

Seeking Explanatory Adequacy: A Dual Approach to Understanding the Term “Heritage Language Learner”

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ABSTRACT

What is a heritage language learner (HLL)? We argue that a pedagogically valuable answer to this question must do more than describe all individuals who ought be considered HLLs; it should also offer a roadmap for meeting the needs of HLLs with regard to language learning. To achieve this goal, which we refer to as achieving “explanatory adequacy”, the answer to the above question must 1) differentiate HLLs from second-language learners (SLLs), 2) differentiate HLLs from first-language learners (L1Ls), and 3) differentiate between different types of HLLs. In reference to the first task, we propose that HLLs are students whose identity and/or linguistic needs differ from those of second language learners by virtue of having a family background in the heritage language (HL) or culture (HC). In reference to the second task, we argue that unlike L1L-s, HLLs do not receive sufficient exposure to their language and culture to fulfill basic identity and linguistic needs. Consequently, they pursue language learning to fulfill these needs. Finally, with regard to the third task, we map out four categories of HLLs, each with different identity and linguistic needs. Along the way, we advocate for endowing all language courses where HLLs are enrolled with a focus on identity and language issues, as these relate to family background.

INTRODUCTION: WHY WE NEED A DEFINITION OF HERITAGE LANGUAGE LEARNER

A popular Indian story tells of six blind men, each of whom offered a description of what an elephant looked like based solely on the part of the animal he came in touch with. Faced with dramatically different and seemingly contradictory perspectives, the men debated their positions to no end. Finally, the issue was resolved when the owner of the elephant pointed out that a complete and true picture of this animal could only emerge from the integration of all viewpoints.

To some extent, the experience of the blind men mirrors that of researchers and teachers seeking to make explicit the meaning of the term “heritage language learner”. Existing definitions of this term vary significantly with respect to the necessary and sufficient conditions that bear on this label or classification (Wiley, 2001). All definitions can be said to be valid for particular communities in the U.S. and to be of value for specific linguistic tasks (i.e. teaching, linguistic maintenance, revival, etc). However, no sole definition is capable of embracing all and only such individuals that could conceivably be argued to fall under the heading of “heritage language learner.”

The fundamental difficulty in configuring a description that is both elastic and explicit stems from the diversity of individuals and populations that can bear the label HLL. As Fishman (2001) observes, the term heritage language in the United States is used to refer to immigrant languages, indigenous languages, and colonial languages. However, each of these categories is characterized by different historical, social, linguistic, and demographic realities that bear on the definition of HLL. For example, the

indigenous languages differ dramatically from immigrant languages such as Spanish and Korean with respect to absolute numbers of native speakers of the HL, the proficiency levels of such speakers, and the variety of social networks in which the languages are used¹. There are significant intra-category differences as well. Although Korean and Spanish are both immigrant languages in the U.S., the community profiles of these two languages differ significantly with regard to literacy, educational attainment, and other sociolinguistic variables (Fishman, 2001). Crucial differences are to be found as well within any given language. For instance, the conditions that characterize the use of Spanish in Miami, a city with a high density of well-educated and politically powerful Latinos, are radically different from those that apply to the use of Spanish in Birmingham Alabama, with a small Latino population that is relatively poor and uneducated.

The number and variety of proposals pertaining to the notion of HLL attest to the critical need felt by heritage language professionals for a precise account of this term. In realm of education, the labels and definitions that teachers and administrators apply to HLLs undergird decisions about course and program design, materials selection, placement and assessment of students, and teacher training. They are also crucial to the task of tracking national and regional trends in language education. In some areas of high Latino density, for example, Latinos are already or may soon be the majority of students learning Spanish — a reality which may not be reflected in official policies and practices of school districts or in teacher-training curricula at universities².

Additionally, defining HLL is important to language revitalization efforts, as explained in Wiley (2001):

The labels and definitions that we apply to heritage language learners are important, because they help to shape the status of the learners and the languages they are learning. Deciding on what types of learners should be included under the heritage language label raises a number of issues related to identity and inclusion and exclusion. ...In revitalization efforts, ethnolinguistic affiliation is important: Some learners, with a desire to establish a connection with a past language, might not be speakers of that language yet (2001: 35).

Finally, defining HLL is also a prerequisite to developing a theory of heritage language learning. In particular, the development of such a theory hinges on our ability to make explicit the traits that differentiate heritage language learners from second and first language learners (Lynch, 2003). With this in mind, we now turn our attention to existing proposals regarding the term HLL.

EXISTING PROPOSALS

In the main, definitions of HLL fall into one of three categories, according to the relative importance they assign to the following criteria: A) the learner's place in the HL community, B) the learner's personal connection to the HL and HC (heritage culture) through his/her family background, and C) the learner's proficiency in the HL. We examine these categories below.

Membership in an HL Community as the Defining Factor

A number of proposals reference the ethnic community as a key element of HLL status (Cho et al., 1997, Cho, 2000, McCarty et. al. 1997, Yamauchi et. al., 2000). These studies define HLLs as individuals who are members of a community with linguistic roots in a language other than English. Being associated with an HL community, rather than proficiency in the HL per se, is the determinant of HLL status in these cases.

Such an approach is particularly well suited to the sociolinguistic reality of many Native American communities, a number of which have a reduced number of actual speakers of the HL. Indeed, of the 154 indigenous languages spoken in the United States, 48 such languages have 100 or fewer speakers. As shown below, 85% of the indigenous language of North America have no child speakers and face the possibility of becoming extinct in the near future (Kraus 1998):

Class A: 32 languages (15%) spoken by all generations, including children—life expectancy: two generations without immediate intervention

Class B: 36 languages (17%) spoken only by the parental general and up—life expectancy: 50 years

Class C: 85 languages (40%) spoken only by the grandparental generation and up—life expectancy: 40 years

Class D: 58 languages (28%) spoken only by the very elderly, usually fewer than 10 people—life expectancy: 10 years (Krauss 1999: 36).

Many indigenous communities have responded to this crisis through a number of in-school and out-of-school initiatives aimed at linguistic revival and maintenance. Although the scale and curricular scope of these initiatives vary according to demographic, social, and economic realities, all programs attest to the importance that such communities attach to their ancestral language on many different levels. Byron Charley, a student of Navajo interviewed in Reyhner and House (1996) notes: “I like maintaining my native language and the teachings in it, the songs and stories in it. It helps you understand who you are and where you come from. It gives you respect for yourself and others” (p. 1). For the community, language teaching is often seen to go hand in hand with the transmission of core cultural values. Often, community leaders and teachers view linguistic revitalization programs as a way to improve the overall civic health of the community and tackle the problems of wayward youth (Freeman et al. 1995). The official policies of many tribal nations go as far as to link the preservation of the HL to the survival of the community.

The Navajo language is an essential element of the life, culture and identity of the Navajo people. The Navajo Nation recognizes the importance of preserving and perpetuating that language to the survival of the Nation. (McLean and Reyhner (1996: 4)).

Efforts aimed at preserving and perpetuating native American languages are often compromised by a scarcity of speakers and teachers of the HL (Freeman et. al. 1995,

Nijhuis 2003). Faced with this impediment, indigenous communities have adopted a variety of measures aimed at language revitalization. Typically, these include instituting bilingual education programs, developing books, computer software, and pedagogical materials in the HL, and organizing cultural/religious activities in the HL. The Deg Hit'an (Ingalik Athabaskan) of Western Central Alaska has adopted a more unusual approach to language preservation. Students in a given community meet at a central location where they communicate with the instructor and learners from other communities using audioconferencing equipment. A participant describes the value of this program, despite its limitations.

Compared to a language learning environment where we have speakers in a community able to interact with us face-to-face, learning over the telephone is a terrible situation ...But compared to no language learning situation, the telephone class experience is wonderful. It allows us the only opportunity most of us have to listen to and talk with a group of fluent speakers (Taff, 1997: 4).

With no fluent speakers of Potawatomi among its 700 members, the Hannahville Tribe in Northern Michigan imports Potawatomi speakers to teach the language to adults and children. In an effort to maximize the number of learners, the Tribe has adopted an all-inclusive definition of HLL. As Potawatomi instructor Don Perrot indicates, this definition is driven by sociolinguistic realities:

They were a little afraid at first of ... making it too available to people who might not have the background to appreciate the sacredness of it...(b)ut we convinced them that we were losing elders far too fast, and we needed to do this so as many people as possible can learn" (Language Key to Preserving Native Culture).

Altogether, the examples cited define a class of HLLs (henceforth HLL1) for whom language learning takes place in the context of a community which 1) has strong heritage culture/language identity, 2) has limited numbers of speakers of the HL, and 3) is striving to reverse language shift. For communities with this sociolinguistic profile, it is meaningless and counterproductive to adopt a definition of HLL based on linguistic proficiency. For one, such a move would render the HLL label meaningless by precluding virtually all community members (or anybody else) from having HLL status. This would likely prove prejudicial to the communities' efforts to reverse language shift, as it would disenfranchise learners from their linguistic roots. Such a definition would also run counter to the spirit of language learning, which for many HLL1s is grounded in the notion of community membership and linguistic and cultural preservation.

The following comment by a teacher of Pi'ilani, (a Hawaiian language), illustrates how a learner-inclusive concept of "us" shapes the language learning experience of HLL1s: "At one point we were having problems between the "us and them" thing, you know, "Oh, those are the Hawaiians." And even though the kids here...the majority are Hawaiian, they'll say, "Oh, those are Hawaiians." We're like, "but you're Hawaiian too!" (Yamauchi et. al., 2000: 395).

Just how inclusive to make the definition of HLL is an issue that particular communities decide according to a number of considerations, including: the number of community members that speak the HL, goals with respect to linguistic revitalization, language teaching resources, etc. In the case of the Potawatomi, the community considers its linguistic situation to be extreme enough to warrant adopting a highly inclusive definition of this term. Other communities may limit the use of this label to individuals who participate in the daily life of the HL community or who have some measure of linguistic proficiency in the HL. The crucial point is that there is a category of learners (HLL1s) for whom HLL status is determined, as least in part, by the HL community. As we will argue next, this is not a common thread running through the language learning experience of all HLLs.

Before turning to this issue, it must be noted that not all indigenous communities fit the sociolinguistic profile presented in this section. For example, many indigenous communities in Class A, (as defined by Krauss above), may have sufficient numbers of speakers to warrant a definition of HLL that requires some measure of linguistic proficiency. Conversely, not all communities that apply the criterion of community membership to determine HLL status are indigenous. There are colonial and immigrant HC communities in the U.S. that also fit this profile, for example, of the German-speaking communities of Pennsylvania described in Fishman (2001).

Personal Connection through Family Background as the Defining Factor

There is a class of learners who study the HL in an effort to connect with their family or ethnic background. These learners (henceforth HLL2s) have a more remote connection to the HL/HC than do HLL1s, in the sense that they are not active members of a community that is affiliated with an HL. The research literature offers insight into what motives these learners to study the HL. Van Deusen-Scholl (2003) cites the case of her husband who on the basis of his last name opted for studying Dutch in college and enrolled in an exchange program to the Netherlands. Ghambir (2001) observes that at the University of Pennsylvania native speakers of a “non-cognate” Dravidian language often enroll in Hindi courses out of a perceived affinity between the Hindi language and their own. Smitherman (1991) notes a significant increase in the numbers of African-American college students studying Swahili and other African languages. She attributes this trend to an interest in “African cultural heritage” among African Americans (see also Kuntz 1993).

In the main, HLL1s and HLL2s differ from each other with respect to their relationship to the community that lays claim to their language of study³. The distinction between primary and secondary group membership put forth by Erickson and Shultz (1982) and discussed by Hornberger and Wang (forthcoming) in relation to the term HLL, provides a useful framework for understanding this relationship. Primary membership entails having detailed knowledge of the norms of interaction of a community one is closely connected with. Secondary membership, on the other hand, involves partial knowledge of the ways of communities one is not intimately connected with.

HLL1s can be characterized as having primary membership in the HC community. For these learners, the motivation to study the HL arises from a desire to

connect more fully or deeply with their community of primary membership. Accordingly, the diagram below depicts the language learning experience for HLL1s as one of laying deeper roots within their community primary membership, which is also a community that lays claim to HLL1's heritage language and culture.

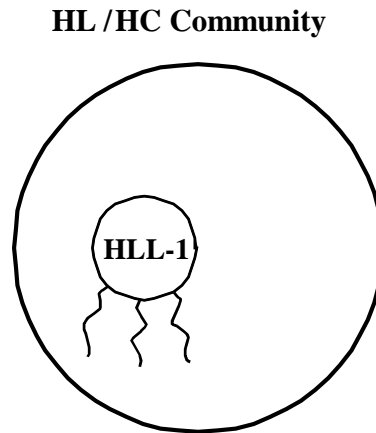


Figure 1. The language learning experience of HLL1s

In contrast, for HLL2s language study reflects a desire to learn the ways of a community of non-primary membership. The following diagrams depict the language learning experience of HLL2s as one of reaching into a language community from the outside. The length of the reach (represented as "r") varies according to the learner's level of familiarity with the norms and ways of the community that lays claim to the HL. This community may be located in the U.S. or abroad.

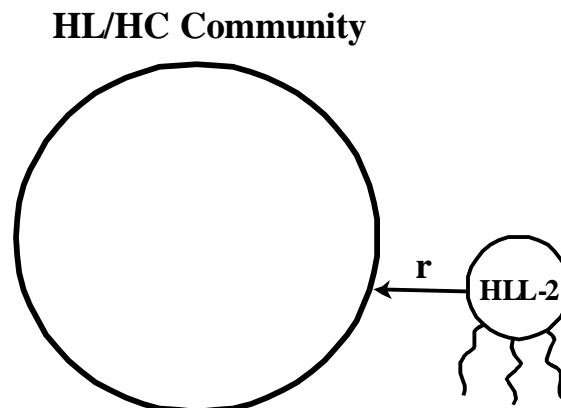


Figure 2. The language learning experience of HLL2's

Vicent Giangreco's (2000) linguistic autobiography highlights the prominent role that the feeling of being an outsider typically plays in the language learning experience of HLL2s. It also underscores the extent to which the search for personal identity drives the language learning efforts of HLL2s:

My flaws and idiosyncrasies led to an identification dilemma. People would often think that I was from some place outside of Italy, somewhere

in northern Europe...Even though I was certainly interested in the aesthetics of proper pronunciation, that was not the only point of consideration. An equally important issue was one of identity, This was an identity from which I felt cut off, or an identity with which I very much wanted to be associated (2000: 63).

Giangreco grew up speaking English to his parents, siblings and other relatives, and some rudimentary Sicilian with his grandfather. His parents, who were second-generation immigrants, spoke Sicilian to each other only when their intent was to exclude the children from their conversation. As his grandfather aged and became increasingly absent from the family, Giangreco eventually lost a great deal of his ability to communicate in Sicilian. Years later, as an adult, he sought to rekindle his connection to his roots by studying Italian, first in New York and then in Italy.

In his autobiography, Giangreco perceptively recognizes that his choice to study Italian does not line up perfectly with his desire to connect with his linguistic roots, which are Sicilian. He notes: "Sicilian and standard Italian can be thought of as different languages, since they are essentially mutually unintelligible" (2000: 60). Yet, as evidenced by the following comment, the experience of learning Italian has satisfied his identity needs:

(t)he desire to relate to and identify with another culture is also of prime importance on the motivational continuum. Even though I have not arrived at a native-like proficiency in all skills in all situations, I have arrived at the point where I feel emotionally connected and centered speaking Italian rather than English under certain circumstances (2000: 64).

These words point to the central role that subjective judgments play in the language learning experience of HLL2s. Significantly, these judgments and perceptions do not need to be objectively justified or approved by an external constituency in order to be relevant to the learning experience of HLL2s. Giangreco's efforts to learn Italian are driven by his desire to establish a connection with his past. His judgment that Italian stands in a close enough relation to Sicilian to fulfill this need motivates him to expend a considerable amount of energy learning Italian and becoming intimately acquainted with Italian culture. Likewise, African Americans who study an African language do so on the basis of personal judgments, and not on the basis of whether their language of study bears a strict genetic relation to their particular ancestry. Of course, for Giangreco and African-American HLLs their choice of language may be a case of "the next best thing", as these individuals may not have access to instruction in their particular language of ancestry. Furthermore, African American students may not even have a way to determine their particular language(s) of ancestry⁴.

Recognizing the importance of perceptions and judgments, Van Deusen Scholl (2003) uses the term "learner with a heritage motivation" to refer to students who "perceive a cultural connection that is more distant than that of, for example, first or second generation immigrants" (12). She reserves the term "heritage learner" for students that either have some degree of bilingual proficiency or have a strong cultural connection to the language through family interaction. Van Deusen Scholl's proposal

produces roughly the same groupings as the categories proposed here (i.e. HLL1=heritage learner, HLL2=learner with a heritage motivation). However, it falls short of relating the proposed categories to the exigencies of the language classroom (i.e. materials selection, curriculum design, instructional focus, etc.). As such, it is of limited guidance to teachers seeking to understand and meet the needs of HLLs. A similar objection can be raised against Fishman (2001)'s proposal that HLLs are learners who study a language of family relevance.

A pedagogically valuable way to conceive of constructing a definition of HLLs is in terms of the distinction between descriptive and explanatory adequacy, as used in Generative Linguistics. A grammar is said to have descriptive accuracy if it correctly describes the linguistic competence of the native speaker. Over and above this, a grammar has explanatory adequacy if it is able to get at what underlies this competence – that is, if it is able to explain the nature or essence of that competence. A grammar with explanatory adequacy is more highly valued than one with only descriptive adequacy because it represents a deeper level of understanding. Extending this distinction to the issue at hand, we might say that a definition of HLL has descriptive adequacy if it correctly identifies all individuals who are HLLs. Such a definition achieves explanatory adequacy only if it offers insight into the particular linguistic, cognitive, and affective needs of HLLs with regard to learning the HL.

Both Van Deusen Scholl's and Fishman's definition achieve descriptive adequacy but not explanatory adequacy, because they do not relate the essence of HLL status to what happens in the language classroom; that is, they don't offer a recipe for teaching different types of HLLs. For some measure of explanatory adequacy, we must turn to Hornberger and Wang (forthcoming). According to this proposal, HLLs are "individuals who have familial or ancestral ties to a particular language that is not English and *who exert their agency in determining whether or not they are HLLs of that HL and HC*" (emphasis mine). On the surface, this definition appears to be a rewording of Fishman 2001 with the added notion of identity. In fact, Hornberger and Wang's definition stands alone in relating HL learning to the *search for identity* through family background. The authors further elaborate that effective practices and theories of HL acquisition can only emerge from a "deep understanding of the contexts, identities, and opportunities or constraints that HLLs face" (forthcoming).

Where HLL2s are concerned, our review of issues of contexts, identity, etc. suggests that the foundations of language teaching and learning must rest on the learner's personal connections to the HL. In particular, pedagogical practices must focus on a) validating the learner's prerogative to define him/herself in terms of their language and culture of ancestry no matter how remote or insignificant the connection to this ancestry may seem to native speakers of the HL or to anyone else, and b) facilitating the learner's search for identity vis-à-vis the HL/HC. Activities to this end include compiling oral histories of relatives, writing heritage-culture autobiographies, and exploring the history of the HL community in the U.S.

Our analysis of HLL1s offers another dimension along which to organize instruction, namely, the learner's membership in a community with a stake in preserving/revitalizing the HL. Typically, this community nurtures the language learning efforts of the learner and (in contrast to the situation of HLL2s) reinforces his/her member status. Given this state of affairs, the learner's relationship to the HL community

– his personal connections to other members, the reservoir of cultural knowledge he shares with these individuals, and his role in maintaining the ways of his people by engaging in language studies—must play a central role in curricular decisions and instructional practices involving HLL1s.

The distinction between group-oriented and individual-oriented concepts of culture provides yet another useful way to frame a pedagogically oriented discussion of both types of HLLs. The group-oriented approach emphasizes the sharing of traits as essential to the notion of culture. Representative of this view is anthropologist Ralph Linton’s definition of culture as “the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses and patterns of habitual behavior which the members of (a) society have acquired through instruction or imitation and which they share to a greater or less degree” (quoted in Garcia, 2001, 46). On the other hand, the individual-oriented approach posits that members of society construct their own culture by choosing from a set of ideas, rules and values found in society. Along these lines, Spiro (1951) proposes a distinction between “heritage” and “inheritance”. The former encompasses the totality of cultural constructs that is available to all members of a society, while the latter refers to the particular cultural constructs from their “heritage” which individuals embrace or participate in.

Garcia (2001) argues that both notions of culture must factor into the teaching of U.S. Hispanics. The group approach furnishes teachers with general background information about students while the individual approach fills in critical knowledge about their particular experiences. The same argument can be made for heritage language learners, also a highly diverse student population. Traditionally, however, HL and SLA curricula have favored group notions of culture (i.e. history, literature, music, holidays, etc.) over individual notions, that is, they have favored heritage over inheritance (as defined by Spiro). Yet, as we have argued in this section, individual notions of culture drive the search for identity and the learning experience of many HLLs, particularly of HLL2s. For the latter, as well as for a category of learner that will identify in at a later point, such notions, more so than any other notion, are on the critical path to learning.

Linguistic Proficiency as the Defining Factor

Proficiency-based definitions of HLL are the most restrictive, in the sense that they can exclude individuals with strong family or personal connections to the HL. However, the restrictive nature of these definitions is not motivated by elitist attitudes, but by practical considerations. Such considerations constitute the focus of this section.

Valdés applies the designation HLL to individuals who a) are raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, b) speak or merely understand the heritage language, and c) who are to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language (2000: 1). It is significant that Valdés, an authority in Spanish-for-Native-Speakers (SNS), makes proficiency a core element of the definition of this class of HLL (henceforth HLL3). This choice reflects a general though not unanimous consensus among SNS specialists, U.S. Latinos, and even the general American public, that the Spanish language is part of the ethnic identity and experience of U.S. Latinos. Demographic and other sociolinguistic data validate this perception. Of roughly 39 million Latinos residing in the U.S. (not counting Puerto Rico), seventy four percent (28 million) report speaking Spanish at home (United States Census, 2000). The existence of

a popular and diverse Spanish-language media underscores the vitality of Spanish in this country. Readership surveys indicate that half of this nation's 8 million Latino households reads a Spanish-language newspaper (Carreira, 2002). As of 2002, there were 664 Spanish language radio stations in the United States. This same year, Univisión's early-evening local news ranked first in seven major markets, including New York, Los Angeles, and Miami. Nielsen ratings also indicate that Univisión is now the fifth-largest network for prime-time viewers in the U.S. and is home of the 33 most popular shows among Hispanics between the ages of 18 and 24 (Carreira, 2002). Spanish is also widely used in religious contexts, schools, and increasingly, in the workplace.

The extent to which notions of proficiency vary among communities of U.S. Latinos remains to be precisely documented, let alone understood. However, it stands to reason that the relationship between proficiency in Spanish and HLL identity is closely related to a number of sociolinguistic markers, including number and density of speakers of the HL, the ratio of foreign-born to U.S.-born Latinos, the range of contexts in which the HL is used, the economic value of the language, and the attitudes that members of the HC have towards their HL language, as well as English. Communities with large numbers of Spanish speakers, a high density of foreign-born Latinos, and where Spanish enjoys commercial, social, and professional sway, may set fairly high linguistic requirements for HLL status. This may be the situation that holds in Miami, Florida, for example. On the other hand, communities such as San Antonio, Texas where the Latino population is predominantly U.S. born, may have much lower proficiency requirements for HLL identity⁵.

Seeking to understand the extent to which proficiency in Spanish is a factor in defining HLLs of this language, during the summer of 2002, I asked 13 high school teachers from different areas in the U.S. to define the term "heritage language learner". Without exception, teachers offered a proficiency-based definition, although the degree of proficiency required for HLL status varied somewhat between individuals. Representative definitions include:

1. Someone who can understand Spanish and can communicate informally with some mistakes.
2. Someone who can understand Spanish-language television.
3. Someone who is an ELL (English language learner).
4. If they understand, but are not able to speak, they are heritage language listeners. If they can't understand a conversation or a television show, then they are second language learners.
5. If a student does not speak then they do not belong in an SNS course. If they can't write in Spanish, then they don't belong in SNS.
6. They have to know some Spanish. It doesn't have to be much, but the foundations need to be there. It's okay if they are not perfect at it.

As a follow up, I asked 65 teachers in the Chicago area to consider five hypothetical student profiles for placement into an HL or a second-language (SL) track at the high school level. These profiles and their assigned placements are listed below.

Student Profiles

1. **Juan**
 - a. Born in Chicago;
 - b. Parents born in Mexico. Speaks English and Spanish at home;
 - c. English dominant but understands Spanish and is able to communicate in every day situations, can read and write Spanish, but makes mistakes.
 - d. Considers himself “Mexican-American”

2. **Maria**
 - a. Born and raised in Omaha, Nebraska.
 - b. Parents were born in Texas and grandparents were born in Mexico. Does not speak Spanish at home, only with grandmother who visits twice a year from Mexico;
 - c. Understands Spanish but speaks haltingly. Does not read or write Spanish;
 - d. Considers herself “Chicana”.

3. **Luisa**
 - a. Born in Buenos Aires, arrived in the U.S. at age 14;
 - b. Parents are Argentinian. Speaks only Spanish at home;
 - c. Reads and writes Spanish at grade level;
 - d. Considers herself “Argentinian”. Does not speak English well.

4. **Pablo**
 - a. Born and raised in Chicago;
 - b. Dad is Cuban, mother is American. Speaks English at home;
 - c. English dominant but has some basic level of Spanish acquired during summers in Miami with relatives. Can read and write Spanish with difficulty;
 - d. Considers himself “American”.

5. **Magdalena**
 - a. Born in Guatemala, arrived in the U.S. at age 15;
 - b. Parents are Guatemalans. Speaks Spanish at home.
 - c. Speaks a rural variant of Spanish, does not read or write Spanish at grade level;
 - d. Considers herself “Guatemalan”. Does not speak English well.

Teacher Classifications

	HL	SLA	Other (options supplied by teachers)
Juan	63	2	
Maria	10	55	
Luisa	24	0	AP literature/language: 14; TESOL: 27
Pablo	18	45	uncertain: 1
Magdalena	61	3	AP language: 1

Before examining these results, some background information on the Spanish language and Latinos in Chicago is in order. Chicago ranks third in the nation in absolute size of its Latino population and fourth in the size of its Spanish-language market. With nearly 800,000 Latinos, half of whom are foreign born, the Spanish language has a strong presence in this city. Latinos in Chicago also wield substantial economic power, for example, tax revenues generated by Latino businesses along 26th Street in *La Villita* (South Lawndale) are the second highest in the city, after those of the upscale Michigan Avenue Mile (Potowski, 2004).

Turning to the results of our query, a few observations bear on the notion of proficiency as it applies to heritage language learners of Spanish in the Chicago area. First, although both Maria and Pablo identify themselves in terms of their ethnic background and have a family connection to this language, neither was classified as a HLL by the majority of teachers, ostensibly because of their limited skills in Spanish. These findings indicate that proficiency trumps identity and family background as the measure of HLL status for Chicago Latinos. They also suggest that proficiency requirements for HLL3 status in Chicago are set somewhere above a basic level of competency and include, at minimum, communicative fluency and some literacy skills in Spanish⁶. These requirements reflect the vital linguistic and economic presence of Spanish in this area. We will return to the question of how to classify and teach Maria and Pablo in a later discussion.

Second, Juan and Magdalena received nearly identical placements, despite important differences in their background and linguistic abilities. Magdalena's first (and dominant) language is Spanish, while Juan is bilingual but English dominant. Juan's literacy skills in English likely surpass his skills in Spanish, while Magdalena's academic skills in Spanish, however limited, are the only literacy tools at her disposal. Furthermore, because Juan is proficient in English and acculturated into the American school system, he has access to grade-appropriate instruction in English, which Magdalena does not. Additionally, the labels of identity preferred by these students suggest a different relation to American society and the Spanish-speaking world. Juan describes himself in terms of two cultures (Mexican-American), while Magdalena identifies herself solely in terms of her country of origin, Guatemala.

The flip side of the above situation is that Luisa and Magdalena earned different placements, despite significant overlap in their backgrounds. Both students are fluent speakers of Spanish, albeit of different variants—Luisa’s is an educated variant and Magdalena’s a rural one. Both are second language learners of English, are newcomers to the American educational system, and define themselves in terms of their country of origin. Nevertheless, Magdalena was classified as an HLL over Luisa by a two-to-one margin and Luisa outranked Magdalena as “AP-language material” by a factor of 14. Curiously, only Magdalena was recommended for TESOL.

These results indicate that the learner’s level of familiarity with an educated standard of language bears on the question of whether to consider him/her an HLL of that language. Being relatively well schooled in Spanish, Luisa is deemed proficient enough in this standard by the majority of teachers to bypass HL instruction. In effect, she is deemed to be an advanced L1 learner of Spanish. In contrast, despite her native abilities in Spanish, Magdalena is assigned to the HL track by nearly all teachers, presumably because of her limited exposure to the academic registers and her use of rural Spanish.

Other conceivable placement criteria would yield different results. For example, if in addition to linguistic proficiency, placement took into consideration students’ academic needs, it would make sense to assign Luisa and Magdalena to a class that would give them access to the general curriculum while learning English and tend to their affective needs as new arrivals to American educational system (Valdés, *Learning*). Likewise, if proficiency were assessed in terms of general oral fluency in Spanish, it is likely that Luisa and Magdalena would receive comparable placements, as both are fluent speakers of Spanish. The point is that determinations pertaining to placement in Spanish courses are often made relative to narrow linguistic criteria favoring standard varieties of this language.

The question of what should be the variant of currency for SNS courses has been debated at length. Proponents of the educated standard point out that this is the most widely understood and accepted variant of Spanish (Carreira, 2000; Valdés & Geoffrion-Vinci, 1998). It is also the language of literary works, books, the newspaper, etc, as well as the lingua franca of the professional world. However, as Villa (1996) argues, many jobs in the American service industry—including healthcare, government, social services, and sales—require a mastery of local variants of Spanish. Furthermore, their regional variant may be most suited for students whose goal in studying Spanish is to communicate with family members, friends, or neighbors.

Framed as an either-or proposition, the choice of variant seems fairly straightforward. Where the intent of students is to further their ability to interact with community members, the study of local variants may be most appropriate. On the other hand, where the intent is to make professional use of the HL beyond their immediate environment, or where local circumstances warrant it, then the academic norm may well be the most appropriate language of instruction. However, when it comes to Spanish in the U.S., the choice of variant is hardly straightforward. For one, there are no boundaries separating the many variants of Spanish attested in this country—standard and nonstandard monolingual variants of Spanish, along with bilingual variants, intermingle on a daily basis. For another, practical limitations often make it necessary to group students with vastly different goals, not to mention abilities, in the same SNS class. Reasons for studying Spanish may include one or more of the following: a) to fulfill a

language requirement, b) to connect with roots, c) to communicate with monolingual family members, d) to increase participation in community affairs, e) to make professional use of Spanish in the service professions mentioned by Villa, f) to make professional use of Spanish at the national or international levels (Carreira and Armengol, (2001)).

These goals must be balanced against legitimate interests on the part of schools in preparing students for more advanced coursework, as well as against the linguistic exigencies of local and non-local communities of Spanish speakers. Viewed in this light, there is a strong argument to be made that SNS classes should be linguistically hybrid, incorporating several varieties of currency for U.S. Latinos, including academic Spanish and local bilingual and monolingual varieties of this language. For any given class, the relative importance of these varieties along with other linguistic issues must be determined in relation to class-internal and external considerations. External considerations encompass issues related to the sociolinguistics of U.S. Spanish: in broad terms, the conditions that regulate the use of Spanish (in its many variants) by individuals and groups in local communities and the country as a whole. Class-internal considerations relate to the levels of proficiency, goals, and attitudes of students in particular SNS classes. Thus, in Miami, a city with a high density of Spanish-dominant Latinos and where Spanish is used alongside English in social and professional contexts, it might be natural for SNS teachers to have high linguistic expectations for students. However, the reasonableness of these expectations (which arise from class-external considerations) must always be assessed relative to class-internal considerations. Where students' proficiency levels are low or their attitudes towards Spanish are negative teachers may need to recalibrate their expectations.

By focusing on Spanish, it is not our intention to imply that among the commonly taught languages in American schools Spanish is the only one with HLL3s. Indeed, the Census 2000 suggests that the potential number of HLL3s of other scholastic languages is not inconsequential. In the country as a whole, 2 million people speak Chinese, 1.6 million French, 1.4 million German, 1 million Italian, 700,000 Russian, 600,000 Portuguese, and 500,000 Japanese (United States Census 2000). The particular issues that come up in relation to teaching these languages to HLL3s vary from one language to another. For example, Chinese and Japanese, which have significant communities of speakers in this country, may often be taught in the context of a dual language track (i.e. a track for second language learners and another for heritage language learners), each with substantial numbers of students. French and German, on the other hand, may be taught exclusively as a second language and with few (if any) HLL3s in any given school or class. Regardless of these differences, where HLL3s are concerned, the same pedagogical principles apply: 1) linguistic objectives must be calibrated relative to class internal and external realities, 2) the curriculum must address the identity needs of students.

Not Good Enough for the HLL Track

Returning to Maria and Pablo, it is likely that in any other language program but Spanish, these students would be classified as HLLs. After all, their labels of identity and family background evidence a strong connection to their HC and both students have some knowledge of the HL. Simply stated, the reason why students such as Maria and Pablo

are assigned to an SLA track is because they lack the minimum linguistic skills to participate in SNS courses. We can assume that in any given institution, the linguistic level of such courses is calibrated relative to the “typical” SNS student, which Maria and Pablo presumably are not among Chicago Latinos. Hence, these students are placed in SLA courses on the assumption that of the two available tracks, this is the one that suits them best linguistically.

It is widely accepted that the linguistic skills of Latinos who learned Spanish at home are sufficiently different from those of second language learners to warrant specialized instruction (i.e. SNS courses) (Draper and Hicks, (2000), Valdés, (1997, 2001)). However, it is unclear where the dividing line should be drawn between students who benefit from being in SNS courses and those who would do better in SLA courses. Research shows that some Latino students at the lower end of the proficiency continuum resemble SLLs with respect to their use of particular language features, (e.g. the subjunctive, subject-verb and noun-adjective agreement, and the grammatical use of the gerund and infinitive forms, to name a few) (Lynch, 2003). For these students or those who have no facility in Spanish, placement in SLA courses may be appropriate, from a *linguistic* standpoint.

Linguistic issues aside, it is important to consider whether SLA courses address other needs of students like Maria and Pablo. What distinguishes these students is not the fact itself of being in an SLA class despite having a family connection to the HL—after all, HLL2s are also placed in SLA courses despite their family connections (recall Vicent Giangreco). Rather, what sets Maria and Pablo apart is that they are learning Spanish in the context of dual language track, one for “insiders” (i.e. native speakers) and the other for “outsiders” (non-native speakers), and that they do not qualify for the “insider” track⁷. In this sense, the placement of these students into the SLA track constitutes a *de facto* negation their HL identity.

Sadly, for this type of student (henceforth HLL4), identity negation is not confined to the school environment, but is frequently found in their community of residence, place of work, and even in their home environment. A situation I recently witnessed at a grocery store in the L.A. area will suffice by way of example. A seemingly Latina clerk was asked a question in Spanish by a customer, also of Latino origin. When the worker replied that she did not speak Spanish, the customer exclaimed (in English), “Oh, I’m sorry, I thought you were Hispanic”.

The typical SLA curriculum offers little in the way of help to students in situations such as these. For one, it does not broach notions of identity that are so important to individuals whose very ethnic authenticity is frequently questioned or negated. For another, the cultural topics it does address—typically, high culture, literature, history, etc.—are in many ways foreign to most HLL4s and are therefore likely to exacerbate feelings of insecurity and outsider status in these students. Ironically—and to further complicate matters—heritage language students in SLA courses also have to combat the widely held assumption they are there to “get an easy A”. The bottom line is that even HLL4s who from a linguistic standpoint resemble second language learners have affective and intellectual needs that are generally not addressed and may even be invalidated in SLA courses.

From the above discussion, it is clear that HLL4s merit a separate track—one which logic suggests should fuse methodologies proper to SLA and HLA and should

address the particular issues of identity that come up in relation to this population. However, creating such a track may not be an option in situations where there are insufficient numbers of HLL4s or where schools are strapped for resources. That being the case, one alternative is to revise beginning language courses so as to make them identity-affirming and empowering experiences for HLLs who do not qualify linguistically for the HL track (i.e. HLL4s). For Spanish, this may involve adopting a curriculum that focuses on Latino cultures in the U.S. and giving HLL4s the opportunity to contribute to the presentation of this material by drawing from their own personal experiences. Where HLL4s report having little knowledge of the HC, classroom discussions can focus on how and why cultural and linguistic knowledge is lost among immigrant families, and students can explore the consequences of such loss for individuals and society.

A recent study of Korean-American students by Lee (2002) underscores the importance of a curriculum that focuses on the bicultural/bilingual identity of HLLs:

When asked how the informants would go about designing a Korean language programme that would be beneficial for second-generation Korean-Americans, the majority mentioned that the instruction should be adapted to Korean-Americans...Also, the informants commented that instructional materials that are of relevance to their Korean-American lifestyle are needed. One informant said that we need to ‘incorporate a programme that would not take away the American style, and enhance the Korean’” (2002: 131)

As far as language goes, even HLL4s with minimal skills have something to offer the SLA classroom. For example, they can assist with the presentation of home vocabulary, numbers, proper names, and other features of the target language. In cases where students’ answers differ from those in the textbook, instructors can use this as an opportunity to discuss the nature of linguistic variation and issues of language contact. Where HLL4s have only receptive skills in the target language, they may be utilized as experts in cooperative listening tasks. HLL4s can also serve as community liaisons in projects involving field research.

Even HLL4’s linguistic “errors” can be parlayed into opportunities for showcasing their familiarity with important features of the target language that must be mastered by SLLs. For example, where a Latino student writes “peliar”, instead of the prescriptive “pelear”, or “boy hablar” instead of “voy a hablar” teachers can point out that this is precisely how these utterances are pronounced. They can follow this up with a brief discussion of the inherent discrepancy that exists between the written and spoken modalities of language.

The idea is to create a learning environment where HLL4s view themselves and are viewed by others as classroom resources. From the perspective of the HLL4, this accomplishes two important goals. First, it offers recognition of his/her heritage identity and special relationship to the subject matter. Second, it calls the learner’s attention to the reservoir of knowledge about the HL/HC at his/her disposal while teaching him/her strategies for applying this knowledge to the study of the HL. This approach also serves

other learners well by bringing them in contact with authentic issues and linguistic input relevant to the U.S.

At this juncture, it is appropriate to discuss the relationship between placement and HLL status. Where there are dual tracks, one for SLLs and the other for HLLs, placement and learner status are generally seen as inexorably linked. As such, teachers and counselors usually operate under the assumption that 1) all HLLs should be in the HLL track, and 2) students who do not qualify for placement into the HLL track are not HLLs. However, as our foregoing discussion has shown, placement and learner status need not always coincide. For example, although Maria and Pablo should be considered HLLs by virtue of their strong family connections to Spanish, there is an argument to be made for placing them in the SLA track (mainly that they would not be able to perform in the HLL track). Likewise, although Luisa may be better suited for literature courses than for the HLL track by virtue of her advanced skills in academic Spanish, it makes sense to consider her an HLL from the point of view of fulfilling her identity needs as a recent immigrant to this country.

To understand why placement and HLL status need not and indeed should not always coincide, we must bear in mind that placement is a decision made by teachers on the basis of student-specific characteristics as well as organizational constraints (e.g., number and type of courses offered, class size, available materials, etc.). HLL status, on the other hand, is an identity label that learners assign to themselves on the basis of deeply personal considerations (cf. Giangreco). As such, placement into the SLA track should never be interpreted or treated as a negation of HLL status. Instead, HLL status should be viewed as an intrinsic characteristic of the learner that must be attended to in all language courses, not just those in the heritage language track.

We are now well positioned to address the problem of dual tracks (i.e. SLA/HLA) identified in Valdés (1997):

In most Spanish departments the expectation is that at a particular point the two tracks will come together. This means that bilingual students who elect to continue the study of Spanish beyond the requirement will be taught together with non-natives at the third year level. At this point, HLL are expected to “pass undetected among ‘real’ Spanish majors” (1997: 12).

Needless to say, this is an entirely unrealistic expectation. But it is more than that: to the extent that it ignores the needs and strengths of HLLs in advanced courses, it is also a counterproductive way to structure a program of studies. A better alternative is to conceive of heritage language teaching as an approach along which to structure all courses where HLLs are enrolled—regardless of whether or not those courses fall strictly under the HLL track. As discussed earlier, such an approach is responsive to the identity and linguistic needs of HLLs, it taps into the reservoir of knowledge that these students bring to the language classroom, and it offers a balanced coverage of group and individual notions of culture.

Meeting these objectives involves placing curricular emphasis on topics that are meaningful to HLLs, that is, topics that address some aspect of their identity and linguistic needs. In a literature course, meaningful HLL topics may include: displacement, separation, poverty, the clash of cultures, identity, and the many different

political and historical circumstances that have brought Latino immigrants to this country. In a linguistics class, it may entail focusing on bilingualism, linguistic prejudice, dialectal variation, and other linguistic issues that impact the lives of HLLs. When selecting materials, is it important to bear in mind that the needs of HLLs can vary considerably. Curricular flexibility, therefore, is of the essence.

To summarize, in this section we have posited a category of HLL4s which consists of learners who lack the requisite linguistic background to enroll in HL classes but who nevertheless feel strongly connected to their ancestry. It has been our contention that although such students may behave linguistically like SLLs, they have identity needs that align them with HLLs. Where it is not possible to create a separate language track for HLL4s, every effort should be made in SLA courses to recognize their HL identity and to tap into the reservoir of knowledge that they bring to the classroom. Without such measures, HLL4s are the most likely of HLL types to find language learning to be a profoundly disappointing and invalidating activity. Finally, we have argued in favor of adopting an HL-approach in all language courses where HLLs are involved.

TOWARDS EXPLANATORY ADEQUACY

Our analysis points to identity, language, and family background, as the primary elements of a definition of HLL. These elements provide the basis for accomplishing three functions on the critical path to achieving explanatory adequacy: 1) differentiating HLLs from SLLs, 2) differentiating HLLs from L1Ls (first language learners), and 3) differentiating between different types of HLLs.

Our discussion of these functions must be prefaced by an important caveat: any treatment of a topic as complex as this requires some measure of simplification in the interest of bringing forth general pedagogical applications. The primary simplification involved in this discussion concerns the categorical representation of differences between types language learners, which in the real world manifest themselves along a continuum. Accordingly, the definitions to be put forth are predicated on assumptions and generalizations that are valid in most but by no means all cases.

Turning to the first function, we propose that HLLs are learners that have identity and/or linguistic needs with regard to language learning that relate to their family background. We have already examined some of the more common manifestations of the search for identity undertaken by HLLs. These include, as in the case of Vincent Giangreco, studying the HL to feel connected to their roots, or, as in the case of Native American students cited earlier, to participate more fully in the life of their HL/HC community and contribute to the preservation of its beliefs and practices. Other reasons why HLLs pursue language learning are: to communicate with family members, travel to their country of origin, or to overcome feelings of being an outsider. Of course, HLLs may also pursue language learning for additional reasons that do not relate to identity such as, for instance, to fulfill a language requirement or to pursue a career.

Life experiences and family background shape the linguistic profile of HLLs (Valdés, *Heritage*; Webb and Miller, 2000). Lynch (2003:1) describes HLLs as students whose acquisition of the HL has been curtailed or stagnated during childhood or adolescence and who consequently behave like neither L1 nor L2 speakers of the HL. The precise way in which HLLs differ from L1 and L2 speakers of the HL is subject to

variation, depending on factors such as the amount and type of exposure to the HL that HLLs get during their formative years and socioeconomic considerations (see, for example, Zurer Pearson, (2002)). For Spanish, Valdés (1997:14) posits eight different categories of HLLs that reflect the diversity of background and linguistic experiences of U.S. Latinos. At one end of this classification are fluent speakers of a prestigious variety of Spanish while at the other are those who have only receptive skills in a contact variety of rural Spanish.

Turning to the second function, the concept of exposure provides a basis for distinguishing between HLLs and L1Ls. Both of these types of learners have a connection through family background to their language and culture of study. However, they differ with regard to the amount of cultural and linguistic exposure that they receive during their formative years. In rough terms, we might characterize HLLs' exposure to their HL/HC as being insufficient to satisfy their basic identity and linguistic needs—hence these students' motivation to pursue language learning. Giangreco, Maria, and Pablo all exemplify this situation, as do the Native American students cited here. By contrast, L1Ls exposure during their formative years to their language and culture of study may be aptly described as sufficient to meet their basic identity and linguistic needs. As such, L1Ls' pursue language studies for other reasons, such as for intellectual enrichment or for professional preparation. Literature and linguistic classes at the college level often enroll students who may be aptly described as L1Ls. Typically, these students have completed high school and perhaps some college in their country of origin and pursue language study in the United States to become teachers, translators, etc.⁸.

The issue of distinguishing between HLLs and L1Ls came up in our earlier discussion of Lucía and Magdalena, both of whom arrived in the U.S. during adolescence and are Spanish dominant. For these students it is difficult to make a clear-cut case for using a single label. It is possible to argue, for example, that their needs line up more closely with those of monolingual speakers of Spanish than with those of HLLs, by virtue of the time they spent in their country of birth. Accordingly, Magdalena and Lucía should be considered L1Ls. On the other hand, it is also arguable that these students are HLLs because this exposure was curtailed before they reached adulthood.

The question of whether Magdalena and Lucía are HLLs or L1Ls of Spanish is really not as significant as that of how to ensure their general academic success. Research indicates that Latinos who arrive in the U.S. in their adolescent years have high rates of high school desertion (Fry, 2003). Some of the factors that predispose these students to dropping out of school include a lack of familiarity with the American school system, a lack of access to grade-appropriate instruction, a lack of L1 support, and feeling isolated from mainstream students (Valdés, *Learning*).

Spanish language instruction can diminish the effect of some of these factors. It can, for example, be a source of grade-appropriate instruction from areas of the curriculum that are challenging, if not inaccessible, to English language learners. It can also be a source of guidance and emotional support for newly arrived students and their families. Of course, all of this can be accomplished while meeting more traditional SNS goals, such as teaching academic Spanish and expanding the bilingual range.

By sidestepping the issue of what label to apply to Magdalena and Lucía and opting instead to perform an analysis of their needs vis-à-vis their background, we have gained valuable knowledge about how to optimize instruction for these students. In so

doing, we have also gained some placement flexibility with these students, as their needs can be met in a variety of different courses and learning formats. Both AP language and advanced SNS courses, for example, can be modified to provide some grade-appropriate instruction in areas like history, science, and the social sciences. Alternatively, Magdalena and Lucía can study these subject areas under the guidance of a Spanish instructor and a subject-area instructor using GED preparation materials in Spanish. Of course, all Spanish courses can offer support and guidance to newly arrived students and help them overcome feelings of isolation.

We are now ready to address the third function, differentiating between HLLs. In effect, the thrust of this function is to examine differences between HLLs with a view towards optimizing instruction for all HLLs.

Pedagogically pertinent differences between HLLs can be characterized along two dimensions that map out four categories of learners. These are 1) the learner’s relationship to HL/HC community (abbreviated below as primary versus secondary membership); and 2) where there are two language tracks, (HLA and SLA), the track in which the HLL studies his/her HLL. (Because the issue of placement is only relevant in situations where there is a dual language track, no placement is specified for HLL-1 and HLL-2, both of whom learn their HL in the context of a single track).

Table 1. HLL Type, Listed by Characteristics

HLL Type	Membership in the HL	Type of language track	Placement
HLL-1	primary	single	-
HLL-2	secondary	single	-
HLL-3	primary	dual	HLL
HLL-4	varies	dual	SLA

The above classifications provide a framework for making instructional choices that meet the needs of different types of HLLs. Below I summarize the main concepts underlying instruction for each of the categories proposed.

HLL Type	Focus of instruction
HLL-1	Group notions of culture, membership in the HL community, the learner’s part in preserving the cultural and linguistic legacy of his community.
HLL-2	Individual notions of culture, the search for personal identity, the learner’s prerogative to define himself in terms of his ancestry.
HLL-3	Building linguistic and cultural skills that are consonant with external realities of how the HL is used outside the classroom.
HLL-4	Countering identity negation, tapping into background knowledge, student as resource.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

From the above discussion, a group portrait of HLLs emerges with some measure of explanatory adequacy. This portrait shows HLLs not as a homogeneous cluster of learners, but a collection of different types of learners who share the characteristic of having identity and linguistic needs that relate to their family background. These needs arise from having had insufficient exposure to their HL and HC during their formative years. Satisfying these needs provides a primary impetus for pursuing language learning.

The above traits carve out an instructional agenda for teaching HLLs:

- 1) Validate identity and linguistic needs;
- 2) Select materials and instructional strategies that address these needs;
- 3) Adjust curricular goals and instructional approaches according to students' sociolinguistic and family background;
- 4) Infuse all language courses where HLLs are enrolled with a heritage language focus;
- 5) Above all, fit the course to the student, rather than the student to the course.

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¹ Though Fishman considers Spanish to be a colonial language, we believe that for purposes of teaching Spanish to Latino students in the United States, it is more appropriate to consider it an immigrant language.

² For example, according to the latest data available, Latinos comprise 71% of the student population of the Los Angeles Unified School District (Education Data Partnership, 2002-2003), 58% of the Miami-Dade School District (HMiami-DadeH, 2002-2003), and 37% percent of Chicago Public Schools (Chicago Public Schools, 2003).

³ Our use of the expression "lays claim" instead of the verb "speaks" reflects the fact that not all HC communities can be said to speak their HL. In the case of the Hannahville Tribe for example, it is the community's sense of ownership of this language, rather than its actual use of it, that matters for HLL identity.

⁴ The potential number of HLL2s is by no means negligible. According to the U.S. Census 2000, there are 33.9 million people in the U.S. who trace their roots to Africa, and 15.9 million to Italy. Figures for other countries include: Germany, 46.5 million; Germany, France: 9.8 million; Poland: 9 million, and Holland 5.2 million. (US Bureau of the Census 2000 Supplementary Survey (C2SS)).

⁵ According to the United States Census 2000, 20% of Miami's Latino population is U.S. born, while 85% of San Antonio's Latinos fit that description.

⁶ The role of literacy in the language learning experience of HLLs is an exceedingly complex issue that is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it so say that notions of literacy vary tremendously by language, communities of speakers, and the context of learning. For a comprehensive look at the issues involved see Hornberger and Wang.

⁷ As mentioned earlier, the general practice of equating Latinos with Spanish probably derives from the fact that the majority of U.S. Latinos in fact speak this language. Accordingly, individuals who have little or no facility in Spanish are perceived as less than fully Latino, regardless of how connected they may feel to their ethnic roots.

⁸ Of course, in the process of studying literature or linguistics, L1Ls end up acquiring linguistic skills in their L1 and learning something about their own identity. What is crucial to the distinction being made is that L1Ls do not acquire these skills in seeking to connect with their family background.