

Working with Heritage Language Speakers: Some Issues to Consider

Training Committee of the Interagency Language Roundtable

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What are the profiles of heritage language speakers?

- Knowledge
- Skills
- Background – language use (when, where, with whom, why, how), language input, language development

Language vitality in individuals

- *Capacity* - proficiency
- *Opportunity* – contexts in which use of the language is not only acceptable but required
- *Desire* – use of the language results in certain rewards

(Grin, 1999; Lo Bianco, 2008; research on identity and motivation)

“HLLs differ from traditional foreign language learners in that many HLLs’ personal identities are strongly linked to the language in question (Peyton, Ranard, & McGinnis, 2001). Thus, it is possible that those HLLs who do not exhibit a certain degree of cultural identification, language learning motivation, and opportunities to use the language will demonstrate HL proficiencies more akin to those of L2 learners.” (Malone, Peyton, & Kim, in press).

What do heritage language speakers need to know and be able to do?

Work in the

- National security industry
 - General Purpose Forces (GPF): language enabled soldier; on the ground in specific places
 - Intelligence analysis
 - Homeland security
 - Counter-insurgency
- National Language Service Corps
- Law enforcement
- International business

Work as

- Diplomats
- Soldiers
- Security agents
- Translators
- Interpreters

What language proficiencies do they need to have?

- Phonology
- Morphology
- Vocabulary
- Syntax
- Discourse (semantics, pragmatics)

What job-related skills do they need?

- Have high-level cultural knowledge and language ability
- Be able to communicate in professional settings, including understanding nuances and unstated implications
- Understand language use and cognitive processing
- Interact with many different individuals in the target language for a variety of purposes
- Establish effective working relationships with native speakers of the language
- Communicate with wider audiences, including through mass media
- Explain complex ideas
- Provide suggestions and direction
- Elicit information
- Understand the concerns and values of others
- Interpret subtle meanings in oral and written texts
- Present information through formal speech and writing
- Translate documents, including materials on websites and other media
- Monitor Internet communications
- Interpret spoken language
- Represent U.S. interests in public and private forums

(Jackson & Malone, 2009)

English for Heritage Language Speakers (EHLS) curriculum focuses on tasks that are crucial to professional interactions in a government workplace, such as:

- Making oral presentations
- Conducting research for federal agencies
- Drawing sound analytical conclusions
- Reading articles on current issues
- Organizing and writing concise reports
- Using accepted email protocol
- Negotiating with supervisors and clients
- Running effective meetings
- Creating résumés
- Preparing for job interviews

<http://www.ehlsprogram.org/the-program/>

What are some of the language challenges?

An example: Montrul and Perpiñán (2011), in an investigation of tense/aspect and mood morphology in Spanish using four written tasks, found that Spanish HL learners were more target-like than L2 learners with early acquired aspects of language (e.g., grammatical aspect); but not necessarily with structures acquired during later language development (e.g., mood). “The fact that subjunctive is acquired much later than tense and aspect in general, including in L1 acquisition, and the fact that a lot of its acquisition may be related to schooling, are two of the factors that may explain these trends.” (Montrul, 2011, p. iv)

What educational/language development contexts and conditions do we want to promote?

- Ongoing, rigorous, and sustainable language learning opportunities
- Language input
- Language output
- Opportunities for interaction
- Identity formation
- Sense of agency and choice

What components of an educational program do we need to think about?

- Standards
 - 3 communicative modes – interpersonal, interpretive, presentational (Valdés, 2001)
- Curriculum
- Instruction
- Assessment – Where do specific assessments fit?
 - ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 1999
 - ILR Proficiency Scale, 1999
 - Other measures?

What approaches are successful?

Where are the challenges?

- Standards
 - Curriculum
 - Instruction
 - Assessment
 - Absence of specialized proficiency standards for HLLs
 - Lack of consensus in defining central concepts (e.g., heritage language learner, language proficiency)
 - Lack of understanding of language variation
 - Lack of assessments for measuring various linguistic skills of HLLs (interpersonal, presentational, receptive, productive, pragmatic, cultural knowledge, different language varieties)
 - Scarcity of assessment-based research on heritage language learners
- (Malone, Peyton, & Kim, in press)

What more do we want to know?

What steps might we take?

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