Heritage Language Learners

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Who is a Heritage Language Learner?

Students who are raised in a home where a non-English language is always used.

Students who sometimes speak or merely understand the home language.

Students who have a strong cultural connection to a particular language, usually through family interaction.

(Valdes, 2000) (Fishman, 2001: Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003) (Kagan,2003)

Heritage Language Learners (HLL) generally fall into four major categories:

1. New arrivals/migrant students.
2. Foreign-born students who arrived at a young age but have been in American schools for several years.
3. Ethnic-American students who were born in the United States to immigrant parents.
4. Students who were born in the U.S., but have no one at home with whom they speak the heritage language. The students would like to strengthen their ties to their heritage language and culture.

Why is it important to support the home language of Heritage Language Learners?

The need for proficiency in languages other than English is greater than ever. Many companies constantly look for employees with the language proficiency needed to negotiate business in the international market. The need for translators and diplomats is crucial to national security. However, few students in our world language programs reach the level of proficiency necessary to perform at this level, and many of the critical languages have few K-12 programs for learners. Because of their basis of knowledge, many heritage speakers, with the proper instruction, can reach professional level proficiency more quickly than foreign language students. We, as a nation, need to value this expertise.

Affirmation of the home language and culture is also important for the overall success of a Heritage learner in school.
- *English language learners' cultural knowledge and language abilities in their home language are important resources in enabling academic engagement; and*
- *English language learners will engage academically to the extent that instruction affirms their identities and enables them to invest their identities in learning. (Early,2002)*

What is the best learning environment for Heritage Language Learners?

Several studies show that Heritage Language Learners taught in both English and their home language surpass those in an English-only program both academically and linguistically. However, few dual two-way immersion programs exist in Ohio and those that do exist are threatened because of a lack of certified teachers in home languages. Therefore, school districts often place many HLL in traditional language classes.

Where do we place Heritage Language Learners?

- The ideal placement would be to have a class for Heritage Learners.   It must be recognized that the proficiency levels of HLL across the three modes of communication vary greatly from speaker to speaker. Most HLL rate their listening comprehension as their most highly developed skill. Few HLL regard their reading, writing or speaking abilities as native-like. There are many factors that affect their proficiency level, including the age of onset of bilingualism, schooling, and the amount of language spoken in the home. Therefore, it is necessary to assess their proficiency level across the three modes and four skills:
  1. Give an accepted proficiency test, such as the STAMP or the AAPPL to determine the placement.
  2. Give an IPA to assess skills across the 3 modes and 4 skills.
  3. Give a survey to find out about the language background of your heritage learner.

 (National Heritage Language Resource Center. (2009). Heritage language learner survey: Report on preliminary results. Retrieved March 13, 2009.)

- When there is a small number of HLL or inadequate resources, it may be necessary to place them in the most appropriate world language class after assessing their abilities.

- For U.S.-born students who do not have a parent that speaks to them in their home language, the best placement is probably a level I traditional class.

- For foreign-born students who have attended school in their home country, a higher placement, depending on their abilities, is required.

- The most difficult placement is for those students who have strong speaking and listening skills, but can minimally read or write. These students should be placed in a higher-level class, but teachers must differentiate activities for them, depending on their strengths and the areas where they need to develop skills.

What are some psychological and attitudinal concerns for HLL?

1. **Insecurity** – Many Heritage Learners realize that their language proficiency may not be as high as expected, or that they speak a social variation of the language. Therefore, they may be uncomfortable and unwilling to use their language.

2. **Stigma** - Many Heritage Learners have met with criticism of their language skills for various reasons, such as:
   - Native speakers of the language, including family in the home country, have criticized their language.
   - Many times, our Heritage Learners have language that teachers and others have considered "incorrect." Teachers need to focus on the skills that HLL bring to the classroom rather than perceived deficits in HLL linguistic knowledge
   - Teachers have assumed that the HLL already knew the language and therefore had no place in their classes, or that they were enrolled in the classes solely to get an "A" grade or to place out of a language requirement. Thus, the needs of the HLL were ignored.

3. One of the fundamentals of preparing teachers of HLL is to inculcate positive attitudes toward the students and the knowledge that they bring to the classroom.

What are some linguistic concerns for HLL?

1. **Academic language** – For many HLL, most their heritage language usage occurs informally with their family. Thus, they do not have the formal academic language that their overall L2 proficiency would suggest.

2. **English influence on the second language** - English influence can include the use of cognates instead of the correct word, inventing words, and spelling errors.

3. **Vocabulary** – HLL may not always understand the subtleties of meaning of words or may need academic vocabulary.

4. **Spelling and punctuation –** Pronunciation may interfere with spelling. For example, Spanish-speaking learners may struggle to differentiate between *s, c,* and *z* or *b* and *v.*

What do we teach our HLL?

Sociolinguistics

1. Students need to understand the connection between language use and society. Many HLL use informal language in situations where more formal language should be used. This should be approached as an academic subject with a discussion of register, standardization of speech, social variations, etc.

Cultural Studies

1. Authentic materials from the target culture help heritage learner explore their home culture. This allows them to build a positive self-identity and overcome any insecurities about their language abilities.
2. For Spanish-speaking HLL, this means the study of the Hispanic cultures in the United States, Latin America, South America, Spain and the Caribbean. The study should include history, literature and art, as well as popular culture and lifestyle.

Linguistics

1. Grammar – Many HLL have an intuitive understanding of grammar, but do not know why a certain form is correct, or how to access the structures that they do know. Many times, a structure can be elicited by using a "key word." For example, the word "*ojalá"* or *"I wish"* can be used to help Spanish HLL access the forms of the subjunctive that they already know. Then the teacher can help them learn forms and ways to organize their knowledge.

2. Vocabulary – Activities in which the subtleties of meanings and the exposure to topics that are not usually addressed in spoken language will help HLL increase their vocabulary. Focused reading also helps to expand vocabulary.

3. Writing – This is often the area that needs the most emphasis with HLL, since the exposure to language is mostly oral. The curriculum should include writing styles, usage, common spelling errors and vocabulary choice.

4. Reading - While many HLL read and understand very well, they need to be exposed to authentic texts of many kinds. Texts on cultural aspects of many different countries where the target language is spoken will serve the purpose of helping them establish a self-identity, along with building vocabulary, reading and writing skills.

5. Speaking – This area is usually one of the strongest skills of HLL. However, HLL also need the opportunity to speak in the classroom and express themselves using formal speech and academic language, as well as informal speech.

6. Listening – This is usually a very strong skill. However, the students should have practice listening to different registers of speech, in a variety of situations, with a variety of speakers.

Claudia Parodi. "Stigmatized Spanish Inside the Classroom and Out." *Heritage Language Learning: A New Field Emerging*. New York: Routledge, 2009. 199-214. Print.

How do I teach Heritage Language Learners?

There are Five Principles for teaching mixed classes of HLL and English-speaking students learning a second language.

From: "Workshop on teaching Mixed Classes", National Heritage Language Resource Center, UCLA
María Carreira, Claire Chik, Joan Chevalier, Alejandro Lee, Alegria Ribadeneira, Julio Torres

1. Know your students:
- As members of a category of learners (HLL v. L2 learner; beginning - advanced learners.
- As individuals.

Begin with an assessment of their skills across the 3 modes of Communication. Give a <u>survey</u> to find out about the language background of your HLL.

Many of our HLL have been criticized for their use of or lack of use of their heritage language, as well as for their use of English. It is therefore important to develop a climate of mutual respect and learning, where it is acceptable to not be perfect. It is unrealistic to expect HLL to have academic skills that have never been formally taught. Teachers should consider the amount of academic exposure to the language that the HLL has had when developing goals and expectations.

Teachers who are not native speakers are encouraged to develop a humble "we will learn together" attitude. They should look specifically for topics in which they are the experts, such as the history and culture of the target country. Teachers who are native speakers must resist the urge to over-correct, as they will certainly notice many errors. They must be mindful and accepting of the wide variety of accents and regional variants while teaching about standard forms of the language. Always be cognizant that there is a great deal of prejudice regarding certain forms of languages and certain regions and work to honor and build on the knowledge that students bring to your classroom.

Crossroads: Heritage Learning
"Attitudes and activities for the heritage speaker classroom" by Jeremy Aldrich and Phil Yutzy, Harrisonburg City VA Public Schools. *©2014 National Capital Language Resource Center*

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2. Choose and use materials with a view towards making learning meaningful, engaging, and accessible to all learners:

HLL differ from L2 learners in the yearning for self-understanding and identity about the heritage language and culture, and English. In a mixed class as well as in a Heritage learning class, teachers need to sometimes address issues of identity, biculturalism and bilingualism and utilize the HLL expertise in the language and culture.

An example of a reading that may appeal to both Heritage and L2 learners is *"My Name" by Sandra Cisneros from La Casa en la Calle Mango.* This book focuses on generational issues, the status of women, the clash of culture and perspectives, and the search for identity.

Think in terms of adding "insider" information or perspectives to the material. What are the perspectives of a HLL to this piece of literature? What are the perspectives of an L2 student?

3. **Make students active and autonomous partners in what happens in the classroom:**
   - Make strategic use of HLL and L2 learners' complementary strengths and needs.
   - Use macro (top down) and micro (bottom up) approaches.
   - Foster learner autonomy through the use of learning strategies.

Strategies:

Create a mixture of tasks that require intuitive knowledge or spontaneous use of the target language (hard for L2 learners) and tasks that require meta-linguistic knowledge or the use of the written or academic register (hard for HL learners). Hold both students accountable for contributing to the task (assign the harder task to each type of learner).

Type of knowledge required in basic activity	Learner comparison (stronger -> weaker)	Sample add-ons to make the activity more challenging for the stronger learner
Intuitive, spontaneous use of language	HLL > L2L	An additional writing component. An activity with explicit manipulation of language (e.g. analysis of vocabulary or verb forms)
Academic language	L2L > HLL	An activity that uses colloquial language (e.g. a skit, acting as an intermediary to explain)
Colloquial language	HLL > L2L	An activity that takes language to a higher register (e.g. write a letter to the editor, write a summary)
Home vocabulary	HLL > L2L	A formal debate. An activity with explicit manipulation of language (e.g. write a glossary of key home vocabulary)

Design Micro- and Macro- Based Activities:

*"The **macro-based approach or top-down approach** makes use of previous knowledge to analyze and process information. So, the prime knowledge is applied to help understand new information or carry out new tasks.*

*The **micro-based approach or the bottom-up approach** makes use principally of the information which is present in the data, that is, for example, words and sentences could be decoded to get to the bigger picture. This is pretty much what we do with foreign language learners. They come to us without any previous knowledge of the language and we start building it up from the bottom and then gradually they get a bigger picture.*

Heritage language learners come to the classroom with a big picture, it's not a perfect picture. Their grammar is not perfect, their comprehension may not be perfect, but it's considerable. They heard the language and they spoke the language for many years at home, even if they stopped for a while and they bring all that knowledge to the classroom.

What we need to do is use the macro-approach, in combination with the micro-approach, which is the bottom-up approach, so that the macro-approach would allow us to teach them at the level they're capable of comprehending and performing. The micro-approach would allow us to develop those instances of their language which need remedial action, like certain grammatical points, register, expansion of their vocabulary, spelling, etc."

HLL find micro- approaches confusing because they lack the meta language of instruction and/or a mental map of the instructional objectives.

L2 learners find macro- approaches inaccessible because they lack the fluency to decipher spontaneous language on their own. Scaffold and assist them to do this.

Teaching Domains	Micro-approaches	Macro-approaches
Vocabulary	Carefully controlled and selected	Dictated by function and context
Reading	Small texts, gradually increasing in volume and complexity	Fairly large and complex texts from the beginning
Writing	Sentence level, gradually advancing to paragraph and then longer	Longer texts from the beginning. Integrated emphasis: content, stylistics, grammar, spelling
Speaking and Listening	Initially restricted, gradually increasing in length and complexity	Full range of native input (movies, news stories, newspaper articles, etc.)
Culture	Initially isolated and decontextualized	Full range of topics, integrated

4. **Build pathways to learning for all learners using differentiated instruction, formative assessment and learning strategies:**

- **KWL Charts:** What we know/ What we want to learn/ What we have learned
  By determining what the students know in advance, we avoid re-teaching items that they already know. This will help to avoid the boredom and detachment that sometimes occurs in a class.

- **Learning agendas:** A learning agenda is a list of exercises or activities that must be completed during a certain period of time. Students work independently, pacing themselves and availing themselves of assistance, as needed. In mixed classes, agendas offer a way for some students to engage in meaningful work, while the instructor gives specialized instruction to other students in the class.

- **Dialectal journals:** Journals can connect students with the text as individuals. It is an effective tool with macro approaches. A sample format could be:

In this column, record:	In this column:
- *A passage* - *A main idea* - *An important event*	- *Write a reaction* - *Discuss its significance* - *Make an inference*

- **Formative Assessments:** Frequent formative assessments allow teachers to see what is already known and what still needs to be taught, so that they can give students work that is meaningful to them. Students can see the areas in which they need more instruction and practice.

- **Exit cards:** These are one type of formative assessment. Using prompts that promote reflection on learning are most valuable. Prompts could be "Identify something that is unclear to you." Or "What are two BIG ideas from today?"

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5. **Design courses and curricula that make linguistic and demographic sense:**
- Build maximally homogeneous classes through placement.
- Accept and embrace diversity in the classroom.
- Use formative assessment to revise curricula and syllabi.

(Carreira, Maria. "Basic Principles for Teaching Mixed Classes." NHLRC: Research. UCLA, 2014.)

Strategies for Teaching Reading

Reading skills may not be as highly developed as speaking and listening skills. By reading, students will gain more experience with academic language and formal registers.

- Choose authentic readings that have a theme of comparing and contrasting elements of the target culture and American culture.
- Choose readings that deal with the clash of cultures and perspectives, negotiating identity, generational differences, etc.
- Form a reading club: http://sophia.stkate.edu/maed/26/ - The Effects of Supplementary Reading Activities for Spanish Heritage Learners.
- Perform Readers' Theater (dramas).
- Read children's' books to younger students in the community.
- Take time to scaffold relevant vocabulary for the less proficient students, including non-heritage students. In other words, preview new words and expressions - perhaps in same-ability groups - that students might need to use or understand in the discussion. You can preview vocabulary and concepts through a variety of strategies:
  - Use class discussion to activate background knowledge on the topic and to generate the essential vocabulary.
  - Use pictures and graphic organizers to help students sort out the information and understand the reading.

- When discussing a text with a mixed-ability group, make sure that non-literate students have access to the ideas in the text, even if they can't read all the words. Again, this can be done by working in same-ability groups before the discussion: students with less literacy can listen to the text read to them or on tape and use their knowledge of the alphabet to pick out or highlight familiar words. More advanced students can read the text independently.

Strategies for Teaching Listening

Listening skills may be well-developed, but may need some enhancement through use of formal registers and academic language.

- Listen to speakers with a variety of dialects/accents in a variety of situations.
- Listen to radio and TV broadcasts to have input from a formal register.
- Summarize/discuss what was heard, using language from the listening sample.

Strategies for Teaching Speaking

- Emphasize the value of the home language that students bring to the classroom.
- Explain what "register" is and describe what it looks like in speech and writing. Give examples of register-switching. For example, a football player talking with his team is not the same as a football player talking on television.
- Help students develop an "inner voice" by modeling the language used. For example, describe how you would solve a math problem and model your thoughts using academic language.
- Provide accountability for the small-group discussion. It is always best for students to know what they need to accomplish by the end of the discussion. Some themes will motivate students to talk with no prompting at all. Maybe they will, as a group, rank the characters in a story per certain criteria: importance, likeability, behaving per cultural norms, etc. For example, the following are some ways in which accountability could be built into a discussion of wedding traditions:

  o Groups design a plan for the "perfect" wedding in their heritage culture.
  o Students create a list of wedding "faux-pas" or 'do's and don'ts" in the heritage culture.

- Assign each group participant a role or a task:

  o **Group Leader:** keep the discussion on track, makes sure that everyone participates, and ensures that all the questions are answered.
  o **Secretary**: keep notes of the points raised in the group discussion and report back to the class on the work accomplished.
  o **Intermediary**: communicate with the instructor or other groups if help is required or information needs to be exchanged.
  o **Reporters:** students with varying oral proficiencies report back to the class at the end of the discussion. For example, each student in a group could be responsible for at least one sentence. The teacher may give sentence templates to groups, so that they fill in the given structures with ideas and vocabulary that emerge from the discussion. For example:

    "One thing you should never do at a "-----" (e.g. wedding) is _____ because _____."

Strategies for Teaching Writing

From: "Attitudes and activities for the heritage speaker classroom" by Jeremy Aldrich and Phil Yutzy, Harrisonburg City VA Public Schools

Jeremy Aldridge, a teacher of Spanish as a Heritage Language, suggests that we create a culture of reading, writing and analytical thinking:

Build up from the basics. Spanish is phonetically based with few exceptions; specifically teach those exceptions (b/v, s/c/z, y/ll, g/h/j, c/q, h, etc.) and work on vowel sounds repeatedly until they become second nature for students. Use routines to build different modes into your daily class schedule and to reinforce and extend prior learning. Reading and writing comprehension are crucial in literacy and proficiency in all languages, and often are the starting point of activities developing interpersonal and presentational modes. Some ideas for routines and activities that are relevant to heritage speakers are listed below:

- Short stories (stop at appropriate intervals for students to interact with the text and each other through a pattern like POP – *write a pregunta, observación, and predicción.*)
- Legends, fables and popular folk stories (students also may collect these in their community.
- Newspapers, magazine articles (consider both news videos and written articles.)
- Dictation of newspaper articles, excerpts from speeches, etc.
- Song study: cloze activity to listen for missing words/phrases in a song
- Mad Libs
- Self-Reflection on your learning in writing.
- Autobiographical writing
- Daily journals
- Grammar signs and bulletin boards highlighting recurring problems
- Summarizing news articles

It's important to teach students respect for the variety and use of the language, creating an atmosphere where students feel confident even while they talk about errors of grammar or diction. I've realized that students aren't aware of the errors they're committing until they're taught that those errors are quite common. The task of the teacher is to use different activities that emphasize the use of words that students usually struggle with to create a 'mental habit' for the correct word, because they've used the other forms so often that the correct forms feel 'weird' to them.

The teacher's approach must always be constructive, using reflection and awareness rather than a judgmental or hypercritical imposition of rules. Another teacher uses the "*abuelitos* rule": most heritage speakers pick up the habits of their parents and grandparents, so when

a teacher addresses a student's language errors it is often perceived as a comment about the students' family. Tell the truth, but be careful about what you say about their *abuelitos*.

As in regular world language classes, remember the natural progression of language acquisition from Novice to Intermediate to Advanced to Superior. As students progress toward higher levels, remember that although they may be speaking at the Intermediate High or Advanced levels, heritage students have typically not developed their writing skills to the same degree because of limited formal education in their heritage language.

In looking at heritage speakers' WPT and OPIc test results, we discover a typical pattern in which writing lags at least one sublevel (and sometimes as much as one full level) behind speaking skills. Be ready for your Intermediate High heritage speakers to write at an Intermediate Mid, or even Intermediate Low level. As in all world language classrooms, students need to experience a lot of practice at their current level to develop automaticity, expand their repertoire of topics, and increase motivation and a feeling of success.

Grammatical concepts and the mechanics of language are important and should be included in course design, but watch out for activities that are too far above the student's current level to be useful and avoid dwelling too long on frustrating aspects of mechanics, such as the use of accents in Spanish.

How do I motivate Heritage learners?

- Emphasize the value of the language ability that they bring to the classroom.
- Use materials that give insights into their culture.
- Make sure that they understand the concept of register and the need to use different registers in different situations.
- Refer to the additional resources below:

Additional Resources on Heritage Language Teaching and Learning

1. **http://startalk.nhlrc.ucla.edu/startalk/lessons.aspx** - Website that thoroughly explains who are heritage learners and things that we can do to teach them. Does take some time to go through the entire group of lessons.

2. **http://languagemagazine.com**/ - "Honing Heritage Learners," Language Magazine; October, 2016 and November, 2016 – Articles on teaching mixed classes of Heritage Learners and L2 Learners.

3. **http://nclrc.org/about_teaching/heritage_learners.html** - National Capital Language Resource Center website with articles on teaching HLLs

4. **https://mrpeto.wordpress.com/heritage-speakers/** - Blog by a teacher of heritage speakers. Emphasis on reading for enjoyment to correct spelling errors. Some sample lesson plans and embedded readings.

5. **http://uccllt.ucdavis.edu/white-papers/heritage-language-instruction.pdf** - Guidelines on Heritage Language Instruction from the University of California.

6. **http://nclrc.org/about_teaching/heritage_learners.html** - Study of teachers who have mixed classes with HLL and L2. Teachers say that they differentiate, but do not. Recommendations for using more authentic materials and compacting curriculum.

7. **http://www.international.ucla.edu/media/files/abuelos.5units.pdf** - Materials Development project UCLA.

8. **http://nclrc.org/about_teaching/PDF%20Documents/Crossroads-AldrichYutzy-Attitudesandactivitiesfortheheritagespeakerclassroom.pdf** - Attitudes and activities for the heritage speaker classroom.

9. **http://nclrc.org/about_teaching/PDF%20Documents/Crossroads-AldrichYutzy-Success.pdf** – Discussion of teacher attitudes toward Heritage Speakers.

10. **http://www.sdkrashen.com/content/articles/1998_language_shyness.pdf** - Case studies of Heritage Learners who discuss why they stopped speaking their home language. Strategies to encourage HLLs to continue to study and speak their heritage language.

11. **http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/home-language.html** - Materials for parents, emphasizing the importance of home language.

12. **http://nclrc.org/about_teaching/heritage_learners.html** - Study of teachers who have mixed classes with HLL and L2 learners.

13. **http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/home-language.html** - Planning from Headstart for Pre-K programs. Emphasizes the importance of Home Language for dual language learners.

14. **http://www.nysut.org/~/media/files/nysut/resources/2010/may/educators-voice-3-adolescents/educatorsvoice3_adolescents_09_heritage.pdf?la=en –** Article on recognizing the abilities and needs of Heritage Language Learners.

Survey for Heritage Language Learners

Please complete this short questionnaire to provide us with some background information on your language experience.

First and last name _____

Please provide the following information

1. Place of birth _____

2. If foreign born, how old were you when you came to the U.S. _____

3. What languages can you speak? _____

4. Did you go to school in the country where your home language is spoken?

  Yes _____ No _____

  4a. If yes, where? _____

  4b. For how many years? _____

5. What languages does

   5a. your mother speak? _____

   5b. your father speak? _____

   5c. your grandmother speak? _____

   5d. your grandfather speak?_____

6. Do you speak your home language in your daily life? (mark one answer with X)

   Every day___   Sometimes___   Rarely___   Never___

7. With whom do you speak _____? Mark with X all that apply:

   mother__ father__ grandmother__ grandfather __ brothers and sisters __ friends __

8. Rate your own proficiency from 0 (none) to 5 (fluent)

   Listening _____

   Speaking _____

   Reading _____

   Writing _____

9. What hobbies or interests do you have? _____

10. Why are you studying your home language?

_____

_____