High School Spanish Teachers’ Attitudes and Practices Toward Spanish Heritage Language Learners

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Abstract: This case study uses survey data to examine the attitudes and pedagogical practices of preservice and current high school Spanish teachers toward Spanish heritage language learners (HLLs). The research questions addressed were (1) the extent to which participants were aware of the challenges facing Spanish HLLs who are enrolled in traditional second language courses, (2) the pedagogical practices they implemented and/or recommended, and (3) the extent to which they perceived the need for Spanish heritage language programs at the high school level. Participants, though largely aware of issues facing HLLs, struggled with how best to support them in practice, and the majority noted a need for implementation of programs for Spanish as a heritage language. Also discussed is the importance of enhancing teaching methods programs and professional development opportunities for high school Spanish teachers to better serve HLLs.

Key words: Spanish, attitudes, heritage status, high school, pedagogy

Introduction

The Hispanic population in the United States increased by 15.2 million between 2000 and 2010 (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, & Albert, 2011, p. 2)—a trend that is projected to continue, reaching 128.8 million by 2060 and making one in three U.S. residents Hispanic (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012, n.p.). This national trend has long been apparent in Florida, California, and Arizona, with their historically high...
concentrations of Hispanics, but it is also becoming more apparent in Indiana, where the Hispanic population increased by 81.7% from 2000 to 2010 (Ennis et al., 2011, p. 6). This increase affects multiple sectors of society, including education in general and high school teachers of Spanish as a second language (L2) in particular, as more Hispanic students are enrolled in classes designed for traditional L2 learners. Interestingly, only 11% of Hispanic children in the United States are first-generation immigrants who were born outside the United States; the remaining 89% would be considered heritage language learners (HLLs) because they were born in the United States of at least one foreign-born parent or grandparent (Fry & Passell, 2009, p. 1). HLLs are different from other groups of Hispanic children, such as native speakers of Spanish, because they may grow up hearing Spanish and using noncolloquial registers but often do not have the opportunity to practice outside the home or to complete formal schooling in Spanish and develop literacy skills. Therefore, they bring to the Spanish classroom varying levels of proficiency in oral and written Spanish as well as dialectal variation. In many cases, they display syntactic, lexical, and register gaps, as well as identity issues, that do not align with the experiences of traditional L2 learners or native speakers. As a result, beginning several decades ago, Spanish classes at the postsecondary level were specifically designed for HLLs. In 2010, 40% of U.S. colleges and universities reported offering specific courses and programs for Spanish HLLs, a notable increase from 1990, when only 18% offered such courses (Beaudrie, 2012b, p. 207). Multiple studies have shown that HLLs do indeed benefit from separate courses (e.g., see Krashen, 2000; Potowski, Parada, & Morgan-Short, 2012). In addition to programs at the postsecondary level, Spanish courses that are specifically designed for HLLs have also sometimes been offered in secondary schools, although it appears that comprehensive data on high schools remain to be collected. Beginning to fill this gap in the literature and helping to increase the understanding of the high school HLL context will position high school teachers to better serve HLLs and prepare them for success beyond high school.

The present case study used data from the U.S. Department of Education (2013) as a point of departure; this report showed that the average pupil-teacher ratio in Indiana is 16.7 students, and therefore, one could argue that any schools with 17 or more HLLs would have enough students to merit a separate Spanish class. Using this argument, one could determine that, of the 38 high schools in an eight-county area known as East Central Indiana, 13 had a sufficient population of Hispanic students in 2013 to theoretically justify a Spanish class for HLLs. However, only one high school in the region actually offered such a course that year. To begin to understand the factors that affect the implementation of Spanish HLL programs, the present study was designed to investigate high school Spanish teachers' attitudes toward HLLs and instructional practices to support them.

**Literature Review**

A variety of definitions of the term *heritage language learner* exist, although nearly all distinguish between HLLs, native speakers, and other students of Spanish. For example, Valdés’s (2000) definition of an HLL was “a student 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” (p. 1). Beaudrie and Ducar (2005) expanded this definition to include all individuals who have experienced a relatively extended period of exposure to the language through contact with family or other individuals, resulting in varying degrees of bilingualism. They made the distinction that the heritage language may have been learned outside the family and further stressed that varying levels of proficiency exist. Because Valdés’s as well as Beaudrie and Ducar’s definitions...
addressed variables that can be concretely measured (such as home environment, English skills, and receptive vs. productive abilities in the heritage language), the present study adopted Valdés’s definition.

The many definitions of HLLs explicitly or implicitly address their ability to use the language across a range of skills, tasks, and registers, and therefore it is important to consider the types of assessments that have been used; e.g., computer-based oral and written exams (e.g., Beaudrie, Ducar, & Relano-Pastor, 2009); a combination of oral interview, sociolinguistic questionnaire, and essay based on a reading prompt (e.g., Carreira, 2012a); the vocabulary and cloze portions of the Diploma of Spanish as a Foreign Language (DELE) test (e.g., Bowles, 2011); a self-ranking of reading, writing, speaking, and listening abilities (e.g., Alarcón, 2010); and a linguistic background questionnaire along with a written proficiency test (e.g., Montrul, 2010). When considering the range of approaches to the assessment of HLLs’ language, MacGregor-Mendoza (2012) pointed out that both written and oral testing should be included and that assessments should reflect local needs, be authentic, take into account linguistic and cultural issues, and avoid incongruities between the test format/content and HLLs’ language background (e.g., only testing HLLs who may have little experience with written Spanish using text-based formats).

A number of studies have investigated the characteristics of HLLs and shown that some traits are ubiquitous regardless of linguistic abilities and thus are useful in setting HLLs apart from L2 learners and native speakers. Specifically, HLLs tend to sound more native-like in terms of phonology in contrast with their L2 peers but struggle with orthography, syntax (e.g., gender), and semantic interpretations of the subjunctive (for a summary, see Fairclough, 2012; MacGregor-Mendoza, 2012). HLLs generally also have a positive attitude toward their language, a high degree of motivation to study the language, a sense of pride in their heritage culture, and a perception of benefits attached to knowledge of the language (Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005). Despite these commonalities, several studies found that traits of HLLs varied according to a number of factors. For example, according to Carreira (2004), HLLs can be grouped into four categories based on their own perceived proficiency in the heritage language, the relative importance HLLs assign to their place in the heritage community, and their personal connection to the language and culture through family. From this perspective, HLLs form a continuum from those who are highly involved in the heritage culture as well as more proficient in the language to those who are not directly involved in the heritage community nor proficient in the language but who still perceive a connection to the heritage culture.

Additional studies have addressed HLLs’ ability to use the language for communicative purposes. For example, students who have lower ability levels in the language generally exhibit stronger receptive (listening and reading) than productive (speaking and writing) skills (Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005), whereas more proficient students exhibit receptive and productive abilities across colloquial and formal registers (Bowles, 2011). Similarly, Alarcón (2010), who studied HLLs with stronger language skills, found that they had more advanced productive abilities in speaking but lacked the skills for academic writing. Thus, lower-proficiency HLLs tended to have receptive abilities and limited productive abilities, and higher-proficiency HLLs generally demonstrated both receptive and productive verbal abilities but needed to further develop writing skills.

Still other studies have investigated HLLs’ learning-related and sociolinguistic characteristics. Interestingly, data have shown that lower-proficiency HLLs shared many characteristics with L2 learners (Lynch, 2003, 2008; Montrul, 2010; Montrul & Perpiñán, 2011). Similarly, Lynch (2008) found that lower-proficiency HLLs of Spanish had acquisitional problems that
were similar to those experienced by L2 learners, particularly in verb mood, use of discourse markers, and avoidance of code switching. In addition, these HLLs and L2 learners showed similarities in their pace of grammatical development, the domains in which they struggled most, and the manner in which they approached tasks (Fairclough, 2012). Because typical HLLs in Indiana high schools exhibit many of the traits of L2 learners and generally demonstrate proficiency in the mid to lower end of the proficiency scale, they are often placed in courses for learners of Spanish as a second language. In contrast, more advanced HLLs have more in common with native speakers (Alarcón, 2010). Because of these shared traits and due to their higher proficiency levels, placement into courses for second language learners of Spanish may not accommodate the needs of higher-level HLLs either.

Despite commonalities among HLLs, L2 learners, and native speakers, these three groups of learners have fundamentally different characteristics and needs. In fact, a number of studies have determined that separate programs for HLLs are essential to address the particular strengths and weaknesses that they bring to the classroom (e.g., Correa, 2011; Krashen, 2000; MacGregor-Mendoza, 2012; Montrul & Perpiñán, 2011; Potowski et al., 2012; Teschner, 1983; UCLA Steering Committee, 2001). Krashen in particular made a strong case:

Heritage language speakers are in a no-win situation in foreign language classes. If they do well, it is expected. If HL [heritage language] speakers do not do well in foreign language classes, the experience is especially painful. Often, classes focus on conscious learning of grammatical rules that are late acquired. Some HL speakers may not have learned or acquired these items. Non-speakers of the HL who are good at grammar sometimes outperform HL speakers on grammar tests and get higher grades in the language class, even though the non-speaker of the HL may be incapable of communicating the simplest idea in the language while the HL speaker may be quite competent in everyday conversation. Such events could be psychologically devastating, a message to the HL speaker that he or she does not know his or her own language, while an outsider does. (p. 441)

Turning to the teachers of HLLs, many studies have focused on teacher preparation programs and established a need for increased professional development related to HLLs. For example, Lee and Oxelson (2010) examined the attitudes of K–12 teachers without discipline-specific training as language educators toward their role in helping HLLs to maintain and develop their Spanish proficiency. They found that these teachers expressed negative or indifferent reactions toward HLLs. Scalera (1998) highlighted a historical lack of support for teachers of HLLs, both in teacher preparation programs and in the language classroom. Potowski and Carreira (2004) examined traditional foreign language methodology courses and concluded that they were insufficient to prepare teachers to work with HLLs, stating that HLLs should be taught in classes that were designed more like language arts courses for native speakers.

Finally, a number of studies have focused on the impact of teachers’ attitudes and practices on HLLs’ success in the language classroom (Clair & Adger, 1999; Gutiérrez, 1990; Leeman, 2005; Potowski, 2002; Romero, 2000; Scalera, 1998; Sylvan, 2000). Lacorte and Canabel (2005) used a questionnaire, interviews, and nonparticipant observations to investigate the attitudes and practices of university teachers in advanced Spanish courses that included both HLLs and L2 learners; they found that teachers generally did not understand why HLLs failed to consistently perform better than their L2 peers. Many assumed that HLLs should be more proficient in the
heritage language and should identify more with cultural aspects of the Spanish-speaking world. The authors suggested that such perceptions can result in the “development of a burdensome pedagogic environment for some Hispanic students, who might not feel as keen as their FL [foreign language, i.e., L2] peers to unquestionably accept the cultural and linguistic models provided by the instructor” (p. 93). In addition, they concluded that standard foreign language methodologies may not be as appropriate for HLLs as for L2 learners. Relatively few studies have examined these attitudes and practices in depth at the high school level. Although Carreira’s study (2004) did not focus primarily on teachers’ attitudes, she did ask a group of 13 high school teachers to define HLL and found that some thought of HLLs as English language learners or as students who could understand but not speak Spanish.

Because previous research has focused primarily on postsecondary learners and has documented variability among HLLs, the present study focused both on current and future teachers of high school Spanish courses in the hope of informing teaching practice and thus better serving HLLs at the secondary level. Specifically, the case study examined the pedagogical practices and attitudes of high school Spanish teachers in East Central Indiana toward HLLs enrolled in their classrooms, which across the state are overwhelmingly standard L2 classrooms that integrate HLLs and L2 learners and have a curriculum designed for learners of Spanish as an L2. The study sought to answer three research questions:

1. To what extent are Spanish teachers in this region aware of the unique linguistic, social, and individual challenges facing HLLs?
2. What pedagogical practices are implemented and/or recommended for courses that integrate HLLs and L2 learners?
3. To what extent do the Spanish teachers in this study perceive the need to develop and offer separate programs in Spanish to meet the differing needs of HLLs enrolled in their high schools?

Methodology

Participants

This study included both preservice (teacher candidates) and in-service (current) teachers of Spanish. By inviting participants from two different stages of the same career path, the study aimed to determine to what extent teacher candidates are prepared in advance to support the diversity among learners in language classrooms or, rather, if such skills are learned in the classroom.

Teacher Candidates

A foreign language methods professor at a large university in East Central Indiana forwarded to his students an invitation and survey link from the authors to participate in the study. The 14 undergraduate Spanish education majors who received this invitation were enrolled in the university’s foreign language teacher preparation program, working toward a BA in education, and had not yet begun teaching. Responses were obtained from 13 of the 14 teacher candidates. Nine planned to teach Spanish at the high school level, one planned to teach at a middle school, another at a university, and two more were undecided. Three of the 13 chose not to provide further demographic information. Of the 10 who did, the average age was 24. Five were female, seven were white, and two self-identified as HLLs. Eight stated that they had learned about HLLs in their teacher preparation program, and six of these eight had worked directly with HLLs in short-term practicums, observations, volunteer experiences, and work contexts.

In-Service Teachers

The survey invitation and link were also distributed by e-mail to members of the Indiana American Association for Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese who worked in
central Indiana. For the purposes of this study, only responses from teachers who taught in counties within East Central Indiana were considered. To further increase the response rate, in-service Spanish teachers who were listed on the Web sites of schools in that area were also contacted by e-mail. From the approximately 50 teachers in the region, 23 responses were obtained. Twenty chose to provide demographic information. Their average age was 38.5. Fifteen were female, nineteen were white, and three self-identified as HLLs. All but two had HLLs in their classes at the time of the study. Only one taught at a school that offered a course in Spanish as a heritage language.

Data Collection Instrument
An online survey (see Appendix) was created using Qualtrics software and included questions about participants’ attitudes and pedagogical practices concerning Spanish HLLs as well as hypothetical scenarios related to teaching them. Skip logic allowed for all participants to answer a common subset of questions, after which teacher candidates and in-service teachers each responded to separate sets of questions specifically reflecting their differing circumstances. The survey was organized into four broad subsections: (1) fixed-response items to collect the demographic data reported above, (2) fixed-response items to address participants’ attitudes and practices toward HLLs, (3) open-ended questions to further investigate their attitudes and practices, and (4) fixed-response items for the hypothetical scenarios. The scenarios addressed teachers’ awareness of challenges, pedagogical practices, and attitudes; were inspired by work by Carreira (2004), Lacorte and Canabel (2005) and Valdés (1995); and also took into consideration input from educators who had experience teaching HLLs. Although the scenarios inevitably measured what teachers thought they would do rather than providing observational measures of actual behaviors, they helped gauge attitudes, which was a primary focus of this study.

Coding
Responses to the first set of fixed-item responses were coded and provided the demographic data reported above. Positive responses to the remaining fixed-response items automatically triggered corresponding open-ended questions. To analyze the open-ended responses, a grounded theory approach was used in which participants’ responses were tagged with codes so as to highlight repeated concepts and patterns. This was an iterative process and eventually yielded the categories discussed below. The two researchers coded all of the data independently: initial agreement between the coders was 90%, and all differences in coding were resolved through discussion. After conducting this qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses, the researchers also calculated percentages to illustrate the prevalence of responses in each category.

Results
All of the teacher candidates and in-service teachers noted that HLLs face unique challenges or have different needs than other language learners (items 11 and 21). To meet these needs, 16 of the 23 in-service teachers (item 19) confirmed that schools should provide HLL-specific programs if there were a sufficient Hispanic population, and 18 total participants (12 in-service and six preservice) said they would directly advocate for such a program (item 28). However, it should be remembered that such programs were only offered in one of the participants’ schools. Data from the open-ended responses revealed that participants focused most on three main categories of issues as well as several subcategories: (1) HLLs’ knowledge and use of language, such as mechanics, grammar, spelling, literacy, and linguistic variation; (2) social and identity issues, such as teacher expectations, exclusion, behavior, parent communication,
and HLL frustration; and (3) curriculum design and development, such as differentiation, pacing, course difficulty, assessment strategies, culturally relevant materials, and teachers’ lack of time and training. Data on each of these categories were further grouped and revealed teachers’ perceptions of the challenges created by enrolling HLLs in courses designed for L2 learners and the additional strategies that teachers used to support HLLs.

**Theme 1: Linguistic Issues**

Both preservice and in-service participants cited differences in HLLs' and L2 learners’ knowledge and use of language as the major concern; in fact, 57% of the open-ended comments about issues that HLLs face addressed language issues. In addition, 30% of support strategies offered by both groups dealt with linguistic support. Teacher candidates were more likely to mention linguistic issues (65% of their comments) than were current teachers (54%).

First, preservice and in-service teachers consistently pointed out Indiana HLLs’ difficulties with mechanics and grammar, starting with their weaker writing abilities; 10 of the in-service teachers directly noted differences between L2 learners’ and HLLs’ literacy skills: “[HLLs] can speak/understand very well, but cannot spell/write. The other [L2] students are the exact opposite.” In addition, 8 of the 13 teacher candidates focused on HLLs’ struggle to master specific grammatical rules, such as stem changes and accent marks, with one identifying grammar as the biggest challenge that HLLs face. Nearly half (12 of the 23) of the in-service teachers felt that grammatical issues were significant, although their responses showed variability on this topic: One in-service teacher stated, e.g., that HLLs “[rely] on their own erroneous instincts of language mechanics,” and another suggested that HLLs may think a sentence “sounds right,” even when it is grammatically incorrect. A third in-service teacher stated that HLLs “struggle in using complex grammatical structures.” In contrast, another stated that HLLs “do not need to linger on the grammar concepts, because they are most likely already using them properly.” Although this latter quote contradicted other participants’ comments, as well as scholarship in the field, the difference in teachers’ perceptions illustrates the variability that exists within the HLL population. It may also reflect the notion that HLLs speak or write in grammatically correct ways but cannot necessarily articulate the rules behind the constructs, which their L2 peers can do with greater facility.

When asked how they planned to, or did already, support HLLs, 18% of the practical strategies that both groups of participants suggested focused on dealing with mechanics and grammar. Specific strategies included directly incorporating vocabulary from the student’s language variety into lessons for the class as a whole, giving grammar notes in English and Spanish, providing additional practice in spelling, focusing on lexicon and grammar, and assigning more frequent writing tasks. One teacher candidate mentioned the importance of understanding “that just because a student can speak a language fluently does not mean that they can read it and write it effectively, too” (emphasis in original) and stressed the importance of communicating this reality in an encouraging manner.

Second, 28% of the participants’ comments (23% of the preservice teachers’ and 30% of the in-service teachers’ comments) mentioned potential challenges posed by the legitimacy of dialectal differences. Five respondents noted that HLLs struggled with the standardized variety of Spanish that was taught in class. Ten of the 23 current teachers directly mentioned the differences in HLLs’ use of language, particularly their use of slang and linguistic variation: “The Spanish that students speak is often not ‘true’ Spanish, but a slang or Tex-Mex version.” One participant, who taught HLLs from a variety of Spanish-speaking regions, noted: “Spanish is slightly different in each
country and students don’t ‘get’ that there are different ways to use the language.’

Only 5% of the support strategies were meant to accommodate this variability in HLLs’ language; one participant suggested that teachers should demonstrate an awareness of dialectal differences by, e.g., “taking [HLLs’] previous experience into account while grading work...[and] talking to them at the beginning of the semester and letting them know that their Spanish is not incorrect.” To gain further insight, items 29 and 30 presented participants with a scenario involving an HLL who was frustrated because the variety of Spanish being taught differed from her own; they were asked first about their attitudes regarding the situation (item 29) and then about their practices (item 30). Their responses largely reflected the support strategies described above: None expressed a negative reaction to the student, 8 were neutral, and 24 were positive, stating that they placed equal importance on all varieties of Spanish. In terms of their practices, only one participant would attempt to have the student adjust her Spanish, 14 would incorporate vocabulary from the student’s home country, 20 would teach vocabulary from multiple varieties of Spanish, 3 said there would be no difference in their teaching style, and 2 marked “other” without specifying further.

Theme 2: Social and Identity Issues
Fourteen percent of participants’ comments about issues that HLLs face in traditional L2 courses dealt with the social theme. Teacher candidates mentioned these issues more often than current teachers (33% of comments from the former vs. 9% from the latter), and only 14% of the support strategies dealt with this theme.

First, the data revealed the extent to which preservice and in-service teachers viewed HLLs as being different from L2 learners. Teacher candidates noted that teachers of HLLs believed that HLLs “should be perfect students,” that they seemed to “like talking more than learning,” or that they were sometimes excluded by peers for being “different.” Furthermore, preservice teachers were aware that they could overlook HLLs because, according to one participant, teachers “assume that they [HLLs] know [the material] well enough and give the non-native students more opportunities to learn and volunteer in class,” suggesting that they realized that teachers may not allocate learning time and opportunity equally for L2 learners and HLLs. Although in-service teachers identified some of the same issues, their most frequently mentioned social issues were actually behavioral; in particular, in-service teachers pointed out that HLLs experienced boredom in a traditional L2 class, which could lead HLLs to act out or exhibit other inappropriate behavioral patterns. Twenty-six percent of the responses to item 25 had to do with how HLLs’ behavior and attitudes affected the classroom dynamic: three teachers suggested that HLLs often chose not to study because they “assume they know everything, especially writing and reading”; one reported issues with HLLs who dominated the class; and two others indicated a lack of HLL participation, which one teacher interpreted as apathy. Another in-service teacher associated behavioral problems with HLLs’ legal status:

The majority of Hispanic learners in our community are illegal which keeps them from being able to work or apply for scholarships and the FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid]. Illegal learners begin to act out poorly by their junior/senior year when they realize that they cannot obtain a driver’s license, attend college without paying full tuition, or work without using false documents.

In addition to these behavioral issues, three in-service participants mentioned the difficulty in communicating with parents: As one explained, some parents of HLLs “expect [A’s] because their child speaks Spanish, but don’t take into account the mastery of the four skills [reading, writing, speaking, listening] and special challenges that HLLs have.”
Few support strategies related to social issues directly addressed behavioral problems; instead, participants focused on how to support HLLs by giving them a sense of importance in the class and in building peer relationships. Responses from teacher candidates centered on helping HLLs to feel involved in the class, providing them with the same opportunities as other students, and giving them the “attention that they deserve.” One teacher candidate stated that the best way to support HLLs was to assure them individually “that they can come to [the teacher] with any question they may have.” Not surprisingly, strategies offered by in-service teachers were somewhat more specific: allowing HLLs to serve as peer mentors to other students, including them in all activities so they would feel more involved, and assigning them leadership roles.

Second, 12% of participants’ responses (5% of teacher candidates’ and 14% of current teachers’ comments) dealt with individual/identity issues related to HLLs’ frustration due to feeling that the course was too easy: As one preservice teacher noted, HLLs “may feel too smart” in a traditional L2 classroom. In-service teachers echoed this response, noting the need to “get [HLLs] to realize that they don’t ‘know everything’ and can benefit from the class just like everyone else.” One teacher also pointed out that some HLLs assumed that “they are fluent in the [heritage] language when in fact, they are not.” Another participant noticed a lack of interest in HLLs toward Spanish.

Although none of the suggested strategies directly dealt with HLLs’ feelings of frustration, 20% of both groups’ comments addressed the need to make the class more interesting for HLLs by using materials that were more relevant to HLLs’ sense of identity. In-service participants mentioned that they would suggest books on culture and history to HLLs and make more of an effort to explain cross-cultural differences and highlight cultural activities. In addition, item 31 presented all participants with a scenario about noncompliant HLLs who believed they were already fluent in Spanish. Responses largely reflected a need for support at the individual level: Fifteen participants said they would work directly with the students to address inconsistencies in their Spanish, 10 stated that they would not directly address inconsistencies in HLLs’ use of language but instead would focus on increasing their overall participation, and 6 stated that they would attempt to resolve the problems indirectly or use other, unspecified strategies.

**Theme 3: Curricular Issues**

Seventeen percent of the challenges mentioned by participants dealt with curricular issues, and 36% of the strategies that teachers offered to support HLLs addressed curriculum. Overall, when asked what they would do to support HLLs if their school had a large HLL population, 15 of the 23 stated that they would differentiate their lesson plans for HLLs, and 9 noted that they would provide additional materials to HLLs but not change their teaching style.

Teacher candidates were less likely to mention curriculum in item 14 (5% of their responses) than were in-service teachers (21% of their responses in item 24) and were also less able to offer specific strategies: Two teacher candidates suggested providing “extra assignments so [the HLLs] can practice the material” and “a differentiated activity during lessons that allow for more engagement with the material.” In contrast, in-service teachers emphasized the lack of materials and resources geared toward HLLs and/or the need to find or develop high-interest activities; such comments made up 20% of the responses to item 25 (challenges that teachers face with HLLs and L2 learners together in class). Similarly, in item 22 (about issues facing HLLs), in-service teachers were primarily concerned with the pacing and difficulty of the curriculum. Seventeen percent noted the difficulty of using sufficiently challenging Spanish and activities for HLLs without “losing” other students. One teacher explained that the greatest issue facing HLLs was “being bored of textbook drills,” and six others suggested...
that this boredom was due to the pace of the lesson, the lack of differentiated activities specifically designed for HLLs, and the scarcity of course materials including aspects of their dialect and heritage culture. To support the needs of L2 learners and HLLs enrolled in the same class, in-service teachers noted that they would provide HLLs with supplemental materials such as advanced readings or independent projects. Interestingly, one respondent said that she “[helped] them discern what they should study as opposed to what [her] traditional students should study,” and another noted that, to accommodate the needs of HLLs and L2 learners, she did not know how to “integrate the [L2] learner activities with the [HLL] activities” and differentiated instruction by designing totally separate lesson plans, clearly a time-consuming and challenging approach.

Both participant groups were asked about their approach to assessment, and all respondents said that they would assess HLLs at the beginning of the year to determine their current Spanish proficiency. Most participants acknowledged the benefit of a written and/or oral assessment: 23 of the 36 participants said they would use an oral and/or written essay assessment, four stated that they would give a traditional paper-and-pencil test, and five marked “other” (with one suggesting using oral interviews exclusively and another mentioning varying the assessment depending on the circumstances with each HLL). Finally, 5 of the 36 teachers mentioned that they were not trained to teach HLLs: In the words of one participant, he was “trained to teach Spanish as a second language and not a first.” This quote was also supported by preservice participants, five of whom reported feeling underprepared to teach HLLs.

**Discussion**

**Research Question 1: Teacher Awareness of the Unique Challenges Facing HLLs**

Teacher candidates and in-service Spanish teachers were aware that their students had different challenges depending on their sociolinguistic background, although in-service teachers seemed more aware of the nuances of these challenges. Pre- and in-service participants identified HLL issues dealing with linguistic, social/identity, and curricular needs, but the comments by the former were generally more limited than those pointed out by the latter, focusing more strictly on grammar as opposed to challenges arising from dialectal differences and slang. In addition, in-service teachers’ comments highlighted the connection between social and curricular issues (e.g., that the pace and content of lessons may be slow or not culturally relevant to HLLs, resulting in boredom or a sense of misplacement). These participants were also aware of the impact that a student’s legal status might have on his or her behavior. Teacher candidates’ comments showed little awareness of these concerns, but they did recognize the effect of teacher assumptions on classroom learning. Furthermore, despite the limitations observed in the preservice candidates’ data concerning linguistic, social, and curricular needs, their assessment of identity issues was mostly on par with that of in-service respondents, e.g., recognizing the HLLs’ feelings of frustration. This was reinforced by item 29, where the majority of all participants expressed a positive reaction toward a frustrated HLL.

Related to this notion of teachers’ perceptions of identity issues, the data also show that in-service teachers, despite being more experienced in dealing with the dynamics of standard L2 classes, still had gaps in how they conceptualized and served HLLs. Although the scope of this study did not allow the collection of longitudinal data from the same individuals during their teacher preparation program and then again later as in-service teachers, what still seemed apparent was that (1) preservice participants were aware that they lacked training regarding HLLs, and (2) in-service participants’ comments suggested that being in the classroom did not compensate for such training. For example, some in-service
teachers seemed to place HLLs in the same category as native speakers. In particular, one participant said that, if at all possible, “students should be provided the opportunity to learn from core standard courses in the native language.” This suggests that this teacher did not realize that HLLs may not be equipped with the same linguistic and literacy skills as native speakers of Spanish because their learning was interrupted or remains incomplete. However, although some HLLs could function well in a core class in Spanish, others clearly would not. Interestingly, the pendulum can also swing to the opposite extreme; for example, another participant said, “Heritage language learners need to accept responsibility for learning English to communicate and work in the Indiana environment.” This statement points to an assumption that HLLs in general lack sufficient English skills and should prioritize improving their English. The reality, however, is that HLLs display notable variation in both their English and Spanish skills and that linguistic and cultural development in both languages is beneficial to them (Valdés, 2000). The misconceptions in the two preceding quotes echo the findings of Lacorte and Canabel’s (2005) study about the attitudes and practices of university instructors of HLLs: In their study, participants also tended to conflate the terms native speaker and HLL and to feel as though HLLs should be more proficient in the heritage language.

These examples confirm that Alarcón’s (2010) suggestion to conduct detailed sociolinguistic background surveys and Carreira’s (2012a) practice of performing oral and written assessments of each HLL would be of great benefit at the high school level. Furthermore, there seems to be a need for more training about HLLs in teacher preparation courses and professional development workshops, a comment voiced by several participants in the present study. In summary, given that all participants agreed that HLLs face unique challenges, research question 1 is supported: Participants are aware to a very large extent that HLLs have distinct linguistic, social/identity, and curricular issues, but there are still gaps in their understanding.

Research Question 2: Pedagogical Practices
Participants’ self-reported practices toward HLLs provided some interesting insights. First, as many participants mentioned, the inclusion of HLLs in standard L2 classes requires that instruction be differentiated and that pedagogical strategies and resources be designed to meet individual learning needs. For example, one participant with over 20 years of experience in the field said that “each learner is different, and will approach their learning with their own bias. Most will challenge the instructor to determine if their skills are beyond those of the instructor. Meet their challenge and give them a reason to value your skill set and expertise.” This echoes Carreira’s (2012b) conclusion that “effective HL [heritage language] teaching hinges on knowing the learner—his or her life experiences, level of academic preparedness, linguistic abilities, affective needs, and goals—and attending to all these factors with effective instructional tools and curricula” (p. 235). In the same fashion, Alarcón (2010) found that the strengths and sociolinguistic needs of advanced HLLs were much different from those of less proficient HLLs and recommended that classroom instruction vary accordingly. In addition, Beaudrie (2012a) noted that Spanish HLLs benefit from direct instruction in common types of misspellings, a need not typically present among L2 learners—HLLs may only know what a word sounds like and spell it accordingly, e.g., often omitting the silent “h” in words like hacer and hecho. This was reflected in the responses of the present study’s participants, who mentioned that HLLs had more spelling issues than their peers and suggested the use of differentiated instruction to help meet these challenges. Clearly, participants recognized that “a one-size-fits-all pedagogical paradigm is not likely to succeed in
educating such a diverse population” (Beaudrie, 2012b, p. 204). However, planning varied instruction takes time, and lack of sufficient daily preparation time was a common issue cited by in-service participants in the present study. In sum, what would be beneficial in theory may not always be practical for high school teachers in terms of the materials and lessons, or, as indicated in responses to item 27, HLL-specific assessments. Most participants believed that an oral and/or written assessment at the beginning of the year specifically for HLLs would be a good idea, but whether they would have the time and training to create an effective assessment tool or to use an existing test (e.g., the ACTFL’s OPI, WPT, or AAPPL tests) is not clear.

That said, in-service participants reported that they did offer support to HLLs in the form of additional cultural activities as well as a more challenging curriculum designed to engage them in using higher-order skills. Specific mentions of individual and curricular support were less predominant among teacher candidates, although candidates did suggest using differentiated activities related to the heritage culture, for example. As one in-service participant indicated, “Being able to give [HLLs] a chance to show their culture in the classroom is a good choice.” This need for culturally relevant instruction was also noted in Beaudrie et al. (2009), who called for more focus on little “c” culture to hold students’ interest and keep them engaged, as well as culture-based materials and textbooks. Several responses in the present study pointed to the need for involvement in the heritage community, a theme also consistent with the literature. For example, Beaudrie and Ducar (2005) suggested having HLLs interview members of the heritage culture in Spanish, an approach that is sometimes used at the university level, where students tend to be more involved in the community; similar projects could be used at the high school level to allow HLLs to practice their language skills and increase their involvement in the community. Teacher candidates highlighted their intent to provide linguistic and social support nearly equally, e.g., by making HLLs feel involved in class (which reflects one in-service teacher’s idea of assigning HLLs a leadership role in the classroom), recognizing their dialectal differences, and providing extra support in reading and writing.

Interestingly, the results of items 30 and 31 presented a contradiction in response patterns: In item 30, only one person indicated that he or she would “attempt to have [the students] adjust [their] Spanish,” but nearly half of the responses in item 31 showed respondents’ inclination toward “working directly with students to address inconsistencies in their Spanish.” This seems to indicate a misalignment between attitudes and practices. In sum, to answer research question 2, participants suggested several pedagogical practices to support the needs of HLLs in traditional L2 classrooms, and they generally believed that differentiated instruction, teaching multiple linguistic and cultural varieties, and administering HLL-specific assessments would be beneficial for students. However, the results also indicated some contradiction between dispositions and practices that would benefit from further investigation.

**Research Question 3: Teachers’ Perceptions of the Need for High School Spanish HLL Programs**

A majority of the in-service teachers (16 of the 23) and almost half of the teacher candidates (6 of the 13) noted a need for a separate Spanish program for HLLs, and 18 participants from both groups stated that they would actually advocate for such a program. Although teachers recognized the need for differentiation in traditional L2 classrooms that integrate HLLs, they also cited insufficient planning and preparation to individualize instruction for HLLs. The task of creating HLL-specific materials would be more challenging when HLLs come from a variety of national backgrounds, speak different versions of
Spanish, and have widely ranging socio-economic backgrounds and cultural origins. Correa (2011) echoed this need for differentiation in traditional L2 classrooms and even further differentiation within Spanish HLL courses (e.g., to accommodate their range of ability levels). However, the teachers in the present study who did not advocate for separate HLL courses noted some important advantages to inclusion, such as positive interactions between L2 learners and HLLs:

I absolutely love having the heritage learners mixed with my [Spanish] III and AP [Advanced Placement] students. They enrich our environment so much and can help out the other students when we watch movies and read stories. Also, in my experience, most of my heritage learners have not been necessarily the most academic students. So, in AP, for example, it gave them an opportunity to take a leadership role for the first time in their lives. It was very rewarding to see how they rose to the occasion.

Examples of positive interactions are also supported in the literature. Bowles (2011) examined the benefits of pairing up L2 learners and HLLs and determined that both groups mutually benefited from joint writing tasks, as L2 learners are generally more proficient at spelling and accent placement, whereas HLLs better contribute to vocabulary. The question, though, is whether these benefits outweigh the benefits of being able to address HLLs’ unique challenges more comprehensively in a Spanish course specifically for them in the high school context.

A number of studies support the present study’s findings. For example, some studies have advocated for the creation of programs for Spanish HLLs, given their varied linguistic needs (e.g., Correa, 2011; Lynch, 2008). Others have emphasized the importance of varying levels of courses so that lower-level and advanced HLLs can have their own niches in the learning community to correspond to their ability levels (e.g., Alarcón, 2010; Beaudrie, 2012b; Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005). Although these studies dealt with university programs, the present study revealed that, to a large extent, high school Spanish teachers (more than 61% of respondents) perceived the need for Spanish HLL programs in high schools with sufficient Hispanic populations; therefore, research question 3 is supported. One high school teacher in the present study summarized it well: “Heritage language learners approach learning Spanish in a different way than traditional students and have different needs and goals. A class focusing on these needs and goals would be more beneficial than having them in regular classes.”

Conclusion

Future research might solicit information from other stakeholders, including HLLs, faculty in teacher education programs, and HLLs’ family members, to offer multiple perspectives on learners’ needs and goals. In addition, studies might further investigate the perceived benefits of having HLLs with different levels of proficiency in traditional L2 classrooms at a variety of levels as well as explore the contradictions between teachers’ attitudes and practices revealed herein (either in cross-sectional studies comparing teachers’ survey data on their attitudes and observational data on their practices or in longitudinal studies that follow teacher candidates into the field). Finally, future research could explore the process of investigating the backgrounds, proficiency levels, and needs of HLLs in their geographic region, grouping students with similar needs, designing appropriate curriculum, and then implementing HLL programs at the high school level.

The present study contributes to the field by focusing on teachers of Spanish HLLs at the high school level and revealing the extent to which participants understood the unique needs of HLLs and believed in
the necessity of supporting these learners’ needs by differentiating instruction, teaching multiple linguistic varieties, and administering HLL-specific assessments. The data also show a lack of alignment between teachers’ dispositions and their practices, both for in-service teachers and teacher candidates. This finding points to a need for teacher preparation programs to provide more direct training and field experiences related to HLLs. In addition, the majority of participants would advocate for Spanish programs designed specifically for HLLs, although some teachers did recognize the unique benefits that HLLs can provide by being placed in the L2 classroom.

In conclusion, as universities strive to attract and integrate minority students into their campuses and as a greater percentage of employers recognize the benefits of a multilingual and multicultural workforce, it will be increasingly vital to prepare HLLs for success. Helping them to thrive in high school, college, and beyond is not simply a matter of improving their English skills but is also integrally linked to supporting and challenging them to broaden their Spanish skills and their connection with their heritage culture. This can be better accomplished if teachers have sufficient training and support to meet these needs.

Notes
1. Differentiated instruction refers to a teacher’s use of knowledge about the differences and similarities among students to plan lessons based on each student’s current level and that provide multiple options for taking in information. For example, the teacher might offer students a choice of reading materials or writing prompts to suit their interests or might take into account students’ individual learning styles by providing information in a variety of formats. See Correa (2011) for ways to differentiate for HLLs.
2. Little “c” culture refers to a type of culture that is difficult to see, such as the perspective of a culture, in contrast to big “C” culture, which focuses mostly on the products of a culture. Some examples of little “c” culture include cultural norms, myths, and legends. See Seelye (1984).

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APPENDIX

Survey: Spanish Heritage Language Learners in the Secondary Classroom
(Skip logic for question flow was applied, so respondents only saw questions relevant to them.)

Q1 Informed consent

Q2 How long have you been teaching? (Student teaching counts as half a year of teaching.)
   • I have not started teaching
   • 1 year or less
   • 2-5 years
   • 6-10 years
   • 11-20 years
   • 21+ years

Q3 Approximately how many students are enrolled at your school?
   • Less than 100 students
   • 100-499 students
   • 500-899 students
   • 900-1299 students
   • 1300+ students
   • I'm not sure

Q4 What grade levels do you primarily teach? (select all that apply)
   • 6
   • 7
   • 8
   • Freshman (or Spanish I)
   • Sophomore (or Spanish II)
   • Junior (or Spanish III)
   • Senior (or Spanish IV)
   • Other (please specify) _______________

Q5 The following questions will deal with Spanish heritage language learners. For the purpose of this study, heritage language learners are defined as students who grew up speaking and/or hearing Spanish at home but have primarily received formal schooling in English.

Q6 What grade level do you hope to teach?
   • 6
   • 7
   • 8
   • 9 (Spanish I)
   • 10 (Spanish II)
   • 11 (Spanish III)
   • 12 (Spanish IV)
   • Other (please specify) _______________

Q7 Have you learned about heritage language learners in any of your classes at BSU?
   • Yes
   • No
   • I'm not sure

Q8 Have you learned about heritage language learners in any other context? (e.g., IFLTA conference, volunteer experience, etc)
   • Yes (please specify) _______________
   • No
   • I'm not sure
Q9 Have you worked with heritage language learners in your pre-service opportunities? (e.g., practicum, observations, volunteer experiences, etc)
   - Yes
   - No

Q10 In what situation(s) have you worked with heritage language learners?
   - Practicum
   - Observations
   - Volunteer experiences (Please specify) ______________________
   - Other (Please specify) ______________________

Q11 Based on the definition of heritage language learners provided in this study (reiterated below) and any knowledge you might have gained in your pre-service opportunities, do you perceive that heritage language learners have different challenges or needs compared to other language students?
   - Yes
   - No
   - I'm not sure

Q12 Please identify the three biggest challenges you believe these students face with regard to learning Spanish in a traditional classroom setting.
   1.
   2.
   3.

Q13 Do you perceive that heritage language learners need additional support besides what is given to other language students?
   - Yes
   - No

Q14 What kind of support might you consider providing for these students?

Q15 The following questions will deal with Spanish heritage language learners. For the purpose of this study, heritage language learners are defined as students who grew up speaking and/or hearing Spanish at home and have primarily received formal schooling in English.

Q16 Have you worked with Spanish heritage language learners in a classroom setting?
   - Yes
   - No
   - I'm not sure

Q17 How many Spanish heritage language learners are currently in your Spanish class(es)?
   - None
   - 1-3
   - 4-8
   - 9-13
   - 14-18
   - 19-23
   - more than 23
   - I'm not sure

Q18 Does your school currently provide Spanish courses designed for Spanish heritage language learners?
   - Yes, my school provides courses specifically for heritage language learners
   - No, my school does NOT provide these courses and is not considering doing so
   - No, my school does NOT provide these courses BUT they are being considered
Q19 Do you think that schools should provide Spanish courses designed for Spanish heritage language learners, assuming there is a large enough population of heritage language learners to warrant such a program?
   • Yes
   • No
   • I'm not sure

Q20 Referring to the previous question, "Do you think that schools should provide Spanish courses designed for Spanish heritage language learners, assuming there is a large enough population of heritage language learners to warrant such a program?", why did you answer "<participant's answer from the previous item was inserted here by Qualtrics for each respondent>"?

Q21 Do you perceive that heritage language learners have different language challenges or needs compared to other students?
   • Yes
   • No

Q22 Please identify the three biggest challenges you believe these students face with regard to learning Spanish in a traditional classroom setting.
   1
   2
   3

Q23 Do you attempt to provide additional support, materials, etc for Spanish heritage language learners?
   • Yes
   • No

Q24 What types of additional support do you tend to provide?

Q25 What kind of challenges do you face as a teacher of heritage language learners?
   1
   2
   3

Q26 The following is a series of classroom scenarios related to Spanish heritage language learners. If you have not worked with heritage learners, use your pedagogical knowledge to determine what you would do in these scenarios.

Q27 Imagine that you want to assess the current Spanish proficiency of heritage language learners at the beginning of the school year. How would you do so?
   • I would give them a traditional paper-and-pencil test
   • I would design an assessment that involved an oral presentation and writing a paper
   • I would not assess my students at the beginning of the school year
   • I would use some other assessment (Please specify) __________________

Q28 Assume that there is a large population of Spanish heritage language learners at your school. Which would you do?
   • Advocate a Spanish program designed for heritage learners
   • Differentiate my lessons for heritage learners
   • Provide additional materials for heritage learners, but not change my teaching style
   • There would be no difference in my teaching style
   • Other (Please specify) __________________
Q29 Maria is a heritage language learner whose family is originally from Colombia. She is often frustrated because the variety of Spanish that you teach is different from the variety she speaks at home. How would you feel about the situation?
   • I would be annoyed. The variety I teach is the standard variety, therefore this student should be fine with learning it.
   • I would feel neutral.
   • I would be sympathetic. I place equal importance on all varieties of Spanish.
   • Other (Please specify) ______________________

Q30 Consider the previous situation: Maria is a heritage language learner whose family is originally from Colombia. She is often frustrated because the variety of Spanish that you teach is different from the variety she speaks at home. What would you do?
   • Attempt to have her adjust her Spanish
   • Incorporate vocabulary from Colombian Spanish into my lessons
   • Teach vocabulary from multiple varieties of Spanish
   • There would be no difference in my teaching style
   • Other (Please specify) ______________________

Q31 Imagine that you are a non-native Spanish speaker and you are teaching a class with several heritage learners. Because they grew up speaking Spanish in their homes, these particular learners believe that they are already fluent and do not need to pay attention and work to improve their Spanish. How would you handle the situation?
   • I would work directly with the students to address inconsistencies in their Spanish
   • I would not directly address their inconsistencies but would instead focus on increasing their overall participation
   • I would not work directly with the students but would attempt to fix the problems indirectly
   • There would be no difference in my teaching style or approach
   • Other (Please specify) ______________________

Q32 Do you have any additional comments related to heritage language learners?

Q33 What is your gender?
   • Male
   • Female

Q34 What is your age?

Q35 Do you identify as being of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?
   • Yes
   • No
   • I prefer not to say

Q36 What is your ethnicity?
   • I prefer not to say
   • Other
   • Asian/Pacific Islander
   • Native American
   • Black
   • White

Q37 What language did you first learn to speak? (Select all that apply)
   • English
   • Spanish
   • Other (Please specify) ______________________
Q38 When did you begin learning Spanish?
   - From birth (my family spoke it at home)
   - Primary school
   - Secondary school
   - University
   - Other (Please specify) ____________________

Q39 Have you had any extended contact with native speakers of Spanish? (E.g., travel, work, volunteer experiences, or in your personal life)
   - Yes (Please specify) ____________________
   - No

Q40 Do you identify yourself as a heritage language learner?
   - Yes
   - No