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## Heritage Language Students: Profiles and Possibilities

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New awareness of language rights and new efforts to right old wrongs have prompted educators around the world to recognize the importance of ethnic and heritage languages. In some countries, this recognition has led to policies that support the teaching of these languages as school subjects to learners with a home background in these languages and as foreign languages to students with no background in them. Supporters of these policies believe that they give these languages both legitimacy and attention.

This recent development offers both new opportunities and new challenges to educators. This paper examines these opportunities and challenges in the context of the United States, where demographic shifts are changing how we think about the teaching of languages that, until recently, were taught exclusively as foreign languages.

### Heritage Language Students: A Definition

In the United States, the term *heritage language* has recently come to be used broadly by those concerned about the study, maintenance, and revitalization of non-English languages in the United States. For those individuals interested in strengthening endangered indigenous languages or maintaining immigrant languages that are not normally taught in school, *heritage language* refers to a language with which individuals have a personal connection (Fishman,

this volume). It is the historical and personal connection to the language that is salient and not the actual proficiency of individual speakers. Armenian, for example, would be considered a heritage language for American students of Armenian ancestry even if the students were English-speaking monolinguals. In terms of strengthening and preserving Armenian in this country, these students would be seen as having an important personal connection with the language and an investment in maintaining it for future generations. Their motivation for learning Armenian would thus contrast significantly with that of the typical foreign language student.

For foreign language educators, the term *heritage language student* has a different meaning than it does for those concerned with endangered indigenous languages or immigrant languages that are not regularly taught in school. Foreign language educators use the term to refer to a language student who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or at least understands the language, and who is to some degree bilingual in that language and in English (Valdés, 2000a, 2000b). For these educators, the heritage language student is also different in important ways from the traditional foreign language student. This difference, however, has to do with developed functional proficiencies in the heritage languages.

It is important to point out that within the profession of foreign language education the use of the term *heritage language speaker* is relatively new. It first became a term of general use in the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996). Up until that time, the Spanish-teaching profession, for example, had primarily referred to these students as native speakers of Spanish, quasi-native speakers of Spanish, or as bilingual students. Dissatisfaction with these terms led to

the increased use of other terms, such as *home background speakers* (as used in Australia) and *heritage language speakers* (as used in Canada). As currently used in the United States, the term *heritage language* refers to all non-English languages, including those spoken by native American peoples. It is likely that the field of foreign language education will continue to search for a term that more precisely describes learners who arrive in the classroom with strongly developed proficiencies in their ancestral languages.

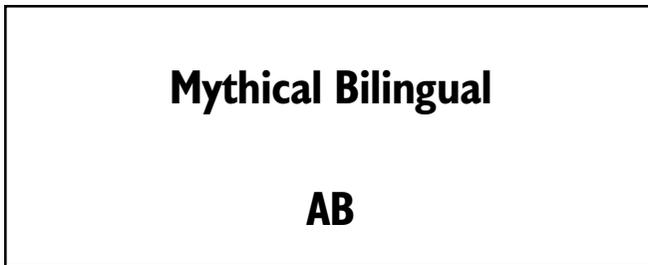
## **The Language Characteristics of Heritage Language Speakers**

### **Bilingualism and Bilingual Individuals**

In spite of a growing commitment by some educators to developing the heritage languages of non-English speakers in this country, the challenges surrounding the teaching of these two types of students—those with and those without proficiency in the language—are not simple. In the case of monolingual English-speaking heritage students of some immigrant and indigenous languages, challenges may include making decisions about the variety of the language to be taught, developing a writing system, developing language teaching materials, and identifying remaining speakers of the language, to name a few. For other languages, the major challenge may be to provide instruction that capitalizes on personal connections to the heritage language. In the case of the teaching of heritage languages as academic subjects to students with some proficiency in the language, challenges include determining the range of proficiencies that these students have already developed in the language and understanding the ways to strengthen these proficiencies.

Heritage language students raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speak or only under-

stand the heritage language, and who have some proficiency in English and the heritage language are to some degree bilingual. It is important to point out, however, that for many people—indeed for some scholars—the term *bilingual* implies not only the ability to use two languages to some degree in everyday life, but also the skilled superior use of both languages at the level of the educated native speaker. For individuals who subscribe to this narrow definition of bilingualism, a bilingual person is two monolinguals in one who can do everything perfectly in two languages and who can pass undetected among monolingual speakers of each of these two languages. For scholars who subscribe to a broader definition of bilingualism, the idealized, perfectly balanced bilingual is for the most part a mythical figure that rarely exists in real life. This mythical bilingual is represented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. The Mythical Bilingual**

In Figure 1, same-size letters indicate that this bilingual is equally proficient in languages A and B. This would mean that whatever the individual could do in one language (recite childhood poems, pray, write academic papers, tell jokes, argue with a sibling) that person could do equally well in the other language. While absolutely equivalent abilities in two languages are theoretically possible, individuals seldom have access to two languages in exactly the same contexts in every domain of interaction. Neither do they have opportunities to use two languages to carry out the exact

same functions with every person with whom they interact. Thus, they do not develop identical strengths in both languages.

Those who define bilingualism more broadly and whose research involves the investigation of bilingualism in communities where two languages are spoken suggest instead that there are many different types of bilinguals and that bilingual abilities fall along a continuum. From this perspective, bilingualism is seen to be a condition that essentially involves more than one competence, however small it might be. The comparison group against which bilinguals of different types are to be measured is the monolingual group, the group of individuals who have competence in only one language. A native speaker of English who is literate in English and who reads French, for example, is clearly more bilingual than an individual who can read in only one language. Similarly, an individual who is fluent in English and understands spoken Polish has developed dual language abilities very much beyond those of speakers who understand only English. Neither of these individuals is completely bilingual. What is important is that neither of these individuals is completely monolingual either.

Figure 2 illustrates a continuum of bilinguals of different types and with different strengths.

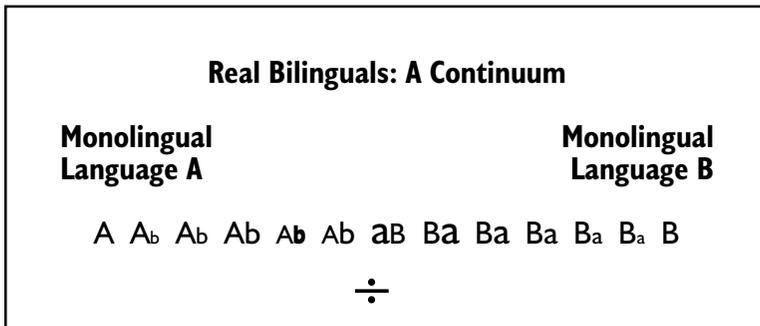


Figure 2. The Bilingual Continuum

In this figure, different letter sizes indicate different strengths in language A and language B in different bilinguals. A bilingual who has recently arrived in the United States, for example, might be represented as Ab (dominant in the heritage language and in the beginning stages of learning English). Similarly, a fourth-generation bilingual could be represented as Ba (dominant in English and still retaining some proficiency in the heritage language.) In minority language communities all over the world, such different types of bilinguals live together and interact with each other and with monolinguals on a daily basis, using one or the other of their two languages.

In addition to varying across bilinguals, bilingualism is best seen as a dynamic condition. Over the course of a lifetime, a single individual's bilingual profile can vary immensely, depending on background experiences and schooling. As **Figure 3** illustrates, an immigrant child, for example, may grow up in a household where mainly Russian is spoken. Over the years, depending on the amount of contact with Russian, that person may become much more English dominant than Russian dominant. It is possible, however, that in older adulthood, perhaps because of marriage late in life to a newly arrived immigrant, that individual will once again use Russian predominantly in everyday life.

<b>Childhood</b>	<b>Adolescence</b>	<b>Adulthood</b>	<b>Older Adulthood</b>
<b>Ab</b>	<b>Ab</b>	<b>aB</b>	<b>Ab</b>

**Figure 3. Changes Over Time in Bilingualism**

In addition, immigrant bilingualism tends to follow a specific generational pattern. Bilinguals of different generations have different proficiencies in English and in the heritage language. As **Figure 4** illustrates, many first-generation

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immigrants will remain monolingual in their first language throughout their lives. Others will acquire some English and become incipient bilinguals, but will still be strongly dominant in the heritage language. By the second and third generation, most members of the immigrant community will have acquired English quite well. The majority of these individuals will be, if not English dominant, English preferent. Many, nevertheless, will continue to function in two languages in order to communicate with members of the first generation. Finally, by the fourth generation, most individuals of immigrant background will have become monolingual English speakers. Only a few will retain some competence in the heritage language.

<b>Generation</b>	<b>Possible Language Characteristics</b>	
1st Generation	Monolinguals in Heritage Language A	Incipient Bilinguals Ab
2nd and 3rd Generation	Heritage Language Dominant Ab	English Dominant aB
4th Generation	English Dominant Ba	English Monolingual B

**Figure 4. Bilingualism of Different Generations**

#### **Language Characteristics of Immigrant Students**

Many immigrant students who come to this country as young children enter American schools with little knowledge of English and are classified as limited English proficient (LEP). By the time they arrive in high school and college, however, most will have acquired some English. Some will continue to be heritage language dominant; that is, their overall abilities in the heritage language will be much

greater than their English language abilities. Second-, third-, and fourth-generation students, however, will be clearly English dominant. Their strengths in English will very strongly overshadow their abilities in the heritage language.

To make matters even more complex, many immigrant students will often be speakers of nonprestige varieties of their heritage language. They may speak a rural variety of the language or a stigmatized variety associated with non-academic uses of language, or their productive abilities may be limited to a very narrow repertoire of styles and registers. The spoken language of these students may often contain a number of features typical of casual and informal registers of the language that are totally inappropriate in the classroom. Registers, it will be recalled, include very high-level varieties of language, such as those used in university lectures and the writing of academic articles. They also include midlevel varieties, such as those used in newspaper reports, popular novels, interviews, and low-level registers used in intimate and casual conversation. Not all speakers of a given language develop identical linguistic repertoires. High-status groups generally have access to language use in a number of contexts (e.g., academic, religious, administrative) in which the high/formal varieties are used in narrowly prescribed ways. As a result, the linguistic features characterizing the high varieties of language tend over time to characterize the speech of high-status groups as well. Lower-status groups, on the other hand, given their limited access to these same contexts, tend to develop a narrower range of styles in both the oral and the written modes. Their speech is characterized by the use of features normally found in the informal/casual varieties of the language that they use with greater frequency.

Heritage language speakers in the United States, like their monolingual counterparts in their home countries,

reflect the complexities of class and access. The linguistic repertoires of upper-middle-class individuals include a broad range of registers including varieties appropriate for those situations (e.g., academia) in which oral language reflects the hyperliteracy of its speakers. The repertoires of individuals of lower-ranked groups, especially those who have had little access to formal education, are much narrower in range and do not normally include ease with hyperliterate discourse. It is important to note, however, that some scholars (e.g., Kroch, 1978) have suggested that other factors, in addition to access to different contexts of language use, have an impact on the differences between the speech of high- and low-status groups in a given society. Kroch argues that dominant social groups tend to mark themselves off from lower-status groups by means of language and that speakers of prestige or high language varieties deliberately work to distance themselves linguistically from the nonelite groups in their society. This would suggest that speakers of prestige varieties consciously and unconsciously work to distance themselves from their nonelite co-nationals. Members of nonelite groups, on the other hand, must consciously work to acquire ways of speaking that characterize the elite groups to which they aspire to belong.

Unlike monolinguals, however, heritage speakers have grown up in bilingual communities in the United States. As in monolingual communities, different registers are used in different situational contexts. What is different, however, is that the high registers of English are used to carry out all formal/high exchanges, while heritage languages and the informal registers of English are used as the low variety appropriate primarily for casual, informal interactions.

In addition to being characterized by diglossia (the functional differentiation of languages) and bilingualism, bilingual communities also reflect the social class origins of their residents. In the case of immigrants from certain coun-

tries (e.g., Mexico), evidence suggests that a large majority of persons who emigrate to the United States do not come from the groups with high levels of education. Other immigrants, however, from countries such as Korea and Taiwan are members of the professional and well-educated elite. A further complication in the study of heritage languages spoken in bilingual communities by first-, second-, third-, and fourth-generation immigrants is the fact that these languages—isolated as they are from the broad variety of contexts and situations in which they are used in the home country—are at risk of undergoing a number of significant changes. Some researchers (e.g., de Bot & Weltens, 1991; Maher, 1991; Olshtain & Barzilay, 1991; and Seliger & Vago, 1991) maintain that the immigrant languages attrite and undergo structural loss. This attrition then results in the transferring by immigrants of their mother tongue in a “mutilated” form (de Bot & Weltens, 1991, p. 42) to the next generation of speakers.

In sum, the heritage languages that are spoken in bilingual communities in the United States and acquired by immigrant bilinguals reflect the class origins of their first-generation speakers. If these speakers did not have access to the range of situations and contexts in which formal high varieties of the heritage language are used, the language is characterized by a somewhat narrower range of lexical and syntactic alternatives than is the language of upper-middle-class speakers. Perhaps more importantly, because in these communities the use of the heritage language is restricted to largely low-level functions and private sphere interactions, over time “the immigrant language falls into disuse,” as Huffines (1991, p. 125) points out. As a result, many young people in bilingual communities may not acquire a full mastery of the registers and styles characteristic of even working-class monolinguals from the home country.

Figure 5 illustrates the language development that might characterize a particular heritage language speaker.

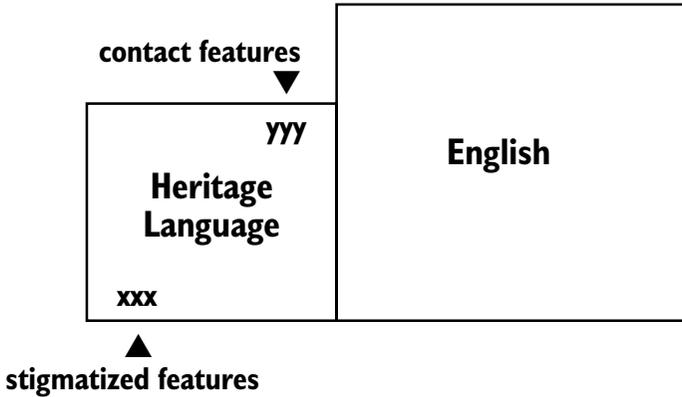


Figure 5. The Language Development of a Bilingual Heritage Language Speaker

As will be noted in this figure, the heritage language is seen to be underdeveloped in comparison to English. Moreover, in this case, the heritage language is characterized by the use of stigmatized features as well as features that are a direct result of contact with English. Functionally, however, this heritage speaker may be able to carry out conversations on everyday topics with ease and confidence and may even be able to understand rapidly spoken language that includes the subtle use of humor. In comparison to students who have acquired the language exclusively in the classroom, the heritage language student may seem quite superior in some respects and quite limited in others. For example, there may be little or no proficiency in reading and writing the language. As is the case with most native speakers of a language, the heritage language speaker “knows” the language and uses a set of internalized grammatical rules but does not have the metalanguage to talk about the grammatical system itself. (See Valdés [1995, 2000a, 2000b] and Valdés &

Geoffrion-Vinci [1998] for discussions of the language characteristics of immigrants and heritage language speakers.)

## **The Role of Policy and Theory in the Teaching of Heritage Languages: The Case of Spanish**

Efforts to develop pedagogies suitable for teaching Spanish to heritage speakers date from the early 1970s, a time when the increasing enrollment of students of Mexican ancestry was felt strongly at the university level in the Southwest. Efforts to develop both theories and policies that might guide the teaching of Spanish as a heritage language, however, have been carried out by isolated individuals at different institutions reacting to problems faced by students in very different programs. As a result, the multiple practices and pedagogies currently being used to teach Spanish to heritage speakers are not directly supported by a set of coherent theories about the role of instruction in the development of language proficiencies in bilingual language learners. Discussions among practitioners at all levels are characterized by strong disagreements about appropriate outcomes and goals of instruction. We find these disagreements even within the current climate of support for heritage language instruction provided by the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP), the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), and the National Foreign Language Center, as well as the models of instruction designed in Australia for home background speakers (Ingram, 1994; Scarino, Vale, McKay, & Clark, 1988a, 1988b, 1988c; Valdés, 1995). There has been much debate, for example, about issues such as the following:

- The difference between foreign language and heritage language instruction (Valdés, 1981)

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- The implications of the study of linguistic differences for the teaching of Spanish to bilingual students (Floyd, 1981; Guitart, 1981; Solé, 1981)
- The teaching of the prestige or standard variety (Colombi, 1997; García & Otheguy, 1997; Hidalgo, 1987, 1993, 1997; Politzer, 1993; Porras, 1997; Torreblanca, 1997; Valdés, 1981; Valdés, Hannum, & Teschner, 1982; Valdés-Fallis, 1976, 1978)
- The teaching of grammar (Alonso de Lozano, 1981; Lozano, 1981)
- The teaching of spelling (Staczek & Aid, 1981; Valdés Fallis, 1975)
- The teaching of reading and writing (Faltis, 1981, 1984; Teschner, 1981; Villarreal, 1981)
- Testing and assessment (Barkin, 1981; Valdés, 1989; Ziegler, 1981)
- The relationship between theory and practice (Merino, Trueba, & Samaniego, 1993)
- The role of the foreign language teaching profession in maintaining minority languages (Valdés, 1992)
- The development of academic language abilities at both the graduate and the undergraduate levels (Colombi & Alarcón, 1997; D'Ambruso, 1993; Faltis, 1981, 1984; Faltis & DeVillar, 1993; Gorman, 1993; Hocker, 1993; Merino, Trueba, & Samaniego, 1993; Quintanar-Sarellana, Huebner, & Jensen, 1993; Roca, 1990; Valdés, 1995; Valdés & Geoffrion-Vinci, 1998; Valdés, Lozano, & García-Moya, 1981)

What is missing is a clear educational policy that can guide the goals of language instruction for heritage Spanish-speaking students (as well as heritage speakers of other languages) in the light of current and future economic and social goals. Many Korean and Chinese parents, for example,

are urging school systems to give their children high school credit for the study of their heritage languages. At the urging of these parents, the College Board has developed subject matter examinations in these two languages. Growing interest in what were previously considered “minor” languages by students is confirmed by the work recently carried out by Krashen, Tse, & McQuillan (1998). Focusing on both language attitudes and language pedagogies, this work concludes that heritage background students have increasingly positive attitudes toward their ancestral language. If appropriate teaching methods are used, further language study (after English has been well acquired) yields particularly good results after early adolescent rebellion has ended.

What is needed in order to support this growing interest in developing heritage/immigrant language resources is a coherent body of pedagogical theories about what can be accomplished in a classroom setting relative to out-of-school acquisition, functions, and rewards. Very little empirical research about the outcomes of different kinds of instruction is available. There have been no policy discussions at the national or state levels that focus on language education for both monolingual English-speaking *and* heritage background students. Foreign language instruction at the high school level is generally still aimed primarily at monolingual English-speaking, college-bound students, and college and university language instruction is still largely defined by the literature-focused, upper-level courses in which students are eventually expected to enroll. Specific goals have not been established for the teaching of Spanish and other languages as heritage languages, and no policies directly guide the implementation of programs, the training of teachers, and the measurement of outcomes.

Heritage language educators are concerned with such questions as the acquisition of a standard dialect, the expan-

sion of bilingual range, the transfer of reading and writing abilities across languages, and the maintenance of immigrant and other heritage languages. In each of these areas, existing practice is informed to a very limited degree by research carried out on societal and individual bilingualism. Language professionals working in the area of Spanish for Native Speakers (SNS) have utilized descriptions of U.S. Spanish, for example, to prepare materials and to predict difficulties that students will have. They have not yet developed theories, however, about how standard dialects are acquired, how bilinguals expand their range in each language, or how skills transfer across languages. More surprisingly, perhaps, they have not even examined the results of teaching practices in order to draw from those results important insights about both language and language learning.

### **Direct Instruction and Spanish Language Maintenance**

For many educators engaged in the teaching of Spanish to heritage Spanish speakers, Spanish language maintenance is an important and primary goal. The belief that the formal study of Spanish in high schools and colleges can contribute to the maintenance of the Spanish language among second- and third-generation Chicano and Puerto Rican students is widely held.

Proponents of this position often cite research focusing on bilingualism and on the nature of language maintenance and language shift (e.g., Fishman, 1964, 1991). Indeed, the field of societal bilingualism has contributed important theories about factors that contribute to each of these processes. Similarly, students of individual bilingualism who have researched language loss have examined the linguistic danger signs that point to the general weakening of a bilingual's two languages (Hyltenstam & Obler, 1989; Seliger

& Vago, 1991). What is known is that given societal and residential mobility, it is often difficult to maintain individual bilingualism across generations, even when societal bilingualism is stable. In the case of Spanish speakers, as Hernández-Chávez (1993) carefully documented in his broad review of the literature on such questions, we know that individual language shift is rapid and ongoing.

Theories about how classroom practice can help to delay or reverse language loss have not been developed, however. There is little information available to the practitioner about how certain classroom practices—for example, consciousness raising about language and identity, the teaching of sociolinguistic principles, or the teaching of overall language skills—can contribute to students' views of themselves as lifetime Spanish speakers who will make the effort to transmit the language to their children.

It is important to note that few sociolinguists and students of societal bilingualism are optimistic about developing simple principles about why and how individuals maintain minority languages in bilingual contexts. The variables are many, and the classroom is limited in what can be accomplished against the assimilative pressures of the wider society. Fishman (1991) is most persuasive in arguing that language maintenance depends on transmission across generations. He maintains that schools alone cannot reverse language shift, and he suggests steps that communities need to take to create an environment in which the minority language can both grow and thrive beyond the classroom.

If practitioners believe, however, that they *can* contribute (if only in some small way) to language maintenance, they and applied linguists working with them must answer the following questions in order to develop a theory of classroom approaches to such maintenance:

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- What levels of linguistic development correlate with students' desire to maintain Spanish?
- What kinds of interactions with other Spanish speakers at school promote an increased interest among students in continuing to participate in such interactions?
- What can teachers read to promote their understanding of students' linguistic circumstances and a concomitant awareness of the efforts involved in maintaining language?
- Which classroom activities contribute to students' positive attitudes about Spanish for themselves, for their educational institutions, and for their communities?

Responses to such questions would serve as a point of departure for the development of a set of coherent principles about the precise role of language instruction in language maintenance. For the moment, instruction aimed at bilingual speakers of Spanish that purports to support language maintenance is operating according to what are, at best, very tentative hypotheses about the relationship between language instruction and language maintenance.

#### **Direct Instruction and the Acquisition of the Standard Variety of Spanish**

The teaching of prestige or “standard” varieties of language to speakers of nonstandard varieties is an area that has received the most attention from researchers. Much attention, therefore, has been given to the discussion of standard and nonstandard varieties of Spanish and the position to be taken by the profession in teaching bilingual students (e.g., Colombi, 1997; García & Otheguy, 1997; Hidalgo, 1987, 1993, 1997; Porras, 1997; Torreblanca, 1997; Valdés-Fallis, 1976, 1978).

The research community, however, has given less atten-

tion to the acquisition of second dialects than it has to the teaching and learning of second languages. Existing literature on the relationship between nonstandard dialects and education in Europe (Ammon, 1989; Bailey, 1987; Cheshire, Edwards, Munstermann, & Weltens, 1989; Fishman & Lueders-Salmon, 1972; Gagne, 1983; Rutt, 1962) underscores the fact that although such dialects appear to have been the subject of controversy for many years, there are few existing theories about how standard dialects are acquired by speakers of stigmatized varieties. Moreover, while it has always been tempting to view the acquisition of a standard dialect as analogous to the process of acquiring a second language, there are important differences between the two processes.

Individuals learning a second language (even a closely related one) always know whether a particular utterance is or is not a part of their first language. This is not the case when learners are confronted with a standard variety of the language that they speak. As Craig (1988) has argued, nonprestige dialect speakers learning a standard dialect have vocabularies that are essentially identical to vocabularies in the standard language. As Craig has further argued, these learners encounter in the standard variety “four sets or strata of linguistic features” (p. 306). Listed below are Craig’s four features, to which I have added a fifth:

1. Features common to both the nonprestige dialect and the standard dialect and normally produced by the nonprestige dialect speaker
2. Features normally not produced in the nonprestige dialect but that are familiar to the learner and possibly produced in situations in which the learner makes an extreme effort to be “correct”
3. Features that the learner would recognize and understand when used in context by prestige dialect speakers but that he or she would be unable (or unwilling) to produce

4. Features totally unknown to the nonprestige dialect speaker
5. Features that are used exclusively in the nonprestige dialect and that are highly stigmatized among prestige variety speakers

In the instructional context, the existence of these five sets of features creates a situation unlike that encountered by the second language (L2) learner. Because of the existence of feature sets (1) and (2), it is often the case that features from set (5) are used by learners when they attempt to speak a standard dialect in the mistaken assumption that these, too, are part of either set (1) or (2).

Concern about the teaching of an educated standard variety of Spanish has been very much at the center of the teaching of Spanish to bilingual Spanish-speaking students in the United States. However, as Politzer (1993) argued, in spite of our knowledge about the complexity of inter- and intraindividual variation, there are no existing theories that can guide practitioners in deciding how to “teach” a standard dialect. Those who hoped to be guided by theories of L2 acquisition now have serious doubts about the parallels to be found between these two very different kinds of acquisition.

In developing language learning theories that might guide the creation of classroom methodology for teaching or bringing about the acquisition of a prestige language variety, questions such as the following need to be answered:

- How is a standard dialect acquired in natural settings?
- What is the order of acquisition of different features?
- How and why do such features become salient to the speaker of the nonprestige variety?
- How do personal interactions contribute to such language awareness?

- How much access to the standard language is necessary before particular features are noticed and acquired?
- What kinds of language exposure provide the most benefit?
- Does avoidance of stigmatized features and production of standard features depend on the development and use of an internal monitor?
- How does the monitor develop?
- How can students be made aware of the dangers of hypercorrection?
- What can be done in the classroom to create an environment in which the standard language can be acquired and the dialect retained for informal, out-of-school uses as it is everywhere else in the world?
- What sets of activities promote language awareness?
- What kinds of language exposure (e.g., reading, writing, viewing and analysis of videos, and studying formal grammar) contribute *most* to the development of sociolinguistic sensitivity and the awareness that some formal styles are inappropriate in certain contexts?

### **Direct Instruction and the Transfer of Literacy Skills**

As compared to the teaching of the standard language or the expansion of bilingual range, the transfer of literacy skills from one language to another appears to be a far more straightforward process. A number of allied fields (e.g., bilingual education and foreign language education) are also concerned about this. The development of theory in this area, then, is already moving forward. In the teaching of Spanish to heritage speakers, however, questions related to this process require a more precise focus. Instructors need to know how different types of skills transfer, how best to bring about an efficient and effective carryover of such skills in both

reading and writing, and what kinds of materials best accomplish the task.

### **Direct Instruction for Heritage Speakers: Theoretical and Pedagogical Challenges**

The primary objective of many language departments in this country is to produce students who come very close to monolingual speakers of the language that they teach. When students have no background in the language, the task is generally seen as a difficult one. It is expected that acquiring the language and reaching near-native proficiency will take many years. Moreover, if language-teaching professionals are truthful, they will admit that very few individuals ever reach such a level of proficiency. Such proficiency, when it is achieved, is the result of a rare combination of natural ability, determination, and opportunity. Serious students are thus urged to travel and live in countries where the target language is spoken and to nurture close friendships with native-speaking persons. Instructors impress upon their students that language competencies erode and that maintaining broad abilities in the language will involve a lifetime effort.

While these views about how near-native competencies are acquired seem commonsensical, in reality they are based directly on what is now known about how second languages are acquired. There is a large literature on L2 acquisition that is accessible to language teachers. A great deal less is known about individuals who acquire their first language in bilingual contexts, and almost nothing is known about how a bilingual person's range in each of his or her languages changes and develops over time. We know enough, however, to make us suspect that the process of further development of a first language is fundamentally different from the process of L2 acquisition. The theoretical questions are

many, and we have only begun to carry out the kind of research that can help us understand whether and how the process of growth in a “limited” first language actually occurs. We do not yet know how much like monolinguals bilingual speakers can actually become in a natural setting over a lifetime, and we know even less about how this process might work in the high school or university classroom. We have no answers to the question “What is possible for such students in what length of time?”

What needs to be developed is a theory about how heritage language competencies can be expanded in both natural and classroom settings. We can conjecture that expansion of such competencies would involve growth in grammatical, textual, illocutionary, sociolinguistic, and strategic competencies; however, a language learning theory would need to explain how growth in these various competencies takes place. We have little understanding of how individuals reverse or retard individual language shift and of whether and how direct instruction can provide such individuals with resources that will allow them to develop their competencies in the heritage language during their entire lifetimes.

## **The Development of Pedagogical Theories**

In moving toward the development of more coherent pedagogical theories for the teaching of heritage languages, one important option is to draw directly from practices and theories used initially in the teaching of either first or second languages. **Figure 6** illustrates the connections between theories of bilingualism, pedagogical theories, and instructional practices in the teaching of heritage languages. **Figure 6** also depicts the connections between pedagogical theories (with sample areas of focus) in first and second language

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acquisition and development, and pedagogical theories in heritage language teaching.

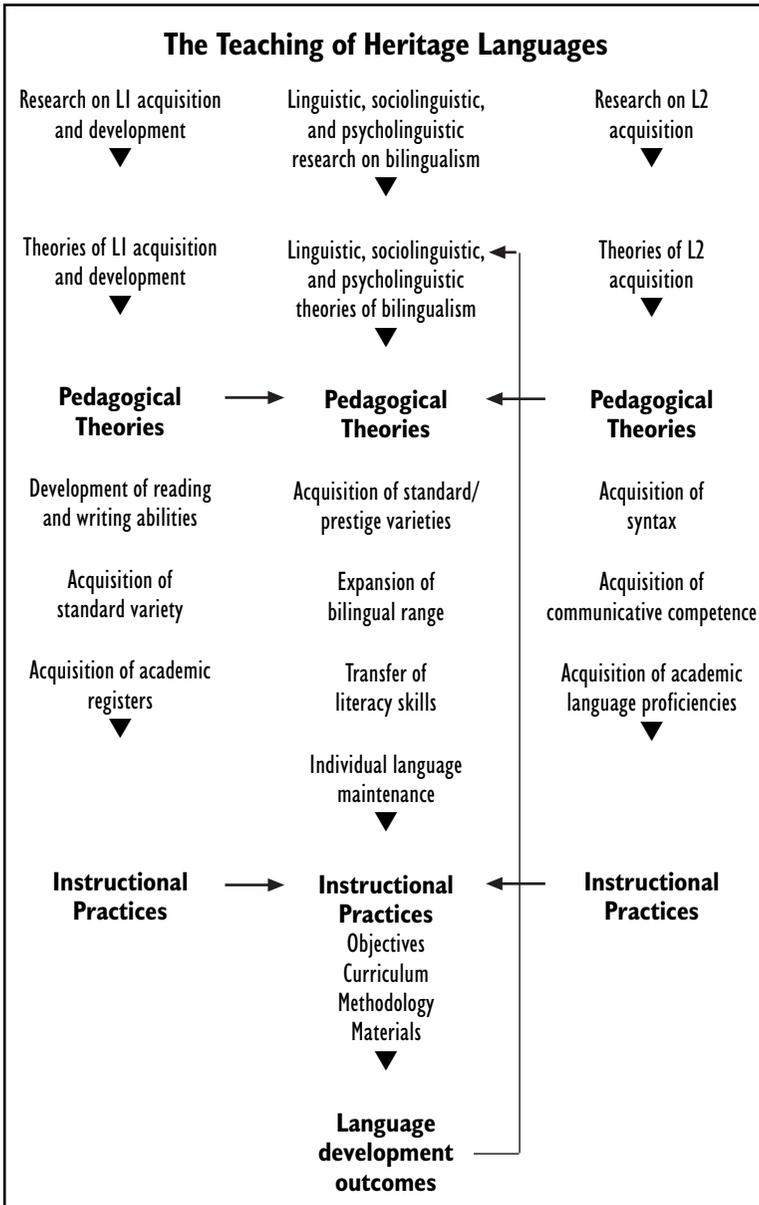


Figure 6. Theories and Instructional Practices

As Figure 6 illustrates, it is important for heritage language educators to continue to examine pedagogical theories and practices in first and second language acquisition and development and to extend the implications of these practices to the teaching of heritage students. Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci (1998), for example, attempted to understand the development and use of academic registers of Spanish by Chicano students by extending Nemser's (1971) view of "approximative" high registers and evolving competencies originally found in the second language acquisition literature. Some instructors (e.g., Pino, 1997), guided by Heath's (1983) work in conducting community ethnographies with L1 students and teachers, have used this approach with heritage speakers. Finally, several individuals (Politzer, 1993; Valdés, 1981) have pointed out the need for the field of heritage language teaching to review the research on nonstandard varieties of English and the early pedagogies developed for the teaching of standard English (Allen, 1969; Bartley & Politzer, 1972; Feigenbaum, 1970; Stewart, 1970).

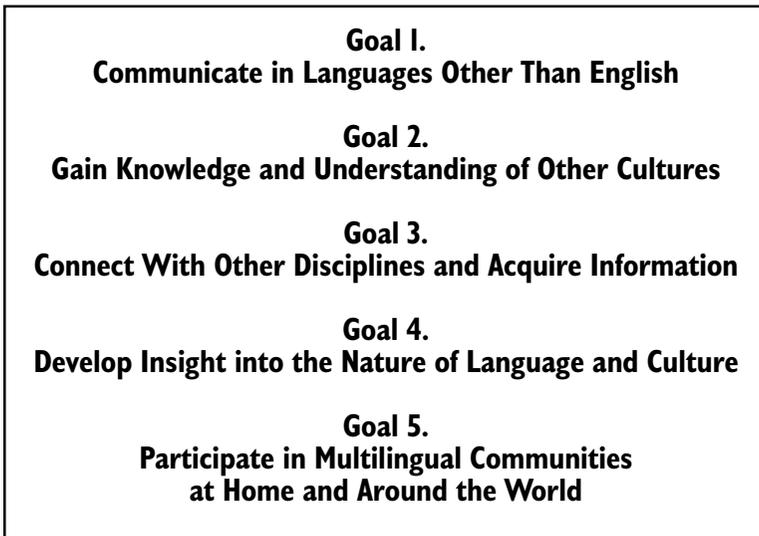
As will be noted in Figure 6, research on bilingualism can directly inform the development of various linguistic, sociolinguistic, and psycholinguistic theories of bilingualism. In order to advance the effectiveness of and theoretical foundation for heritage language instruction, we need to develop coherent pedagogical theories for the teaching of heritage languages that are based not only on theories of bilingualism and bilingual language development but also on the actual outcomes of heritage language instruction. Objectives and practices in heritage language instruction must be carefully examined in order to identify successful practices and outcomes that—although not directly based on clear pedagogical theories—may potentially contribute to the development of such theories by providing evidence of the kinds of language development that can take place in classroom settings for bilingual learners.

Similarly, it is important to determine to what degree pedagogical theories and approaches used in the teaching of first or second language learners can be applied to the teaching of heritage speakers. For example, theories of extensive reading (Day & Bamford, 1998), although originally developed with L2 learners in mind, may be effectively used or adapted in expanding the restricted range of registers used by Latinos in this country. Similarly, pedagogical theories of L1 written language development—for example, those used to support the teaching of written academic discourses to unskilled or minority writers (Bizzell, 1986; De & Gregory, 1997; DiPardo, 1993; Fox, 1992; Hill, 1990; Hull, 1991; Lisle & Mano, 1997; McCarthy, 1987; Perl, 1979; Rose, 1985, 1989; Shaughnessy, 1977; Walters, 1994)—may well be used successfully for teaching academic literacies in the heritage language to bilingual learners. We know that some classroom practices in the teaching of heritage languages have been borrowed from L1 and L2 instruction (e.g., the teaching of traditional grammar). It is important, as well, to identify novel adaptations of pedagogical theories and practices (e.g., genre analysis in Swales, 1990; community ethnographies in Heath, 1983; reformulation in Cohen, 1990) drawn from the fields of first and second language development and acquisition that can inform the continued development of theories and practices in the teaching of heritage languages.

### **A Framework for Planning Instruction for Heritage Language Speakers**

Instruction for heritage language speakers who are to some degree bilingual requires that language educators build on these students' existing language strengths. One possible approach is suggested by the new *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (National Standards in Foreign Language Edu-

cation Project, 1996). The standards were the result of the national standards setting movement and involved members of most of the associations of language educators in the country (i.e., American Association of Teachers of French, American Association of Teachers of German, American Association of Teachers of Italian, American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, American Classical League, American Council on the Teachings of Russian, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages), and Joint National Committee for Languages. Because the standards writing team included from its inception individuals actively engaged in the teaching of heritage languages, the standards offer a view of the goals of language study that are of direct relevance to those of us concerned with this instruction. The goals of foreign language study that serve as the organizing framework for the standards are presented in Figure 7.



**Figure 7. National Standards for Foreign Language Learning—  
Goals of Foreign Language Study**

### 3. Heritage Language Students: Profiles and Possibilities

As will be noted, the goals of language study as presented by the standards go far beyond the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (ACTFL, 1986). The standards perspective on language learning views language study as resulting in the ability to function in the target language. Students who study language will communicate with others, will explore other disciplines using the target language, and will use it to participate in multilingual communities in this country and abroad. Moreover, through their study of language, students will learn about culture itself as well as about the nature of language.

What is evident from this discussion of the goals of language study is that even though linguistic abilities are still seen as central to the acquisition of language, no longer is there a preoccupation with the four skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—as separate language abilities. More importantly, for the purposes of this paper, the standards allow us to think about instruction for heritage language speakers in an entirely new way. In examining the above five goals, for example, it is clear that no matter how much they already know, heritage speakers must continue to focus on Goal 1. They must continue to develop a greater bilingual communicative range. The other four goals, moreover, are equally important. Heritage speakers need to gain knowledge and understanding of other heritage language cultures (Goal 2). They need to use the heritage language to connect with other disciplines and to acquire new information (Goal 3). They need opportunities to develop even more insights than they already have into the nature of language and culture (Goal 4). Finally, they must be encouraged to become lifelong learners of the language by participating in multilingual communities at home and around the world (Goal 5).

The presentation of the communications goal (Goal 1) as outlined in the standards is of particular relevance to our understanding of the unique language strengths of heritage language speakers. Because of the importance of Goal 1 to the teaching of language to heritage speakers, I will discuss it at some length and describe the view of communication that is presented in the standards document.

From the point of view of the standards, communication in a language involves much more than simply speaking and listening. The standards recognize three “communicative modes” and place primary emphasis on the context and purpose of the communication. As illustrated in **Figure 8**, these three modes are *interpersonal*, *interpretive*, and *presentational*. Each mode involves a particular link between language and the ways in which interaction takes place. Moreover, various skills, such as listening and speaking or reading and writing, occur together within a single mode of communication.

<b>Interpersonal</b>	<b>Interpretive</b>	<b>Presentational</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Face to face communication</li><li>• Written communication with individuals who come into personal contact</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Receptive communication of oral or written messages</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Spoken or written communication for an audience</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Speaking</li><li>• Listening</li><li>• Reading</li><li>• Writing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Listening</li><li>• Reading</li><li>• Viewing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Speaking</li><li>• Writing</li></ul>

**Figure 8. The Three Communication Modes**

Note. Adapted from Figure 5, “Framework of Communicative Modes,” in *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century*, by the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996, p. 33.

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As will be noted, the above conceptualization takes the position that communication is carried out in both oral and written language. It involves both productive and receptive skills. The spoken language may be informal in certain types of interpersonal interactions and much more formal in others. Interpersonal communication, for example, may involve the written language as in the writing of informal notes to members of the family. It may also involve conversing with strangers, making requests, apologizing, or simply establishing personal contact. It requires linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic knowledge.

The interpretive communication mode involves understanding what is communicated by others in both oral and written texts. When students read literary texts, for example, or listen to lectures in the language they are studying, they are engaged in interpretive communicative activities. The abilities required for engaging in this type of communication are primarily the receptive skills of reading and listening.

The presentational oral communication mode involves communication with a group of listeners or readers. It can take place in both written and oral language. As will be evident, oral communication in the presentational mode is quite different from oral communication in the interpersonal mode. In the presentational mode, there is little opportunity to read body language and to clarify or reformulate. Oral communication in the presentational mode is in fact much like formal written communication in this same mode and requires a sense of the audience as well as planning and preparation in presenting an argument, explaining, or summarizing information.

For students with a home background in the language studied, the standards framework of communication modes provides a useful way of conceptualizing both learners'

strengths and needs. As I pointed out above in the description of the language characteristics of such students, heritage learners may enter formal language instructional programs with considerable ability in the interpersonal mode. However, they may not have completely developed the interpretative and presentational communication modes. While many heritage learners are quite fluent in oral interpersonal language, many need to develop a greater bilingual communicative range. They need to develop their interpersonal skills in order to interact with a broad range of individuals of different backgrounds and ages for a variety of purposes. In terms of the interpretive and presentational communication modes, heritage language speakers need to learn how to read skillfully in the heritage language, to interpret subtle meanings found in both oral and written texts, and to present information in both oral and written forms intended for audiences with which they do not have immediate contact.

As will be evident from work with these communication modes, using a standards-based perspective, instruction directed at heritage language speakers can move beyond a focus on prescriptive grammar, transfer of skills, and basic language maintenance. This kind of instruction can directly contribute to the expansion of bilingual range in that it can help students grow in their competence to carry out face-to-face interactions, comprehend live and recorded and extended oral texts, comprehend written texts, and use language in written and oral form to present information to groups of listeners or readers.

### **Toward the Establishment of a New Profession**

Heritage language speakers present new challenges for the field of foreign language education. Most teachers have not been trained to work with students who already speak

or understand the target language or who have a strong connection with it. Similarly, language teachers brought in from countries where the languages are spoken have little or no idea about bilingualism and about the language competencies of heritage students who have been raised in this country. For individuals and groups concerned about the role of instruction in maintaining or revitalizing heritage languages, the basic pedagogical issues, however, are similar to those of foreign language instruction. The challenge involves understanding the needs of minority language communities and of particular groups of learners and adapting or developing pedagogical approaches that can bring about the best results.

In this paper, I have attempted to describe the characteristics of language students who are raised in homes where the language is still spoken and who speak a language that is commonly taught at the secondary and postsecondary levels. The pedagogical challenges I have discussed, the need for theory, and the suggested framework based on the current standards for foreign language learning apply primarily to heritage students with this kind of profile. I would argue, however, that lessons learned from the many years of struggling to legitimize the teaching of heritage languages as academic subjects to students who have developed proficiencies outside of school may not be entirely irrelevant to those groups whose situations are significantly different. Many of the same political and pedagogical challenges will be faced by other heritage language groups in the existing English-only context.

As we move to the establishment of a heritage language teaching profession, it is important that we keep in mind that what brings us together is our commitment to the study and teaching of non-English languages in this country to students who have a personal investment in these lan-

guages. As we work together, it is important that we discuss with each other details about the specific challenges of instruction in various heritage languages. If we are to build on each other's experiences, we need to share answers to questions such as the following:

- What are the characteristics of the community in which the heritage language was or is spoken?
- Does the heritage language teaching effort involve language revitalization or language maintenance?
- How many school- and college-age students have functional proficiencies in the heritage language?
- What kinds of language backgrounds do these students bring to the classroom? (Are they first-, second-, or third-generation? Are they biliterate?)
- What kinds of strengths in those languages do they bring?
- Are members of the community interested in developing, maintaining, or revitalizing the heritage language?
- Do individual students wish to develop or maintain the heritage language?
- How large is this group?
- Are these students willing to request instruction in the language, if not available, and to apply pressure on the academic institution to respond to their request?
- Is the heritage language commonly taught as an academic subject in schools or colleges in the community? Should it be?
- What kinds of support are available to carry out such instruction and to plan pedagogical practices?
- Is an out-of-school teaching context likely to be more effective?
- Are teachers of the heritage language available?
- Are pedagogical materials available?

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- Are teacher preparation efforts in place or likely to be put in place?
- In cases where instruction in the heritage language is already part of a school or college program, are heritage language speakers well placed in existing language sequences?
- How well can students' strengths be developed by existing instruction?
- What are legitimate and valid language development goals for these students?
- What kinds of special courses have to be developed to bring about those goals?
- Are school and college faculty interested in heritage language students and willing to work closely with them?
- Can school and college administrators be persuaded to support the teaching of the heritage language?

Sharing such information, cataloguing ways in which challenges have been addressed, and examining why efforts have been successful or unsuccessful will directly benefit others who are working to bring about the continued development and maintenance of heritage languages.

Heritage language speakers bring with them many strengths and many different abilities, and heritage communities are very different from each other. In preparing ourselves to teach heritage students, we must see their strengths, value them, and take joy in the fact that in spite of negative sentiments toward non-English languages in this country, many languages are alive and well. To be successful in helping to maintain these languages, we must firmly resolve as a profession that we will learn from each other, that we will share what we learn, and that we will endeavor to extend lessons learned by others to our own contexts. We must continue to find strength in the fact that we value

heritage languages and heritage language speakers and that we are convinced that language maintenance efforts are vitally important to our country and to our society.

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