INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITION

In the language acquisition field, new pedagogical theories, methodologies, and assessment protocols appear periodically. However, no new area of research and development in language teaching has emerged as an independent field since Teaching English as a Second language (TESL). Heritage language learning has recently become such a new field of inquiry.

The term heritage languages is Canadian in origin; it was coined when the “Ontario Heritage Languages Programs” (Cummins, 2005, p. 585) were launched in 1977. The term entered the US vernacular in the late 1990s. As yet there is no single, universally accepted definition of the terms heritage speaker or heritage learner. For example, Spanish courses for what we would label “heritage speakers” are typically labeled “Spanish for Native Speakers.” By contrast, a recent advertisement for advanced proficiency training in English is aimed at “heritage speakers” who are, in fact, native speakers, individuals who have completed their undergraduate education in their country of origin.

Several definitions of heritage languages and speakers have been proposed by researchers in the USA. The best known definition belongs to Valdés (2000) who describes heritage learners as “individuals raised in homes where a language other than English is spoken and who are to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language.” Polinsky [Brinton, Kagan, and Bauckus (in press)] defines heritage language as the “language which was first for an individual with respect to the order of acquisition but has not been completely acquired because of the switch to another dominant language.” Fishman (2001, p. 81) identifies a heritage language by its “particular family relevance to the learners,” and Van Deusen-Scholl (2003) refers to learners who “have been raised with a strong cultural connection to a particular language through family interaction” as learners “with a heritage motivation” (p. 222). For the purpose of discussing heritage language education, a description that emphasizes the dichotomy between foreign language acquisition that “is usually begun in a classroom setting” and heritage language acquisition that “begins in the
home” (UCLA Steering Committee, 2001, p. 8) can serve as a working definition. Collectively these definitions affirm the need for multidimensional approaches to teaching heritage learners.

Fishman (2001, p. 81) identifies three groups of heritage speakers: speakers of colonial, indigenous, and immigrant languages. The heritage language field has arisen in the United States as a consequence of the language profession’s recognition that heritage learners of immigrant languages now constitute a major demographic group for a large number of K-16 language programs. Over 28 million Americans identify Spanish as their home language (2000 US Census) and overall, 12% of Americans speak a language other than English in the home. Table 1 lists ten languages other than English and Spanish most frequently spoken at home in the USA.

When heritage speakers pursue formal study of their heritage language, they present a challenge to language educators who are trained to teach foreign language learners, that is students without previous knowledge of the target language. Since the events of September 11, 2001 heritage students’ knowledge has become increasingly valued in the USA as the federal government has become mindful of the need for competent speakers of foreign languages, especially languages considered vital for national security.

Table 1 Ten most frequently spoken languages in the USA (excluding English and Spanish)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>N Speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>2,022,143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>1,643,838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>1,382,613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tagalog</td>
<td>1,224,241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>1,009,627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>1,008,370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>894,063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>706,242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>667,414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>614,582</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data from Census 2000 (US Census Bureau, n.d.), Summary File 3.
EARLY DEVELOPMENTS

Scholarly interest in heritage language preservation can be traced back to the mid-1960s and early 1970s. Joshua Fishman’s publications laid the foundation for what became known as a field of heritage language education, most notably his seminal work on the sociology of language, *Language Loyalty in the United States* (1966). Guadalupe Valdés has been involved in efforts to maintain and preserve heritage languages among minority populations since the mid-1970s. While much of her work has focused on the teaching of Spanish to Hispanicophone students in the USA (she is the co-author of the first textbook for heritage speakers of Spanish, *Español Escrito* (2003), first published in 1978 and now in its fifth edition), Valdés prepared the groundwork for research and instruction in other heritage languages.

In the late 1990s interest in English–Spanish bilingualism broadened to include an effort to embrace and preserve all languages spoken in the USA. Russell Campbell (Campbell and Peyton, 1998) and Richard Brecht (Brecht and Ingold 1998; Brecht and Rivers, 2000) were among early advocates of providing instruction designed for heritage speakers. Even before national security became an issue of concern, Brecht and Ingold (1998) advocated drawing on the capabilities of heritage speakers to strengthen linguistic readiness, pointing out that foreign language instruction on the college level seldom results in the proficiency needed for professional-level work.

The first national conference dedicated to heritage language teaching, “Heritage Languages in America,” was convened in 1999 (Center for Applied Linguistics, 1999). Selected papers from the conference were published as “Heritage Languages in America: Preserving a National Resource” (Peyton, Ranard, and McGinnis, 2001). The conference focused on the need to create heritage programs in K-16 and in communities and demonstrated that the nascent heritage language field was in need both of foundational research and a research agenda. The research agenda was proposed in the UCLA Steering Committee Heritage Language Research Priorities Conference Report (2001). The report advocates multidisciplinary research with a focus on the heritage speaker; the family and the community; language specific issues; educational policies; programmatic priorities, and assessment.

The second national conference on heritage languages was held in 2002 (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2002). This conference’s goals were to develop public awareness of the economic, personal, and social benefits of proficiency in heritage languages and promote the inclusion of heritage language issues in the national dialogue; to shape a national heritage language policy and share information on best practices; to
develop collaboration among all constituent groups; and to devise a plan for moving from rhetoric to action.

MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Several volumes dedicated to heritage education have been published since 2000. *Teaching Heritage Language Learners: Voices from the Classroom* (John Webb and Barbara Miller, 2000) resulted from the project “Collaborative Teacher Education Program: A Model for Second Language Instruction for Inner City Schools,” sponsored by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and Hunter College, NY, and designed to prepare teachers of Spanish, Haitian Créole, and French to work with heritage language learners.

Selected papers from the 1999 heritage language conference were published as *Heritage Languages in America: Preserving a National Resource* (Peyton, Ranard, and McGinnis, 2001), with contributions focused on establishing the field in the USA.

*Mi Lengua: Spanish as a Heritage Language in the United States* (2003) (Ana Roca and Cecilia Colombi, editors) examines theoretical issues involved in teaching Spanish to Spanish heritage learners and reports on classroom research studies at all levels of instruction. Although the volume’s focus is on Spanish, its offerings, which include an abundance of practical suggestions for heritage language educators, also apply to other heritage languages.

*Heritage Language Education: A New Field Emerging* (Brinton, Kagan, and Bauckus, in press) is a multidisciplinary collection of articles that positions heritage speaker education at the intersection of language policy, linguistics and applied linguistics, psychology and pedagogical practice. In addition to theoretical findings, this collection presents a range of case studies in such less commonly taught languages as Japanese, Russian, and Korean.

The online *Heritage Language Journal* (HLJ), the first and so far the only serial publication in the heritage field, is a joint project of the UCLA Center for World Languages and the UC Consortium for Language Learning and Teaching and has been publishing since 2003.

In recent years the teaching and preservation of heritage languages has become an increasingly popular topic at national conferences on language acquisition and teaching, including the American Association for Applied Linguistics, the Modern Language Association, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, and language-specific conferences, which routinely have panels dedicated to heritage language research and practice.

Virtually all studies suggest that an understanding of heritage language learning and teaching requires attention to an array of issues including proficiency, identity, curriculum and assessment, ties with heritage communities, and questions of policy. Hornberger (2003) locates heritage speakers’ proficiency on a continuum of bilingualism that suggests the difficulty of a single instructional approach. Learners may, for example, demonstrate high-level competence in speaking and listening while having no functional literacy skills. Moreover, because of the home-based nature of their language acquisition, even heritage speakers with high proficiency in speaking and listening generally lack the skills shaped by formal education that would allow them to function in an academic or professional setting. Heritage speakers also may display traits of nonstandard or émigré language and dialectic features, and their language may be marked by code switching, English borrowings and calques, all features that require tailored instruction if heritage speakers are to acquire standard professional level language skills.

Valdés (2001) classifies speakers of immigrant languages according to the time of arrival and their contact with the language. She proposes four categories of bilinguals, from incipient bilinguals of the first generation to English dominant bilinguals of the fourth generation (pp. 42-43). Basing her findings on Spanish speakers, Valdés finds that “by the fourth generation, most individuals of immigrant background will have become monolingual English speakers” (p. 43).

Studies of Russian heritage speakers by Kagan and Dillon (2001) and Kagan (2005) have identified four groups of Russian speakers based on the correlation between their education and their degree of competency in the language. Students in Group 1 either graduated or nearly graduated from high school in a Russian-speaking country and are the closest to native speakers. Group 2 students attended school in a Russian-speaking country for about 8 years. They have lexical and stylistic lacunae in academic or formal language. Group 3 emigrated after starting elementary school. Their formal education has been primarily if not completely in English. Group 4 students emigrated at a pre-school age or were born outside of the home country. These students, who are generation 1.5 or second generation, are typically already English dominant. While each language group has
its own characteristics, grouping students according to their level of education in the language, including in community schools, is beneficial for placement and curricular design.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge and competencies</th>
<th>Typical heritage language learners</th>
<th>Traditional foreign language learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phonology</td>
<td>Pronunciation, stress, and intonation are close to native speaker level; may be dialect</td>
<td>Have acquired most of the phonological system of a standard dialect; pronunciation is accented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>Use much of the grammatical system appropriately, not familiar with the rules</td>
<td>Familiar with grammatical rules, but cannot use them fluently nor comprehend them fully in real-life communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Have acquired extensive vocabulary, but range is limited to home, community, and religious institutions; a large number of “borrowings” from the majority language are noted</td>
<td>Vocabulary is extremely limited, but consistent with the prestige dialect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociolinguistic rules</td>
<td>Control registers relating to verbal interactions with family and community members; competence is limited by range of social interactions</td>
<td>Have very limited knowledge and control of sociolinguistic rules except for those appropriate to the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy skills</td>
<td>Have not developed literacy skills beyond elementary levels. However, are capable of developing such skills quickly, can learn to process lengthy texts early on acquiring literacy</td>
<td>Have a good to very good foundation for development of literacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the purposes of designing courses for heritage-language learners the most important factor is understanding not only how heritage speakers differ from native speakers, but also the factors that distinguish differences between heritage and foreign language learners. Table 2 offers a comparison of the abilities of heritage speakers with no schooling in the language and foreign language learners, based on the features identified in Campbell and Rosenthal (2000, pp. 169–170).

Because of heritage learners’ prior and extensive exposure to language, approaches that take their global knowledge into account are considered to be most beneficial. Such approaches have been termed “macro-approaches” by Kagan and Dillon (2001). A macro-approach can be otherwise described as a global or top-down approach that builds on learners’ initial abilities in speaking and listening. A micro-approach, by contrast, builds competency from the bottom up, by isolating the elements of the language and gradually increasing in complexity. Instructional needs of heritage learners can be best met by “macro-approaches” to curricular and material development, as illustrated in Table 3.

Approaches that can be characterized as macro include discourse-based, content-based, genre-based, task-based, and experiential.

WORK IN PROGRESS

Valdés (2000) has argued repeatedly and convincingly that “the pedagogies and practices currently used for teaching heritage languages are essentially atheoretical” (p. 389). She has pointed out that in the case of heritage language courses, “classroom practices, effective as they may superficially appear, are not based on coherent theories about, for example, how second dialects are acquired, how proficiency in high-level registers is developed, how bilinguals are able to expand the range of a non-dominant language, and how skills (e.g., reading and writing abilities) transfer across languages” (pp. 389–390). Every issue relevant to the heritage language awaits foundational research. The most pressing issues include policy formulation and implementation, curriculum and materials development, the adaptation of foreign language methodology to heritage language teaching, placement, and assessment.

Policy

Fishman (1978, ix) wrote that “the ‘unity’ of mankind must be built upon a recognition and acceptance of mankind’s diversity” that includes “societal multilingualism.” We have come a long way since 1978 in recognizing the value of bi- or multilingualism in the form
Table 3 Pedagogical needs: nonheritage versus heritage learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching domains</th>
<th>Non-heritage learners</th>
<th>Heritage learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation and intonation</td>
<td>Instruction throughout course of study</td>
<td>Typically none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Full range</td>
<td>Age appropriate/literary/academic/formal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>Micro-approach (e.g. case by case)</td>
<td>Macro-approach (i.e., by concept)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Small texts, gradually and slowly increasing in volume and complexity</td>
<td>Fairly large and complex texts almost from the very beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Sentence level, gradually advancing to paragraph level. The writing even at high levels of proficiency rarely approaches native ability.</td>
<td>High degree of internal grammar allows expansive writing assignments at early stages of instruction. Macro-approach to writing: concentrate on the content and gradually improve spelling, grammar, and stylistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>Micro-approach: initially restricted to dialog, gradually progressing to monologue and discussion</td>
<td>Macro-approach: emphasis on monologue and discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Micro-approach: short simple texts, gradually increasing in volume and complexity</td>
<td>Macro-approach: full range of native language input, that is movies, documentaries, lectures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Micro-approach: initially isolated cultural items</td>
<td>Macro-approach: full range of native language input, audio, visual, and print</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kagan and Dillon (2001, p. 513). (Reprinted with permission.)
of heritage language competence in the United States, but an under­
standing of linguistic, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic factors that
is crucial for developing “a coherent heritage language education pol­
icy” (UCLA Steering Committee, 2001, p. 11) remains inadequate.
“There has been, in recent years, increased interest and support to help
linguistically diverse students acquire speaking, reading, and writing
abilities in their home languages” (Wiley 2005, p. 208). There is still,
however, no policy that would facilitate transforming the United States
into a “language competent American society” (Tucker, 1991, p. 78).

Curriculum and Materials Development

There is as yet no standard approach to teaching heritage languages.
Some approaches have been suggested by various researchers and prac­titioners, but sufficient data have not been gathered to determine their
efficacy. Among the commonly discussed issues are the applicability
of foreign language methodology to heritage language curricular
design, tracking heritage learners, and teaching them in mixed classes.

At the end of each chapter of Mi Lengua: Spanish as a Heritage
Language (Roca and Colombi, 2003), the editors include a practical
section titled “Pedagogical Implications for the Teaching of Spanish
as a Heritage Language in the U.S.” Volume contributors propose the
use of “challenging academic material (p. 141), providing students with
“extensive experience in Spanish in all modes, registers, and a variety
dialects” (p. 192); and the value of “the content-based and genre-
based approaches” (p. 230). In the same volume (Lynch, 2003, p. 37)
recommends a discourse-based approach, suggesting that “HL peda­
gogy should emphasize grammatical and lexical development through
discourse-level activities. Discrete-level activities, transformation exer­
cises, grammar paradigms, metalinguistic rules, and long vocabulary
lists will likely hinder HL learners more than help them.”

Researchers and practitioners alike debate the alternatives of teach­
ing heritage learners in mixed classes or of tracking them (Pino and
Pino, 2000). When heritage learners are tracked, separate instruction
generally is limited to the first 1 or 2 years of instruction. The rationale
is that after one or two years heritage learners can be taught together
with foreign language learners. Experience indicates that this practice
is deficient and that the needs of heritage learners remain different from
the needs of foreign language learners. Kagan and Dillon’s matrix for
heritage learner education includes a multi-year sequence together with
components such as proper placement, time on task, and programmatic
rigor; specific instructional materials; an uninterrupted, comprehensive
curriculum; instructors trained in heritage language acquisition; con­
sideration of the home/community native speaker environment, and
a metalinguistic framework that raises awareness of importance of grammatical accuracy and register (2003, p. 100).

PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES

The principal needs in the heritage language field include the development of the aforementioned theoretical base, curricular models, and instructional materials. In addition, research and observation have shown that heritage speakers require placement and assessment protocols and education abroad programs designed expressly for them.

Placement and Assessment

A current topic in the area of placement and assessment is the application of the Oral Proficiency Interviews (OPIs) and the ACTFL (1999) Guidelines to evaluate the oral proficiency of heritage learners. Objections to using the guidelines are largely based on the observation that because they have acquired their language in a naturalistic environment, heritage learners’ competencies substantially differ from the competencies of traditional foreign language speakers for whom the ACTFL Guidelines were designed. Valdés argues that since the Guidelines compare students against the standard of the educated native speaker, and do not take native nonstandard varieties into account, they may not accurately measure the oral competency of speakers of these nonstandard varieties (Valdés, 1989). However, Kagan and Friedman (2004) found that the OPI can be an effective placement instrument for learners of Russian, since most heritage students come from families who were educated in a uniform educational system in the former Soviet Union. More research is necessary to determine whether the OPI and the ACTFL Guidelines could be revised to incorporate heritage learners of all languages.

Placement and assessment of heritage learners is complicated by attitudes that these students may encounter in the educational system. Terence Wiley, who is known for his work on the importance of language use in the community in making curricular decisions, is concerned that if “the school stigmatizes the varieties of home and community language, it may undercut the motivation to learn at school” (2005, p. 597). Addressing similar concerns, Valdés (2000) stresses that knowing which dialects are spoken in émigré communities, and how those dialects are regarded within the communities and by monolingual native speakers in the target country, is important, since effective heritage instruction is designed to “expand the bilingual range” (Valdés, 2000, p. 388), that is to build on existing knowledge rather than stigmatize it.
Study Abroad for Heritage Learners

Study abroad experiences and resulting gains for foreign language students have been the focus of several important research studies (Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg, 1993; Cohen, Paige, Kappler, Demmessie, Weaver, Chi, and Lessegard, 2003). As yet, however, no studies have examined in-country experience of heritage learners who are participating in study abroad programs in increasing numbers. Current understanding indicates two key areas of concern: (1) programs have not yet identified or adapted to heritage learners’ instructional needs, and (2) successful articulation between home institutions and study abroad requires more information about how to prepare heritage students for study abroad.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future directions for the heritage field remain largely the same ones that have been identified at the seminal meetings and conferences held when the field was first emerging. It has been nearly 10 years since the Brecht and Ingold (1998) call for a national effort to supply what is absent in the field of heritage education, including the study of heritage communities, development of the principles of effective program design, curricula, materials, and the establishment of an infrastructure that will promote the sharing of knowledge and resources to provide appropriate heritage language instruction.

An understanding of the cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts that define heritage speakers must be at the center of continuing work in the heritage language field. For example, factors such as an immigrant community’s density, relationship to the home country, rate of continuing immigration, average level of education, and the extent of commercial activity conducted in the immigrant language, may be anticipated to influence the character of language retention and language shift (UCLA Steering Committee, 2001) and thus must be central concerns of future development. Not enough is known about why some language groups are more likely to retain their languages, or retain them longer, than others. Similarly, insufficient research has been done on the conditions under which language shift occurs and whether these conditions are identical for each group. Cummins determined that in the Canadian population “there is massive attrition of students’ heritage language competence over the course of schooling.” (Cummins, 2005, p. 585). This loss of an enormously valuable resource, a factor in the United States as well, can be stemmed only through research-based curricular, pedagogical, and policy interventions.

Some studies dedicated to a specific language have begun to appear, such as a study of Chinese heritage schools by Wang (1996) or Korean
children’s biliteracy by Shin (2005). Studies such as these are vitally needed in other languages as well in order to develop broad-scale understanding of the language-specific issues that should underpin curricular and programmatic development and design.

Recent research in sociology indicates that immigrants of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries no longer sense a contradiction between “an ethnic identity and an American identity” (Zhou, 2004, p. 153). This new sense of identity among heritage students needs to be explored to determine what role it might play in motivating them to study their heritage languages. As witnessed by recent submissions to the Heritage Language Journal, language educators are beginning to research the connection between motivation and identity. A large-scale cross-language research project could make a significant contribution to heritage language education.

The research agenda articulated by the UCLA Steering Committee Heritage Language Research Priorities Conference Report (2001) is still valid; every component of that comprehensive menu awaits contributions. The conference called for a multidisciplinary approach “to explore the diverse aspects of heritage language maintenance and development.” It stated that researchers “from other fields, including economists, scientists and social scientists would . . . have important roles in measuring the effects of heritage language learning on the individual, the family, the community, and the nation.” Such a large-scale multidisciplinary effort is fundamental to the maturation of the heritage field, redoubling to the benefit of millions of heritage language learners in the USA, who need a comprehensive education in their first but no longer dominant language if they are to become truly bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural.

The funding of a new National Heritage Language Resource Center (Department of Education # P229A060008) in 2006 affirms the importance of the field. The Center at UCLA is dedicated to the development of research and the production of instructional materials pertaining to heritage language education.

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