Attitudes

The last section of questions examines the respondents’ attitudes to their HL.

38. In general, what do you prefer to speak?

The largest number of respondents (754, or 47%) prefer to speak a mix of the HL and English, followed by the group that prefers English alone (578, or 36%). 167 (10%) had no preference, while only 97 (6%) expressed a preference for their HL. The 17 “Other” responses (1%) mostly referred to a mix of the two languages or the addition of a third.
To answer this question, respondents were asked to check as many reasons as applied. Consequently, the most commonly chosen responses may not have been chosen as the most important reasons for enrolling in an HL course. On average, respondents gave 3.26 reasons for studying their HL. That said, the most common reasons HLLs had for enrolling in HL courses were (1) to learn about their roots, (2) to communicate better with friends and family in the U.S., and (3) to fulfill a language requirement, in that order. Communicating better with friends and family abroad and using their HL for a future job were also important to many respondents. Fewer than half of the respondents enrolled in an HL course to prepare for travel to their country of origin, while less than one fifth enrolled because it was easy for them. Respondents wrote a variety of motivations in the “Other” field, including wanting to learn reading and writing, for a major or minor requirement, “because I want to,” and a few wrote “my parents made me.”
40. Does your family want you to maintain your HL?

The overwhelming majority of HLLs have their family’s support in learning their heritage language. 1,635 answered yes, while only 39 answered no.
41. How do you self-identify? (e.g. American, Vietnamese-American, Vietnamese, Asian, Asian-American, etc.)

For this question respondents were asked to type in whatever response they wished. Self-identifications fell into the following three categories: “American” (unaccompanied by another identity); a hyphenated or qualified American (such as Asian-American, Mexican-American, etc.); identities without the word “American” (such as Asian, Mexican, etc.). We excluded “South American” from the hyphenated/qualified American category, as that term refers to a different America. A small number of responses did not fit into this scheme, including “human being,” “whitey,” and “me.” Some responses were quite colorful, which gets lost in our sorting, such as people who answered:

- “American, the hyphenated American is the one that causes the downfall of this nation.”
- “100 % Ethiopian.”
- “depends on who I’m talking to .... and what my agenda is with that person. I pick the option that best benefit [sic] me in a particular situation.”
- “Lebanese Only Forever.”
- “Armenian stranded in America”
- “Lost”
- “IRANIAN ... who happens to have been born and raised in the U.S.”
42. Do you intend to teach your children your HL?

An overwhelming majority (1,616) of HLLs plan to teach their children their heritage language, while only 59 do not.
43. What are your general attitudes about your HL? (Check as many as apply)

The respondents’ general attitudes to their HL are positive, which can partly be explained by the nature of the sample, made up of students who chose to take HL classes. The majority of HLLs believe that their language is a valuable skill, useful, and important to who they are. Many also felt it has helped them make friends and made school more enjoyable. Very few felt their HL had negative consequences in their lives. The most common negative response, “at times I feel embarrassed,” was chosen by fewer than a third of the respondents.
44. How has your knowledge of your heritage language affected your experience in SCHOOL? Can you remember an incident when your heritage language was helpful or caused you problems in school? (Answer in 4-6 sentences.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can talk discreetly in public</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can speak better with my relatives after taking my HL class</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can use my HL to help others</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was put in ESL classes because of my HL</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more integrated into my HL community</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been made fun of or discriminated against</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have learned more about my culture</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have made more friends</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have problems with my lack of knowledge of my HL</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can more easily learn other languages</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
45. How has your knowledge of your heritage language affected your experience outside of school, for example in your home, church, or neighborhood? Can you remember an incident when your heritage language was helpful or caused you problems in any of these settings? (Answer in 4-6 sentences.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can talk discreetly in public</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can speak better with my relatives after taking my HL class</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can use my HL to help others</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been made fun of or discriminated against</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have made more friends</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have problems with my lack of knowledge of my HL</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the last two questions respondents were asked to provide open-ended responses to questions. 20% of respondents skipped each question, though it was not in all cases the same 20% for each question; many respondents answered one and not the other. Because respondents could answer as they liked, the answers are hard to quantify. The tables above list categories that we noticed recurred frequently. These do not by any means encompass the entire spectrum of answers, but are intended to impart a sense of what respondents mentioned.

Overall the answers to both questions are positive. In #44 respondents focused on how their HL benefited them in school. The most frequently stated themes in the responses to this question reflect that respondents had used their HL to help someone, often a classmate with fewer English skills than they themselves did, and that their HL had helped them make friends in school. “Negative” responses were fairly infrequent. Of the 924 respondents who answered this question, only 21 reported that they had been made fun of or otherwise discriminated against because of their HL. 14 mentioned that they had been placed into ESL courses (usually in their opinions wrongfully) because of their
And 15 mentioned they had had difficulties because of their lack of ability in their HL.

In #45 respondents again focused on the positive aspects of having an HL. Again, the most frequently occurring theme was that HLs were proud of their abilities to help others by using their HL, with an equal group gaining pride from their increased HL abilities after enrolling in their college-level HL courses. The most common negative answer to this question was an expression of frustration at their insufficient HL knowledge. Some students also noted that their HL interfered with or adversely impacted their English.

Examples of responses to the two open-ended questions appear below, grouped into general categories.

**I have made more friends:**
- It has made my experience at school more pleasant. By taking a HL class, I was able to meet more students with my HL. Thus, I have created new friendships with students of the same background as mine. It has never caused a problem for me. (Armenian)

- It has helped me make more friends, because most of my friends that I’m close with now are all Chinese too. If I need to ask or talk to someone privately with people around, I can ask them in Chinese. It never caused problems for me.

- I find my heritage language very useful in school. When I was in high school, it helped me find my very first friends. I was a new transfer student so I didn’t know anyone, and this girl came up to me to make friends. And knowing Chinese has helped me to communicate with her in a better way since Chinese is her native language.

**I can help others:**
- Several times the knowledge that I have of my HL has been to the benefit of teachers that had problems because of the language barrier between them and new students that
spoke mainly Cantonese. So in the end I ended up sitting next to them, being the big buddy, or whatever it was. In the end, it showed how much I really knew my language, even though it was easier to get the point across if I had explained it, but I still had a long way to go if I wanted to be fluent in Cantonese.

- It was helpful when I was young, when a new student came to school and did not understand English. I helped him translate and translated the teacher’s words to his parents. (Cantonese)

**It helps me learn other languages:**

- When I was in elementary school, I made every effort to avoid speaking my heritage language. It made me feel different, and like all children that young, all I wanted was to fit in. It wasn’t until I was a sophomore in high school that I realized how important it was for me to be fluent in my HL. Academically, having knowledge of my HL has been nothing but beneficial. In high school I took three years of French, and, my HL being Spanish, I was able to pick up the language very quickly. I received the highest grade in the class each year, and also received the highest AP score of my class.

- When reading Russian literature in translation, I was able to help my class understand the connotation of certain words that were not very clear in the translation. Also, surprisingly, when I studied Latin, I found certain vocabulary to have similar roots. The grammar systems of these two languages is also very similar (at least in contrast to English). Also, there are many Russians involved in my major study of mathematics, so this has been useful at times, though as of yet I do not have a technical vocabulary that would be useful in reading papers in Russian.

**Other academic advantages:**

- My Heritage language has been an enormous asset to me in school. I am a history major and the amount of progress I have made in my HL through UCLA has allowed me to do two research projects for history classes, both of which required the use of sources in my HL.
As a college student, I realize that knowing a second language can be very helpful, both socially and academically. My major requires me to take a foreign language and because Korean is my second language, it has been easy for me to take the placement test and be placed right into Korean 1C instead of having to go through 1A and 1B. However, it hasn’t always been easy growing up with a heritage language. As a young student, I had difficulty in my writing classes.

It offers privacy, intimacy, etc.:

- It is very helpful. I met most of my friends because we all knew how to speak Russian and we were all coming from the same place of moving to America when we were little kids. I also find that my heritage language has helped made school more enjoyable. We would always laugh about a joke in Russian or something else that the English students couldn’t or wouldn’t understand. It made school fun!

- My heritage language at school is at most useful to tell jokes amongst us HL speakers. It's helpful in that we can rant about other things in a language people don’t understand and are therefore free to whatever we please. Other than that, we don’t talk in our HL much. It’s only used for jokes. (Cantonese)

I have been made fun of or been discriminated against:

- I did not grow up speaking Japanese. But when I went to school over in Japan it was often embarrassing to make speeches in front of large groups and introduce myself to new people. Often teachers assumed things about me and my heritage culture. One time I yawned during class and my Chemistry teacher called me out explaining that he didn’t know how it was in America but in Japan it was very rude to yawn while someone else was speaking.

- There was one incident when my lack of spoken Hmong caused me problems at school. One Friday evening a student organization held a Hmong Medical workshop where medical students would take on the role of doctors and students would pretend to be taking an
elder, parent, or non-English speaking individual to see the doctor. Students had to play as interpreter between doctor and the non-English speaking participant. When it would come to my turn, I would have difficult speaking in Hmong and I felt embarrassed and ashamed of myself that I couldn’t speak my language fluently.

**The ESL issue:**

- Socially, my heritage doesn’t hinder me. However, I think that as an elementary and middle school student, having an Asian heritage has made it somewhat difficult for me. Although I was born here, and speak English with no accent, administrators often tested me for ESL even though I explained many times that my English was fine. In fact, I learned to never put down that Vietnamese was my first language, because that just caused more trouble and landed me in ESL programs that slowed down my education.

- I always am very happy that I know my language but I remember growing up in U.S. I have had people look at me funny because I didn’t speak English. One time with my sister I would speak Cantonese and then English and a person passing by said, “good, you are speaking more English.”

**Other English issues:**

- Since I learned Cantonese first, English was a little hard to learn since my parents refused to speak English to me (Something I’m very happy about now). As a result my grammar in both languages are not very good. When I started to learn Mandarin when I was 6 years old I didn’t really like it since it was different from Cantonese but now I really like it. Overall it is just grammar that I need to work on.

- It has made Chinese class a lot easier for me. However, I feel that is has held me back from being a complete native English speaker. Although, I was born in America, I still feel that my English is not at the level it should be. I feel like I make grammatical errors when I speak, and it is not a fluent as I would like it to be.
• Just gave me more work to do and the pressure from my parents to master both languages just built up stress - maybe the reason why I am not living in my HL country.

(Korean)

Belonging:
• All my life, I've been around people not of my native heritage. To be in a class with people of the same culture as I am feels inviting and accepting. I am now able to speak to my classmates in a different language whilst making myself feel integrated in my culture.

(Vietnamese)

• During middle school and high school, I felt that my heritage language was not something that I would consider a valuable skill. I only spoke Tagalog when calling relatives back in the Philippines during holidays and special occasions. I only started to take pride in my knowledge of my heritage language after coming to UCSD and joining Filipino clubs as well as enrolling in classes such as Advanced Filipino.

Expanding horizons:
• It has helped me understand people better, and understand the different levels of diversity we have in our university. It has allowed me to understand who I am and how I relate to my school environment. (Chinese)

• I think that my HL is very useful in today's increasing globalizing world. I have used my HL in class presentations, to teach others, and to explain concepts. (Mandarin)
Connecting with older generations:

• It has allowed me to communicate with elderly people who are only able to speak the heritage language. Without this language, I would never have had conversations with my grandmother, and would have never learned anything about her, but what I am told by my parents. (Dutch)

• I have found that my knowledge of my heritage language has been very useful. Wherever I go, if there is an elder who is also Vietnamese, I feel extremely comfortable just speaking to them. Often times, there is a language barrier that hurts the Vietnamese that do not speak English. With my extensive knowledge of both Vietnamese and English, it has been very helpful. I feel as if I am almost giving back to my culture.

Visiting the HL country:

• Over the past several months, because of the Polish class I am in, I have gained more confidence speaking the Polish language to my family. I recently went to Poland to attend my grandma’s funeral, and had more confidence talking with my relatives. I may not have had a big vocabulary, but the extra confidence I feel made me sound like a much more competent, expressive Polish speaker.

• It has helped when I travel abroad every year to visit my relatives in the Philippines. They all speak my HL so it feels more comforting when I can understand what they are talking about, even though I can’t really speak clearly back to them.

Professional opportunities:

• My heritage language has recently helped me qualify for a job at a traditional Japanese restaurant. Because I can speak in proper Japanese, I was hired to work there, for there are many businessmen from Japan who choose to eat there. This restaurant prioritizes people who speak both English and Japanese to cater to people from Japan, and those who are just in the neighborhood.
In home, I try to practice as much as I can so that I will be better able to talk and communicate with my grandmother and relatives overseas. Also for my future career, I intend on dealing with overseas, and Chinese/Mandarin is a great necessity in the coming decade.

**Incidental perks:**

- It has allowed me to be able to make new friends easier. I was looking for a place to stay near school and it was difficult to find a place nearby. I was able to find a place and the owner happened to be Vietnamese speaking only. I got to rent the place thanks to the fact that I was able to talk to her in Vietnamese and that we had stuff in common.
References


