

Why is the course called “Heritage Spanish”?

Spanish-speaking students have been referred to as “native speakers, quasi-native speakers, residual speakers, bilingual speakers, and home-background speakers” (Valdés 1997, p. 13). Those who study Spanish in school often come to formal education with skills in comprehension and conversation, but the literacy skills of this population vary widely, ranging from extremely fluent to receptive to only partially receptive (Valdés, 1997).¹

Heritage: 1. the status conditions, or character acquire by being born into a particular family or social class. 2. something such as a way of life or traditional culture that passes from one generation to the next in a social group.

Native: one who has received formal studies within the country of the native language and has acquired the ability to speak a language effortlessly and correctly and/or proficient in writing.

Those who study Spanish in school often come to formal education with skills in comprehension and conversation, but the literacy skills of this population vary widely, ranging from extremely fluent to receptive to only partially receptive (Valdés, 1997). The degree of oral Spanish proficiency also varies widely among these students, ranging from native proficiency to what Bills has called “disfluency” (1997, p. 267).

Traditionally, heritage Spanish speakers have been placed in Spanish classes with English speakers learning Spanish as a second language. This can be problematic. Other students may resent the heritage speakers’ native-like familiarity with oral language and the appearance that the Spanish speakers are studying “a language they already know” (Peyton, Lewelling, & Winke, 2001, p. 1). At the same time, while the Spanish speakers may be able to discuss day-to-day topics related to home and community, they may have difficulty communicating about more complex topics, such as politics, literature, or careers, and with the mechanics of Spanish writing, such as spelling, syntax, and use of accents. This situation is challenging for heritage Spanish speakers and potentially frustrating for other students. “Neither the Spanish language needs nor the abilities of either group can be duly or successfully addressed” (Peale, 1991, p. 448). Increasingly, researchers and educators realize that these students need courses tailored to their specific needs (Bills, 1997).²

Many parents/guardians are reluctant to enroll students in heritage Spanish Courses because the student may be able to speak and understand the language, but may never have had formal studies in the language or may have never developed any reading or

¹ Heritage Spanish Speakers’ Language Learning Strategies, Zennia Hancock, University of Maryland, College Park, October 2002

writing skills in Spanish. Some students feel that the course will be difficult and assume that they will get an easy “A” if they are enrolled in a non-heritage Spanish course because they speak the language. This can be problematic for both the student who speaks Spanish, the students who do not speak Spanish and the teacher.

1. As stated previously, students who do not speak the language being taught may not want to orally participate because of errors that they may make in front of a peer who speaks the language.
2. The heritage speakers’ native-like familiarity with oral language allows the students comprehension of everyday discussions, but may find difficulty when introduced to complex topics, syntax, morphology, and lexical and dialectal variations.
3. When a heritage speaker is placed in a non-heritage Spanish course, the content of the course is elementary compared to the oral/aural knowledge of the heritage speaker. It has been proven to be difficult to recede in language once it has been established.
4. When a heritage speaker and a teacher both speak Spanish but may be different dialects or socio-dialects, the student may feel culturally dismissed. Such feelings are produced because of standard Spanish being taught opposed to the colloquial Spanish the student speaks within his/her own social circle.

The following is a chart³ of students who are enrolled or should be enrolled in Heritage Spanish:

Newly arrived	Type A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well schooled in Spanish-speaking country • Speakers of prestige variety of Spanish
Newly arrived	Type B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poorly schooled in Spanish-speaking country • Speakers of stigmatized variety of Spanish
Bilingual	Type A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to bilingual instruction in U.S. • Basic academic skills in Spanish • Good academic skills in Spanish • Fluent functioned speakers of contact variety of rural Spanish
Bilingual	Type B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No academic skills in Spanish • Good academic skills in English • Fluent but limited speakers of contact variety of rural Spanish
Bilingual	Type C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No academic skills in Spanish • Good academic skills in English • Fluent but limited speakers of prestige variety of rural Spanish • Some contact phenomena present
Bilingual	Type D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No academic skills in Spanish • Poor academic skills in English • Fluent but limited speakers of contact variety of rural Spanish

³ Paula Winke, Center for Applied Linguistics, Cathy Stafford, Georgetown University, May 2002, EDO-FL-02-03

Bilingual	Type E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No academic skills in Spanish • Poor academic skills in English • Very limited speakers of contact variety of rural Spanish
Bilingual	Type F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No academic skills in Spanish • Poor academic skills in English • Receptive bilingual in contact variety of rural Spanish

A number of factors affect the language learning of heritage Spanish speakers (**Heritage Spanish Speakers' Language Learning Strategies, Zennia Hancock, University of Maryland, College Park, October 2002, EDO-FL-02-06**)

Varieties of Spanish. The belief that some dialects of Spanish are inferior to a standard or widely accepted form of the language can manifest itself in the attitudes of the teacher, other students, and even the speakers of those dialects. Spanish speakers who encounter negative attitudes toward their dialects in the Spanish class may become embarrassed and reluctant to participate for fear of ridicule or correction. Some Latino students in university Spanish classes have claimed that because they spoke non-standard dialects of Spanish, their teachers gave them lower grades (Villa, 1996).

Cultural Connections. As dialects vary, so do cultures. Previous studies have shown positive correlations between learning styles and ethnic background (e.g., Vásquez, 1990). For example, some researchers have found that Latino students learn particularly well in groups rather than by themselves (Griggs & Dunn, 1996). According to Oxford (1990), "Hispanics seem to use social strategies more than do some other ethnic groups" (p. 13). Research on the sensory dimension of learning styles has shown that Latino students are "frequently auditory" learners (Oxford, 2001, p. 360). While generalizations like these about cultural groups need to be treated with caution, learning style preferences such as preference for group or individual work do need to be considered in designing instruction.