediate to advanced range and their speaking skills in the low to intermediate range. Likewise, 84.8% rated their reading skills in the low to intermediate range, and 89.9% rated their writing skills in this range. These ratings were not readily explainable by a lack of exposure to their HL. Indeed, among survey respondents, Korean HLLs had the highest rates of participation in a community or church school (72.3%) and participation in community events (50.4%). In this regard, it bears noting that Korean American communities have been particularly resourceful in promoting their language. Wiley (2005, p. 76) wrote: "They have their own professional teacher training association and professional conferences, a professional journal, and receive considerable support from the South Korean government in the form of educational language materials." With regard to the home, the overwhelming majority of survey respondents (80.3%) were read to in the HL by a parent or relative. Nonetheless, Korean speakers were among the least likely respondents to read in their HL in their college years.

Regarding their reasons for studying their HL, most cited as their top priority fulfilling a language requirement (72.9%). As noted earlier, from a linguistic standpoint, this was the least ambitious of the goals commonly cited by survey respondents. Other top goals for Korean HLLs were (1) to communicate better with family and friends in the United States (64.4%), (2) to learn about their cultural and linguistic roots (54.2%), and (3) to communicate better with family and friends abroad (51.7%). Again, these findings largely coincided with those of Cho (2000), except for the importance afforded to fulfilling a language requirement.

Tagalog

Among survey respondents, Tagalog-speaking HLLs stood out for their limited

exposure to their HL. The overwhelming majority (85.1%) reported making exclusive use of English at home, while none reported exclusive use of Tagalog. By comparison, only 13.6% of survey respondents on the whole reported making exclusive use of English in the home and 39.3% reported making exclusive use of their HL in this environment. Tagalog HLLs were also the least likely of all respondents to have been read to in their HL by a parent or other family member (37.3%) and the least likely to have first learned to read in their HL (18.0%). Despite this, nearly all Tagalog respondents (95.1%) believed that their family wanted them to maintain their HL.

Where schooling is concerned, only a minority of Tagalog HLLs reported having attended a community or church school (19.1%) or attending school in the Philippines (28.2%). In the area of proficiency, the majority rated themselves in the low to intermediate range in speaking (72.6%), reading (75.5%), and writing (83.4%). However, slightly more than half (54.9%) rated their listening skills in the advanced to native range.

Tagalog-speaking HLLs studied their HL primarily to explore their cultural and linguistic roots (84.3%), to fulfill a language requirement (79.4%), to communicate better with family and friends in the United States (72.5%), and to communicate better with family and friends abroad (68.1%).

Vietnamese

Like Tagalog speakers, Vietnamese speakers had very limited exposure to their HL. Specifically, they had the lowest rate of Internet usage in their HL: 70.3% never used it, and 26.1% used it only rarely. They had among the lowest rates of reading in the HL: 42.7% never read in Vietnamese, and 28.2% read in it for 15 minutes or less per week. They also had relatively little schooling in their HL: 85.9% did not attend school in Vietnam or attended only for 1–2 years, and 73% did not attend a community or church school in the United States or attended for less than a

year. Despite their limited linguistic exposure, Vietnamese HLLs gave themselves relatively high aural proficiency scores: 67.0% rated their listening skills in the intermediate to advanced range, and a full 25% rated themselves as native-like. In speaking, 63.4% considered themselves to be intermediate to advanced, and 9.8% considered themselves native-like. As is to be expected, their literacy scores were lower: 79.5% rated their reading skills in the low to intermediate range, and 83% rated their writing skills in this range too.

Like Tagalog speakers, their top reasons for studying Vietnamese were to (1) fulfill a language requirement (79.5%), (2) learn about their cultural and linguistic roots (67.9%), and (3) communicate with friends and family in the United States (67.0%). Communicating with family and friends abroad ranked a distant fourth, at 38.4%. This was consistent with the fact that Vietnamese HLL had limited experience with their home country: 52.7% had never been there, and 42.9% were there one or two times.

Persian

Persian students fit the general profile of HLLs quite well, with a few notable exceptions. They spent considerably more time reading in their HL than any other HLLs. Specifically, 45.8% spent at least one hour per week reading in Persian outside of class. By comparison, 28.2% of survey respondents in all languages averaged this much time reading in the HL. They were also

more likely than other respondents to have attended school in their country of origin (40.0% vs. 25.9%). At the same time, however, Persian HLLs were less likely to have attended a community or church school than the average survey respondent (30% vs. 41.4%). In terms of proficiency, the large majority of Persian HLLs placed themselves in the low to intermediate range in reading (85%) and writing (88.4%). However, they had strong aural skills: 77% rated their listening skills in the advanced to native-like range, and 75% rated their speaking skills in the intermediate to advanced range.

By way of summary, we provide a schematic representation of the languages and variables discussed in this section in Tables 6–10. Notably, exposure, use, and schooling showed significantly greater interlinguistic variance than aural proficiency and literacy skills. In the next section, we report on three languages with fewer numbers of students (Hindi/Urdu [41], Arabic [28], and Japanese [11]), in the context of highlighting the diversity of learner backgrounds represented in language classes enrolling HLs.

Intra-Language Variation

Issues of diversity present significant teaching challenges in classes enrolling HLLs. To illustrate this point, we profiled the students in three actual classes, labeled here as Arabic 100, Hindi/Urdu 100, and Japanese 100.

Arabic 100 is the sole course for HLLs in a large public university in California. At the time of this survey, it enrolled 10

TABLE 6

Exposure and Usage of Language

| High | | | Moderate | Low | |
|------------------------|---------|---------|----------|------------|---------|
| Spanish | Russian | Persian | Korean | Vietnamese | Tagalog |
| Mandarin and Cantonese | | | | | |

TABLE 7

Aural Proficiency (average of listening and speaking scores)

| Native-Advanced | | Intermediate | | Low |
|------------------------|---------|--------------|--------|-----|
| Spanish | Russian | Persian | Korean | |
| Vietnamese | | | | |
| Mandarin and Cantonese | | | | |
| Tagalog | | | | |

students—four were foreign-born and the rest were U.S.-born. These students ran the full range of proficiency levels in the written registers. At the top end of the proficiency scale was a foreign-born student who arrived in the United States between ages 14 and 16 having completed more than 9 years of schooling in an Arabic-speaking country. Given this background, it was not surprising that he considered his reading and writing skills to be advanced. The rest of the foreign-born arrived in this country before age 5 and thus had no schooling in their country of origin. However, two such students, along with one of the U.S.-born students, had 4 or more years of community or religious school in the United States. These students ranked themselves as intermediate readers and writers of Arabic. The remaining six students did not attend com-

munity school or attended for a year or less. Of these, two had low reading and writing skills, and the rest claimed to have no such skills at all.

When it came to the spoken registers, there was considerably more uniformity among the students in this class. Specifically, eight out of 10 students considered themselves to be advanced listeners and speakers of their HL. The two exceptions were (1) the aforementioned student who arrived between ages 14 and 16—he considered himself native-like in listening and speaking, and (2) a U.S.-born student who rated himself as an intermediate speaker and advanced listener. It is important to remember, however, that with Arabic this does not necessarily translate into a situation of mutual intelligibility. When they hail from different Arabic-speaking countries

TABLE 8

Literacy Skills (average of reading and writing scores)

| Native-Advanced | Intermediate | | Low |
|------------------------|--------------|---------|--------|
| | Spanish | Russian | Korean |
| Vietnamese | | | |
| Persian | | | |
| Tagalog | | | |
| Mandarin and Cantonese | | | |

TABLE 9

Schooling in the HL (includes foreign and domestic schools)

| Significant | Medium to Low | | | Limited |
|-------------|------------------------|---------|------------|---------|
| Russian | Mandarin and Cantonese | Spanish | Vietnamese | Tagalog |
| Korean | | | | |
| Persian | | | | |

(Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt), Arabic-speaking students may in fact be limited in their ability to converse with each other due to dialectal differences. Further complicating matters is the fact that Arabic is characterized by diglossia, a situation where two variants of a language coexist and are used in complementary ways: (1) Modern Standard Arabic, which is used in formal situations, is known by educated speakers and is used as a lingua franca among Arabs from different countries, and (2) Colloquial Arabic, which is used in informal communications, is not commonly used for written communication and has a limited range of intelligibility (Maamouri, 1998, 1999). Addressing the difficulties created by diglossia in Arabic countries, Maamouri (1998) wrote:

There is a growing awareness among some Arab education specialists that the low levels of educational achievement and high illiteracy and low literacy rates in most Arab countries are directly related to the complexities of the standard Arabic language used in formal schooling and non-formal education. (p. 5)

As exemplified by Arabic 100, this situation is further exacerbated in HL classes in the United States, where Arabic HL learners from different dialectal backgrounds and with different levels of exposure to formal schooling are grouped in the same class.

Diversity was also an issue in Hindi/Urdu 100, the second in a six-course sequence

at a large public university in California. Remarkably, this class of 16 students actually had HLLs from six different languages: Hindi/Urdu (7), Gujarati (4), Punjabi (2), Relugu (2), and Marahi (1). Though these languages are closely related and have some degree of mutual intelligibility, they have their own grammar, lexicon, and dialectal variants, and use one of the two writing scripts. In this way, teaching Hindi/Urdu may be comparable to teaching Spanish to a class of Spanish, Italian, French, and Portuguese speakers. As far as literacy goes, Hindi/Urdu 100 students ran the gamut of proficiencies. Seven had no reading skills, two had low skills, six were intermediate, and one was advanced. Likewise, seven had no writing skills, four had low writing skills, and the remaining five were intermediate writers (Gambhir, 2008).

Japanese 100 enrolled a fairly homogeneous group of HLLs. All 12 HLLs in this class ranked themselves as advanced to native-like in listening and speaking. Furthermore, eight of the 12 had a significant amount of formal education in Japanese. Six students (all U.S.-born) attended 4 or more years of a community school in the United States. One foreign-born student attended 6–8 years of school in Japan. Another student was raised in a Japanese-speaking home in Korea, where he attended Japanese school for 5 years. Not surprisingly, all these students rated themselves in the range of intermediate to advanced in reading and writing. The remaining four students, three

TABLE 10

Top Four Priorities for Their HL (1 = first priority, 2 = second priority, etc.)

| | For a career or job | To connect with cultural and linguistic roots | To communicate with family and friends in the United States | To fulfill a language requirement | To communicate with family and friends abroad |
|---------------------|---------------------|---|---|-----------------------------------|---|
| Spanish | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| Mandarin, Cantonese | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| Russian | | 2 | 1 | 4 | 3 |
| Korean | | 3 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| Tagalog | | 2 | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Vietnamese | | 2 | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Persian | | 1 | 2 | 4 | 3 |

TABLE 11

Characteristics of One-Size-Fits-All Instruction

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Curriculum | Sequential—progresses in a linear fashion. |
| Course Content | Fixed—determined by prior course work rather than by learner characteristics. |
| Materials | Uniform—all students acquire and demonstrate mastery of the course content by use of the same pedagogical materials. |
| Pacing | Lockstep—all students have the same amount of time to gain mastery of the material. |

U.S.-born and one foreign-born, had little or no formal education in Japanese. Specifically, two such students had 1–2 years of schooling in Japan, and the other two had no schooling at all. Surprisingly, these students reported spending an average of one hour per week reading in Japanese outside of class, and all ranked themselves as intermediate readers and writers. It will be recalled that, on average, survey respondents reported spending 15 minutes or less reading in the HL outside of class.

While differences between Japanese HLLs were not as pronounced as they were with Arabic and Hindi/Urdu HLLs, Japanese 100 exemplifies another type of diversity challenge involving classes with HLLs. Such a challenge stems from having both HLLs and non-HLLs in the same class. These two populations present very different learning profiles. For example, like all survey respondents, the HLLs in Japanese 100 studied their HL in large part to fulfill personal goals such as learning about their roots or communicating with family members. These students also brought with them a wealth of experiences and emotional responses to the target language that are not generally found among non-HLLs.

Implications for Teaching

Traditional foreign language classes are one-size-fits-all. This is true in the sense that students progress through the same

material in the same manner. Table 11 summarizes the characteristics of one-size-fits-all instruction, as implemented in traditional foreign language programs.

In many instances it is not easy to justify this one-size-fits-all instruction even in foreign language classes, where some students typically are ahead of others and where students' learning styles vary widely (Brown, 2007). It is even harder to justify it in HL classes, where proficiency, learning goals, and motivation vary significantly from one student to the next, as shown by the survey. To deal effectively with these issues, instructors need to differentiate instruction by learner needs.

Teaching multilevel classrooms is common in ESL and elementary education, and instructors in these fields are trained in multiple strategies or classroom structures that support learning for all students (see Berry & Williams, 1992; Hess, 2001; Shank & Terrill, 1995). Many of the concepts and practices of multilevel teaching are familiar to foreign language instructors in one form or another. They include, for example, grouping students to promote engagement, using portfolios to assess learning, and offering independent studies to learners who want to pursue a topic outside of course offerings. Still others are easily modifiable for use in foreign language classrooms, such as agendas, electronic learning centers, and multiple-entry journals (Carreira, 2007; Tomlinson, 1999, 2003).

Surveys, such as the one presented in this article, can give HL instructors a window into the attitudes, learning strategies, goals, and linguistic skills of their students, thereby making differentiation possible. They can also help instructors make decisions about placement. This becomes especially clear when one compares the age of arrival and reading and speaking practices, as well as the use of the Internet. Other tools available to instructors for understanding students include interviews, observations, assessments, diaries, and teaching logs (see Hubbard & Miller Power, 1993; Mills, 2006; Wallace, 1998). Survey results demonstrate the critical role of families and local communities to HL instruction. Indeed, HLLs across all languages listed “communicating with family and friends in the United States” among the top three reasons for studying their HL, and their open-ended answers evidence the value they place on being part of a community of speakers. Thus, HL teaching and curriculum design must be oriented toward fulfilling that goal. The importance of anchoring HL teaching in the HL community has long been recognized. Merino, Trueba, and Samaniego (1993) proposed that Spanish HL pedagogies and curricula should be inclusive of students’ home language and culture(s) and offered activities and curricula consistent with this perspective. They also advocated using Vygotskian principles to develop learning contexts in which students are active participants in the learning process and in which learning emerges from the interaction of learners, educators, and community members (see also Faltis, 1990; Rodríguez-Pino, 1994).

The UCLA Research Priorities Conference (2000; <http://www.cal.org/heritage/involved/hlprioritiesconf00.pdf>) provided the following explanation of the differences between the HLL and the L2 learners. It emphasized that the “heritage language acquisition begins in the home” as opposed to the L2 education that typically begins in the classroom. HLLs bring the home and community language and attitudes, including cultural stereotypes, into the classroom.

A classroom that either negates the value of the students’ background language acquisition or ignores it cannot be efficient for these students. An instructor who does not know the community of speakers of the target language cannot be an effective instructor in an HL class. The survey presented in this article demonstrates clearly that HLLs remain connected to their families and communities and continue to use their HL to some extent in the natural environment. Many of the open-ended questions showed that students feel they can understand their families and communicate with them better after taking HL classes.

Community-Based Instruction (CBI), mainly understood as an approach to working with children with learning disabilities, offers some insights on how to connect HL teaching and HL communities. CBI fosters children’s development in real-world activities and reinforces the skills they need to acquire in order to function in the society. The approach places teaching in community environments (Beakley, Yoder, & West, 2003).

There is a considerable difference between the CBI used for children with developmental needs and that used for HLLs. But there are also similarities. HL learners come to the classroom from the community with their language and cultural knowledge being rooted in the community. They need to continue to be able to function in the community while also enhancing their academic and linguistic skills.

What recommendations can one make to administrators and instructors who want to launch or improve an HL program? HL curriculum and program design must be anchored in knowledge about local communities of HL speakers and about the particular HL learners that instruction is aimed at. We suggest several steps.

1. Know the community: An analysis of the demographic data pertaining to the location where instruction takes place will show the numbers of speakers of a certain language and could serve as a

justification of introducing or strengthening an HL program. Having information about the community itself (time of immigration, level of education, a dialect or dialects spoken, political and cultural beliefs) will guide a curriculum, as it will assist educators in selecting appropriate material for classes. For example, a community of Cantonese speakers may not be served well by teaching Mandarin, unless the community desires it. This information could be found by surveying students and/or parents about their interests and background and by interviewing in the community.

2. Know the learner: Gathering information about the learners is essential to understanding their needs and goals in (re)learning the language. A survey of background factors that correlate with general proficiency, including age at immigration, use of language in the family, exposure to literacy, etc., can prove useful in this regard.
3. Connect the learner and the community: There is also a need to understand learners' interaction with their heritage community. This kind of knowledge can be both "discovered" and further developed through community-based instructional units that involve interviewing family members and members of the community, recording oral histories, and researching both the history of the country and the history of immigration. The NHLRC has recently developed community-based HL curricula that rely on these types of activities to teach students about their HL community and develop their reading and writing skills. For example, in the Abuelos (Grandparents) Project, which builds on a protocol developed by Roca and Alonso (2006) for Spanish speakers, students interview an elderly member of their HL community and present their findings to the class. This information is then connected to literary pieces and other reading material

about the HL community. Finally, students develop a project of their own that integrates all sources of information (see Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 2001, for other suggestions for tapping into home and community resources). In addition to community-based curriculum, other macro-approaches (Kagan & Dillon, 2009) provide a good foundation for HL instruction, as they build on students' initial proficiencies.

Limitations of the Study

The main limitations of this study—namely, the imbalances in the representation of learners from different geographical areas and language backgrounds—have been discussed and explained as stemming from demographic realities. The fact that so many answers came from California is a limitation of the study. However, this can be attributed to a degree to the geographic distribution of immigration in the United States. The two places of immigrant concentration are California and New York. Table 12 shows that there are considerably more speakers of Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, and Korean in California, but there are more speakers of Russian in New York. The survey data reflect the distribution of speakers fairly accurately.

In the same vein, there are more Spanish- and Chinese-speaking respondents, in part because these languages have more HL learners enrolled in courses than other languages. This is particularly true in California, where the number of HLLs increased by 80% in Spanish and 200% in Chinese between 1997 and 2007 (Steele, Oishi, O'Connor, & Silva, 2009, p. 11). That being said, it would be important to obtain information from other geographic areas and languages. We hope that the publication of this article will help us correct this limitation by including respondents from more areas and linguistic backgrounds.

Another limitation stems from use of the phrase "a combination of the HL and English" in some of the questions about language

TABLE 12

**10 Most Spoken Home Languages in
New York State and California: By Number of Speakers**

| Language | California | New York |
|------------|------------|-----------|
| Spanish | 9,570,398 | 2,588,384 |
| Chinese | 925,129 | 481,355 |
| Tagalog | 742,260 | 71,555 |
| French | 129,792 | 146,554 |
| Vietnamese | 473,573 | 20,464 |
| German | 115,911 | 75,819 |
| Korean | 346,962 | 103,947 |
| Russian | 146,717 | 237,655 |
| Italian | 64,404 | 226,176 |
| Polish | 22,841 | 99,999 |

use. As we have discussed, the research literature points to an important three-way distinction in the home environment, i.e., whether learners use only the HL, use both the HL and English, or use only English. In keeping with this, we gave survey respondents the choice of responding with “only the HL,” “a combination of the HL and English,” and “only English” for several questions. Unfortunately, this resulted in ambiguous answers in some cases. For example, in reference to the home environment, the answer “a combination of the HL and English” left us asking whether this meant that respondents used both languages with all members of the family, or if they used the HL with some members of the family and English with others. More specific formulation of the options would have helped us avoid this ambiguity. The authors plan to pursue this line of research in another project. In a preliminary survey conducted by one of the authors, 36 HL learners of Spanish reported using a combination of the HL and English in the home (83.33%) and exhibited different patterns of use with different family members. Nearly

all (91.67%) reported speaking only Spanish with their grandparents. With their mothers, 25% spoke only Spanish and another 33.33% spoke mostly Spanish. On the other hand, with siblings, many reported using English and Spanish in equal amounts (27.78%) or speaking mostly English (52.78%), and none reported making exclusive use of Spanish with siblings. Interestingly, even respondents who claimed to speak only Spanish at home actually used some English, particularly with siblings and, to a lesser extent, fathers. All respondents reported mixing English and Spanish when they spoke both of their languages. Further information is available from the authors upon request.

A final limitation stems from the fact that we relied strictly on self-ratings to determine learners’ competency in their HL. Ideally, it would have been beneficial to cross-check these ratings against actual assessments in each of the four areas of competency: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, given the number of languages, students, and institutions involved, this would have been impractical.

Summary and Conclusions

The results of the National Heritage Language Survey give us insights into HL learners and HL teaching. A general profile of HL learners across language emerges as a student who (1) is an early sequential bilingual—who acquired English early in life, after acquiring the HL; (2) has limited exposure to the HL outside of the home; (3) has relatively strong aural skills but limited reading and writing skills; (4) has positive attitudes and experiences with the HL; and (5) studies the HL mainly to connect with communities of speakers in the United States and to gain insights into his or her roots, even though career plans feature prominently in learners of some languages as well. On the basis of these findings, we have argued that a community-based curriculum represents an effective way to harness the wealth of knowledge and experiences that students bring to the classroom and to respond to their goals for their HL.

Finally, the survey shows that classes with HL students are characterized by substantial student diversity. To deal effectively with issues of diversity, it is critical for instructors to understand their students individually as well as collectively and apply this knowledge to differentiating instruction by learner needs.

Notes

1. This survey was funded by a Title VI National Heritage Language Resource Center Department of Education Grant. A report of survey responses is available at <http://www.international.ucla.edu/languages/nhlrc/>.
2. Because our primary goal for this survey was to formulate curriculum guidelines for those who are taking HL classes or mixed (foreign language and HL) classes, we made a decision to offer the survey to HLLs, not speakers at large.
3. Survey Monkey is a commercial product for creating and administering online surveys. Survey tools allowed us to group and analyze responses by various categories.

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