

Heritage vs. Non-heritage Language Learner Attitudes  
in a Beginning-Level Mixed Spanish Language Class

by

Vilma Dones-Herrera

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Barbara A. Lafford, Chair  
Álvaro Cerrón-Palomino  
Verónica González

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study used a survey to investigate the attitudes and experiences of 44 Heritage learners (HLL) and non-Heritage learners (NHLL) in beginning-level Spanish courses with a mixed population (HLLs and NHLLs) in the same classroom. Specifically, the survey elicited data on their attitudes and experiences towards their own language skills in Spanish and English, their mixed beginning-level Spanish course, their personal reactions to mixed classes, and their attitudes toward classmates that belong to the other group (e.g., HLLs view of NHLLs). The findings of this study indicated that HLLs perceived their listening and speaking skills to be better than their literacy (reading and writing) skills, while NHLLs self-assessed their receptive skills (reading and listening) to be higher than their productive skills (speaking and writing). In addition, both groups expressed a positive attitude toward mixed beginning-level Spanish classes and noted specific advantages to learning in such an environment (e.g., the opportunity to learn about each other's cultures, the fact that each group felt appreciated and valued by the other group) with very few disadvantages (e.g., HLLs had mixed opinions on the effect that a mixed class might have on a teacher's expectation for how much material is covered and how thoroughly, while NHLLs mostly agreed that a teacher's expectations would affect the breadth and depth of material covered; NHLLs thought the presence of HLLs in their class might negatively affect their grades). However, both groups indicated they would prefer to be in Spanish classes with members of their own group instead of in mixed classes (NHLLs affirmed this more than HLLs). This study concludes with a discussion of pedagogical implications, limitations of the study, and ideas for future research on this topic.

## DEDICATION

To my dear husband, Alfredo, whose love, patience, encouragement, and guidance made it possible for me to finish this work, and to our three children, Alfredo, Victor, and Amanda, and our granddaughter Amelia, who were my inspiration and motivation. And last but not least to my dear mother to whom I owe the formation and thirst of knowledge I possess today.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the United States today the Hispanic college enrollment grew by 1.7 million from 2000 (Census, 2000) to 2011 (ACS), reaching 3.5 million in the latter year (15percent of the total). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, by 2011 14.5% of all students enrolled in college were Hispanics. Many of these university students choose to study Spanish, seeking to learn or refine their heritage language. As the presence of these Heritage Learners increases in Spanish language classes, universities encounter the challenge of accommodating them at the proper level for their language learning needs. Some universities are not able to offer language courses to accommodate Heritage learner needs due to economic reasons. In addition, language teachers encounter serious challenges when trying to accommodate specialized Heritage Learner needs in regular Spanish classes.

Several studies have been done researching students' attitudes regarding mixing heritage and non-heritage language learners in a regular Spanish university classes (e.g., Alarcón, 2010; Edstrom, 2007). However, both of these studies were conducted using Heritage and non-Heritage learners only in advanced Spanish classes. The current study will expand the literature on this subject by exploring the attitudes of non-heritage and heritage students in a beginning level Spanish course. The purpose of this study is to compare and contrast the attitudes of heritage and non-heritage students toward the experience of being in a mixed population beginning level Spanish class. In addition, students' visions of "best practices" for teaching mixed population beginning-level Spanish classes will be presented with the purpose of exploring new ways of meeting the

needs of both heritage and non-heritage learners who may matriculate in the same beginning level Spanish language courses.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

As the current study will compare and contrast the attitudes of heritage and on-heritage language learners of Spanish toward their experience in mixed language classes (in which both are present), these terms must first be defined.

### **Heritage vs. Non-Heritage Language Learners**

According to Valdés (2000) the definition of a *heritage language learner* (HLL) in the United States (where English is the dominant language) is “a student who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speak or merely understand the heritage language and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language” (p.1). The current study focuses on the educational experiences of *heritage language learners* of Spanish as well as on non-heritage language learners of that language in university classroom settings in the United States. Some heritage learners may understand, speak, read and write their heritage language, others may only understand and speak the language, while other heritage learners may actually be passive bilinguals (Chin & Wigglesworth, 2007) who can understand the language but not speak it. For the purposes of this study, *non-Heritage language learners* (NHLL) are defined here as native English speakers with no previous Spanish exposure at home.

Torres (2011) conducted a study focusing on HLL and NHL students perceptions on their language learning anxieties regarding listening, speaking, reading, and writing, language learning self-efficacies in those skills while learning, and which factors they thought significantly impacted their learning process. This study investigated the

following: (1) whether HLL and NHL students reported significantly different reasons for their anxiety, (2) whether the HLL students should be separated into groups based on how they perceived themselves in their connection with their ethnic identity, (3) whether they had significant levels of skill-specific language learning and self-efficacies anxieties among themselves and in comparison to NHL students.

Torres (2011) proposed three research questions and five different hypotheses. The first question was “Do heritage language learners report significantly different skill-specific language learning anxieties and skill-specific language learning self-efficacies compare to foreign-language learning students?” (p.31). From which she generated the following two hypotheses: (1) HLL students will provide “lower ratings of skill-specific language learning anxieties and higher ratings of language learning skill-specific self-efficacies in comparison to” NHL (p.31), (2) HLL “will provide higher ratings of skill-specific language learning anxieties and lower ratings of language learning skill specific self-efficacies with respect to the language learning skills of reading and writing in comparison to” NHL students (p.31).

The second research question was “Based on the extent to which heritage language learners consider speaking the target language as part of their ethnic identity, can heritage language students be separated into groups? If so, do they: (a) report significantly different ratings of ethnic identity? (b) experience significantly different levels of skill-specific language learning anxieties and self-efficacies? and (c) experience significantly different levels of skill specific language learning anxieties and self-efficacies in comparison to foreign language learners?” (p. 32) from which she generated the third, fourth and fifth hypotheses as follows: (3) HLL “ who perceive Spanish as part

of their ethnic identity will have higher ratings on ethnic identity” (p.32) (4) HLL “who perceive speaking Spanish as part of their ethnic identity will provide higher ratings of skill-specific language learning anxieties and lower ratings of language learning skill-specific self-efficacies than HLL students who do not perceive Spanish as part of their ethnic identity for these language learning skills” (p.32) and (5) HLL “students who do not perceive speaking Spanish as part of their ethnic identity will have similar ratings with respect to skill-specific learning anxieties and skill-specific self-efficacies compared to” NHL students (p.32).

Torres’ (2011) third research question was “How do heritage language learners perceive their Hispanic backgrounds?” (p.32) which specifically investigated a) “the role of Spanish language learning in the ethnic identities of heritage language learners” (p.32), and (b) “how heritage language learners identity-related perceptions affect their thoughts and feelings about learning the underlying grammatical and linguistics aspects of the Spanish language.” (p.32). No hypotheses were generated from this question due to its exploratory condition.

Torres’ (2011) study was conducted using a mixed-method approach to investigate perceptions of Spanish learners in a Florida university. It included a total of 315 participants, 203 females and 112 males which had the following ethnical distribution: 46% White, 26 % Multiethnic (including Hispanic), 2% Asian, 5% Black, 3% Multiethnic (non-Hispanic); the rest were from several different countries. Among them there were 132 HLL students and 183 NHL students. Results showed that “not all of the hypotheses were supported”, (p.85) since there were not significant differences

between the two groups. The hypotheses expected significant differences with respect to their ratings of skill-specific language learning anxieties and self – efficacies.

According to Torres (2011) in regards to the first research question the results showed that with respect to the first hypothesis HLL students provided lower learning speaking and lower learning listening anxiety in comparison to NHL students. However, significant differences were found between the two groups for learning listening anxieties where NHL showed higher ratings and learning writing anxieties where HLL showed higher ratings. HLL participants indicated that their writing anxieties originated when they tried to make language transfer from English to Spanish. Lack of vocabulary, knowledge of verb conjugation and accent placement.

In regard of the second research question results showed that “there were significant differences between groups of heritage language learners for skill-specific language learning anxieties and skill-specific language learning self-efficacies” (p.88). The hypotheses generated by this research question was therefore not validated. However, the HLL students who perceived that Spanish was part of their ethnic background provided higher ratings of ethnic identity in comparison with HLL students who reported they did not consider Spanish a part of their ethnic background.

### **Spanish Language Education of HLLs and NHLLs**

At the university level, upper- and lower-division Spanish classes in the United States are often composed of NHLLs as well as HLLs. Some universities have specialized classes for HLLs in the form of classes with titles such as “Spanish for Bilinguals” or Spanish for Heritage Learners. However, even at those institutions, HLLs are found in regular Spanish classes at all levels, often due to scheduling conflicts

between the Spanish for Bilinguals classes and student's other classes or work schedules. As a result, HLLs of Spanish often matriculate into regular Spanish classes with NHLLs of Spanish. The mixture of HLL and NHLL in the same Spanish class can be perceived as an advantage or detrimental to the learning process by students in both groups.

Beaudrie, Ducar & Potowski (2014) focused on the education of HLL students in the United States. According to the Census reports of 2000 and 2010 the Spanish population grew 37% during that decade. Therefore the authors focused on the teaching aspects of the heritage language, in this case Spanish, since is the most spoken foreign language in this country. Their target audience was language educators and their intention was to help language educators acknowledge the value of the HLLs a resource. They invite language educators to reflect on their role as a language instructor of HLL students and how they can reinforce their HL, how they can help transfer their academic strengths from English to their HL, how can they meet the needs of their HLL students and which pedagogical approaches would be best to teach them. This invitation is due to the fact that HLL students have particular needs very different to the ones of the NHL students. They questioned the competency of regular L2 instructors to teach HLL students and suggest that special training should be required of all L2 language instructors to prepare them to deliver effective heritage language instruction to this increasing population. As their primary goal, the instructors should encourage their HLL students to value their heritage language and culture.

Next Beaudrie, Ducar & Potowski (2014) stated that heritage language teachers must learn to be knowledgeable regarding several sociolinguistic factors to be effective instructors of HLL. Teachers also should be non-judgmental to the use of code-switching,

borrowing, and extensions by the HLL students, concepts which are generally stigmatized by the mainstream society. Therefore, the authors emphasized the importance of the appreciation of diversity when teaching language and culture to the HLL students. The authors noted that HLL students are a heterogeneous group which “can vary along many dimensions, including the following five: historic, linguistic, educational, affective, and cultural” (p.35).

Another important aspect mentioned in the book by Beaudrie, Ducar & Potowski (2014) are the goals and principles of heritage language instruction. The authors presented seven goals and some educational principles necessary to accomplish those goals. The seven goals presented are “language maintenance, prestige language variety, expansion of bilingual range, transfer of literacy skills, academic skills, positive attitudes, and cultural awareness” (pp. 59-69).

The suggested general pedagogical principles to fulfill these goals are top-down instruction or “macro”, which refers to the use of prior knowledge to understand a particular reading or piece of information. Bottom-up instruction, a “micro” approach, refers to the instructional approach that make students use different small units of information to construct the whole meaning. Beaudrie, Ducar & Potowski (2014) state that the top-down approach would be the most effective to teach the HLL students “because they take into account the learners’ global knowledge of the language” (p.70). The second principle regards approaches to correct HLL students language production, which entice teachers to be “sociolinguistically informed” to be able to provide adequate linguistic feedback by knowing how to differentiate dialectal features. The third principle is *differentiating instruction*, a student centered approach (Carrera & Kagan, 2011) that

encourages the instructor to take into consideration the differences and diversity of their HLL students especially on mixed classrooms.

Finally, Beaudrie, Ducar, and Potowski (2014) proposed solutions to some of the administrative aspects of a heritage language program. The most relevant to the present study is their suggestion on how to meet the needs of HLL students in L2 courses. The authors noted that many universities and colleges do not have the resources to offer separate classes for HLL students and are forced to place them in mixed classes with NHL students. As heterogeneous as the HLL students are, the fact that on top of that they are sharing the course with NHL students increases the challenges for the instructor. In such a case it is imperative that instructors apply the differentiating instructional approach to be more effective in meeting the educational needs of all the students.

### **Attitudinal Research on HLL Students**

Attitudinal research has taken place in second language acquisition studies for many decades. According to Eagley and Chaiken (1998) “an attitude is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor” (p. 269). Several studies have been carried out on the attitudes, motivations and goals of HLL and NHL university students (Alarcón, 2010; Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005; Campanaro, 2013; Carreira & Kagan, 2011; Edstrom, 2007; Mikulski (2006); and Reynolds, Howard & Deák, 2009).

Overall, these studies found that HLL and NHL had positive attitudes toward learning the Spanish language and were motivated to study Spanish for various motives and goals. HLLs wanted to improve their grammatical skills (Mikulski, 2006), to improve jobs opportunities (Alarcón, 2010; Carreira & Kagan, 2011; Beaudrie and Ducar, 2005),

to be able to communicate with their family and community, and learn more about their culture (Carreira & Kagan, 2011).

Mikulski (2006) studied motivations, attitudes and goals among students in an upper division Spanish HL class in a major Midwestern university. Her main concerns were to find out what motivated the participants to enroll in that particular course, what goals they wanted to attain in the course, and how their motivations, attitudes and goals evolved throughout the semester.

There were 11 students enrolled in the class and they were given two different questionnaires and an interview. The researcher also evaluated their class journals with their permission. The journals were a requirement of the course. The first questionnaire was divided in six sections mainly asking for demographic information about themselves and their families. The other four sections asked about their language education experience and their specific language skills, like speaking, listening, reading and writing. It also asked for their motivations for enrolling in that particular class and if they would have taken it if it were not a heritage language course. The second questionnaire was more focused on the importance they gave to their language goals and were asked to rate their progress in the different language skills they were learning. They were also asked if they would take another language course. The interviews were given to provide the students with the opportunity to expand on the answers given in the questionnaires. Finally, the researcher evaluated the journals, which were a requirement of the course, to assess how the students' goals and attitudes evolved throughout the semester.

The results showed that the students' experiences in this class reaffirmed a positive attitude toward studying their heritage language, and helped them to keep

pursuing and creating their language goals. It also was deduced that the experience had a community building function that will help the students to maintain their heritage language use outside of the classroom. Some limitations of the study were the size of the participants' population and failing to inquire about their linguistic needs and about how they developed their heritage language.

Carreira & Kagan (2011) reported on a survey that was offered online through the National Heritage Language Resource Center (NHLRC) in different languages and regions of the United States that looked into their linguistic profiles, goals and attitudes of college level HLL students. The survey consisted of a 45 discrete-point questions and two open ended questions. The questions were related, as mentioned above, to their attitudes, goals and experiences with their heritage language. The researchers contacted the universities and recruited students through their instructors who took them to the language laboratories to answer the survey online. They received 1,732 responses. The languages spoken by the respondents were Arabic, Armenian, Cantonese, Hindi/Urdu, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Persian, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, Thai, and Vietnamese among others. The majority of the responses (72%) came from California. About 70.2% of the respondents said they used their heritage language exclusively at home until they were 5 years old, which is the age at which they started formal schooling.

Respondents showed overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward their heritage language, since they said there was practical value to communicate better with others. Overall, the results gave the researchers the general idea of the profile of an HLL as someone who learned English early in life but only after having acquired their heritage language at home, has limited contact with the heritage language outside of the home, has

strong listening skills but limited reading and writing skills, has positive attitudes toward their heritage language, and studies it primarily to be able to connect with others in their communities and family.

The findings showed that the HLL classroom in the United States has great diversity and instruction should take that in consideration to be effective. Some of the limitations of this study were the fact that there was not a balance numbers of speakers of each language. In addition, the generalizability of the results were limited because the majority of respondents were from California and were enrolled mainly in Spanish and Cantonese courses.

Reynolds, Howard, and Deák (2009) carried out a comparative study of the main motivations of HLL and NHLL students from nineteen different languages. Their study was conducted in two universities in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania area: University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University. To collect their data the authors distributed a survey with questions to be measured with a Likert scale, in which the students were asked about the languages they were taking the motivation for taking the class, their self-rated proficiency in that language, and past language exposure. Students were also asked how they became aware of course offered, expectations for future language study and ultimate attainment, their perceptions about impact the study of that language would have in their careers, specific interests expected from the language instruction, parental attitudes toward the language, schedule convenience, and level of education and major.

Reynolds, Howard, and Deák (2009) found that NHLL students had positive attitudes toward learning the target language and their main motivations and goals were to be able to communicate with people who spoke that language, to increase their job

opportunities and to learn about different cultures. In contrast, they found out that the main motivation of HLLs was to maintain their heritage language and reinforce their identity. The researchers noted that their study was limited by the fact that they did not ask about gender and only asked about receptive skills in relation to their target language.

### **Research on Student Attitudes toward Mixed Group Language Classes**

The attitude of HLL students and NHL students toward mixed Spanish language classes has been studied in the language acquisition literature, but only for students in upper-division classes (e.g., Alarcón, 2010; Campanaro, 2013; Edstrom, 2007). In these studies, the HLL group in those advanced classes has been characteristically more heterogeneous, as their levels of their heritage language exposure and proficiency varied greatly with the individual. In the other hand the advanced non- heritage learner group has been more homogeneous since those students typically come to the classroom with little to no exposure to the target language.

Campanaro (2013) investigated students and instructors perceptions about Spanish mixed classes in an upper division in a Canadian university. Upper division classes were chosen because in this universities students were not mixed in lower level classes. She surveyed and interviewed 55 students enrolled in four different upper division Spanish classes and their four instructors. The questionnaire was administered to all participants and the interviews were given in a voluntary basis. In the first class there were 5 HLL students and 22 NHL students, in the second class there were 8 HLL students and 15 NHL students, in the third class there were 7 HLL students and 19 NHL students, and in the last class there were 5 HLL students and 13 NHL students. Of the 25 HLL students identified by their instructors as HLL only 11 considered themselves

heritage learners. Therefore 44 students were labeled NHL for the purpose of the study. Data was collected through a written language background questionnaire and an interview. The questionnaire was divided in two sections: one asked for language background with open-ended questions and the second was an adaptation of the questionnaire administered by Edstrom (2007) with question being answered by participants using a Likert Scale.

The interviews in the Campanaro (2013) study were intended to elicit responses that would expand the information obtained with the questionnaire and to explore in more detail issues like perceptions of HLL students and NHL students about being in a mixed Spanish language class, and how they collaborated with each other. It also explored the instructors' expectations as posted in the research questions. Each instructor was asked about their views on teaching a mixed language class and to reflect on the advantages, disadvantages and challenges of teaching such a class.

The results showed that both HLL students and NHL students expressed similar positive perspectives for being together in a mixed language class and that it was advantageous for their learning process. Instructors also indicated that they thought it was a positive experience, and beneficial to all involved, for HLL students and NHL students being enrolled in the same upper level Spanish mixed class. The researcher found that the fact that there was a small number of HLL students in comparison with NHL students presented a limitation for the validity of the study.

Alarcón (2010) conducted a research study about the attitudes of HLLs regarding mixed upper-level Spanish university classes. Her purpose was to identify strategies to better educate the HLLs in those mixed classes. This study consisted of a qualitative

analysis of responses from five HLLs enrolled in an upper level Spanish class in a small private university. The data was collected through a survey which was administered in two sessions, one at the beginning of the semester and the second at the end of the course. The survey questions were categorized by the following topics: background, language contact, language attitude, identity and culture issues, Spanish dialect awareness, self-assessment of the HLLs' proficiency, motivations and future use of the language, and reasons for taking a Heritage language course in college.

The results of the Alarcón (2010) study showed that HLLs were particularly proud of their identity, were educated and fluent in their parents' standard variety of Spanish (depending on their country), confident in their oral abilities, and interested in improving their writing skills. The major limitation of her study was the limited sample of only five HLL participants, which prevented the results from being generalized.

Edstrom (2007) conducted research on the perspectives and attitudes of non-native speakers of Spanish, native speakers (NSs), and heritage speakers of Spanish studying Spanish in an upper-level mixed university class in a non-disclosed setting. The author elicited those opinions with the expectation of obtaining a better understanding of the various needs of the diverse students in those classes. She interviewed and surveyed 16 students who identified themselves as native speakers of Spanish (10), as non-native of Spanish (4) and as heritage learners (2). The author noted that these numbers reflected the pattern of low enrollment of non-native Spanish speakers (NHLLs) in upper division Spanish courses at the researcher's institution. She used two versions of an 11 item written questionnaire and audio-recorded interviews to inquire about language

background. The non-native Spanish speakers answered one version and the native Spanish speakers and Heritage speakers answered the other.

Edstrom's (2007) conclusions from her analysis of the interview data suggest that studying a language in a linguistically mixed advanced class is advantageous for all involved for several reasons. First, the non-native speakers expressed that studying with native speakers and heritage speakers helped raised their motivation and improved their listening comprehension; they felt that the immersion-like environment led to better exposure to native fluent speech, which improved their pronunciation and gave them more opportunities to engage in conversations in the target language. They also reported obtaining a better understanding of cultural differences. Secondly, the heritage and native Spanish speakers felt that they also benefited by sharing the classroom with NHLL's since they also learned more about the non-native speakers' culture and perceived positive validation of their heritage. The interview responses also showed that the non-native learners of Spanish were highly motivated to learn Spanish; the fact of having to share the classroom with native speakers and heritage speakers enhanced their motivation even further, as they noted several advantages of sharing the class with native and heritage speakers of their target language in their interviews.

On the other hand, in Edstrom's (2007) study, native speakers of Spanish in the class expressed that sometimes the class was too easy and Heritage speakers felt as intimidated by the native speakers as the non-native speakers felt. Non-native speakers expressed their predilection for the class being conducted solely in Spanish and frustrated when their Heritage peers talked to them in English. The major limitation of this study

was the inability to have a larger sample, which prevented her from generalizing the results to the large populations from which her samples came (NSs, HLLs, NHLLs).

### **Justification for the Current Study**

The preceding literature review has shown that several studies have been carried out researching students' attitudes regarding mixing students of different language backgrounds (HLLs and NHLLs) in a regular Spanish university classes (e.g., Alarcón, 2010; Edstrom, 2007). However, studies to date have been conducted using Heritage and non-Heritage learners only in advanced Spanish classes.

The current study will expand the literature on this subject by exploring the attitudes of HLLs and NHLLs in a mixed population beginning-level university Spanish course. The results of this study will allow students, professors and universities to recognize the challenges encountered when trying to accommodate the needs of both types of students in the same beginning-level classroom. The study will also explore the visions of HLLs and NHLLs regarding the optimal learning conditions for Spanish in university classes and compare them to those proposed by Beaudrie, Ducar, and Potowski (2014). These student visions of “best practices” for mixed classes will help to shed light on how to improve Spanish classroom curricula at the beginning level, with the goal of providing a better classroom environment and learning experience for all students.

This study will address the following research questions:

- What are the attitudes and experiences of Heritage learners in lower level Spanish courses with mixed populations (Heritage and non-heritage learners) in the same class?

- How do these attitudes and experiences compare to those of non-Heritage Spanish L2 learners in mixed classes?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Subjects**

Data was collected from two intact regular first-semester classes in a university in the American Southwest. A total of 44 students (11 males and 33 females) took part in the survey about attitudes towards mixed beginning Spanish classes.

On the survey students self-identified as either Heritage Learners (HLL) and non-Heritage Learners (NHLL) according to Valdes' (2000) definition of HL: "a student who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speak or merely understand the heritage language and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language" (p.1) The result was 15 students who identified as HLLs (3 males and 12 females) and 29 students who said they were NHLLs (8 males and 21 females), a total of 44 participants.

### **Instruments and Procedures**

A survey (Appendix A) was given to all 44 students; the survey contained questions regarding demographic information, language contact information, and attitudes towards the presence of both HLLs and NHLLs learners in the same language classes.

These aforementioned studies on attitudes and motivations of HLL and NHLL students typically gathered attitudinal and motivational data using surveys or questionnaires that often measure attitudes with the use of a Likert Scale, a type of

measurement tool used in surveys to score participants' responses (Gass & Mackey, 2007) from high to low or best to worst in a spectrum of five to seven levels. The scoring depends on how the scale is designed. The research questions and hypotheses guide the researcher to design the survey or questionnaire in order to elicit the pertinent responses related to the investigation. This type of data collection is advantageous for the researcher since it offers a great deal of flexibility in reaching the participants (by mail, telephone, e-mail, mail, etc.). However, it also can be problematic in some second language investigation if the participants do not have a high level of proficiency and the responses are unclear or unintelligible. To avoid that situation the survey and questionnaire should be administered in the participants' native language (Gass & Mackey, 2007).

### **Data Analysis**

A qualitative approach was used to analyze the data, which will be presented as frequencies (answers to the Likert-scale questions), followed by qualitative commentary. The open-ended data regarding the type of class structure that participants propose for meeting their needs were searched for patterns and the results are presented qualitatively in prose form.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In this section the results of the data analysis are discussed to answer the research questions. Comparisons to prior research will be made where appropriate.

### **Heritage Learners**

Table 1 presents data from the HLLs regarding the comfort with speaking and writing Spanish.

Table 1 Heritage Language Learner Comfort Level with Speaking and Writing Spanish

Questionnaire Statement	Very Comfortable	Comfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	Somewhat Uncomfortable	Uncomfortable	Very Uncomfortable
6. How comfortable do you feel speaking Spanish?	11 (73.3%)	2 (13.3%)	2 (13.3%)	0	0	0
7. How comfortable do you feel writing Spanish?	3 (20%)	7 (46.7%)	4 (6.7)	1 (6.7%)	0	0

The data in Table 1 show that HLLs feel comfortable speaking and writing Spanish. However, they feel more comfortable speaking than writing; 86% of the HLLs state they are *very comfortable* or *comfortable* speaking the language, while only 66.7% of the same participants felt *very comfortable* or *comfortable* writing the language.

Table 2 indicates the self-assessed abilities of the participants in speaking, listening, writing, and reading Spanish (n=15).

Table 2 Heritage Language Learner Self-Assessment of Spanish Language Skills

Column1	No skills (NS)	Some skills (SS)	More skills (MS)	Native-Like (NL)
a. Speaking	0	2 (13.3%)	2 (13.3%)	11 (73.3%)
b. Listening	0	0	0	15 (100%)
c. Writing	0	3 (20%)	9 (60%)	3 (20%)
d. Reading	0	1 (6.7%)	5 (33.3%)	9 (60%)

Table 2 shows how HLLs self-assessed their abilities in speaking, listening, writing, and reading Spanish. In general, they assessed themselves as having a higher level of ability in listening and speaking than in reading and writing of Spanish. Fifteen participants (100%) said they had NL (native –like) listening skills and 11 participants (73.3%) indicated they had NL speaking skills, However, only 9 participants (60%) said

they had NL reading skills, and only 3 participants (20%) self-assessed their writing skills as NL. Table 2 also shows that most participants (9=60%) said they had a MS level in writing Spanish, a third of the HLLs (33.3%) believed their reading abilities to be at the MS level, and only 2 HLL participants self-assessed their Spanish speaking skills at the MS level. No participant self-assessed their Spanish abilities as NS.

Table 3 indicates the self-assessed abilities of the participants in speaking, listening, writing, and reading English (n=15).

Table 3 Heritage Language Learner Self-Assessment of English Language Skills

Column1	No skills (NS)	Some skills (SS)	More skills (MS)	Native-Like (NL)
a. Speaking	0	0	1 (6.7%)	14 (93.3%)
b. Listening	0	0	1 (6.7%)	14 (93.3%)
c. Writing	0	1 (6.7%)	2 (13.3%)	12 (80%)
d. Reading	0	0	1 (6.7%)	14 (93.3%)

Table 3 shows that the majority of HLL participants self-assessed themselves as having NL abilities in all English speaking skills. The data show that 14 participants (93.3%) reported having NL abilities in speaking, listening and reading English, while 12 (80%) participants reported having NL abilities in writing English.

Table 3 also shows that 2 participants (13.3%) reported having MS in writing English, 1 participant each (6.7%) reported having MS in speaking, listening, and reading English. Only 1 participant (6.7%) reported having only some skills (SS) in writing English.

Therefore, HLLs indicate an overwhelmingly higher level of confidence in all their English skills than in their Spanish skills. They were much more confident in their ability to speak English (93.3% NL) than Spanish (73.3% NL) and to read English (93.3% NL) than Spanish (60% NL). However, these HLL participants reported slightly

higher abilities to understand spoken Spanish (listening skills-100% NL) than spoken English (listening skills: 93.3% NL). All HLL participants had the least amount of confidence in their writing skills compared to other skills in either language, but their self-assessment of their English writing skills (80% NL) is much higher than their perceived writing abilities in Spanish (20% NL).

Tables 4-6 present data regarding the HLL participants' view of mixed beginning-level Spanish classes, the impact of their mixed class on their self-image and their learning, and their view of the NHLLs in the class.

Table 4 indicates the participants' general view of mixed beginning Spanish classes.

Table 4. HLL Views of Mixed Beginning-Level Spanish Classes

Questionnaire Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
28. I think that mixing non-native speakers with heritage Spanish speakers in beginning-level classes is a good thing.	8 (53.3%)	3 (20%)	2 (13.3%)	0	1 (6.7%)	1 (6.7%)
31. The mix of students in beginning level courses encourages learning a lot about our classmates' cultures.	5 (33.3%)	5 (33.3%)	4 (26.7%)	1 (6.7%)	0	0
34. The fact that there are some non-native speakers of Spanish in class seems to affect my professors' expectations for how much material we can cover and how thoroughly we cover it. In other words, we could cover more and could discuss things more in depth if all students were bilingual.	3 (20%)	1 (6.7%)	3 (20%)	2 (13.3%)	3 (20%)	3 (20%)
35. I believe that there should be special sections of some beginning level courses that are specifically for heritage speakers and other sections for non-native speakers.	3 (20%)	1 (6.7%)	3 (20%)	3 (20%)	3 (20%)	2 (13.3%)

36. The heritage Spanish speakers  
 try to help the non-native speakers in  
 class.

39. If a course specifically for  
 Heritage learners were offered I  
 would take it instead of a mixed  
 class.

				0	0
	11 (73.3%)	1 (6.7%)	2 (13.3%)	1 (6.7%)	
	1 (6.7%)	3 (20%)	4 (26.7%)	3 (20%)	2 (13.3%)
					2 (13.3%)

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Table 4 shows that when the participants were asked in question 28 if they thought that mixing non-native speakers with heritage Spanish speakers in beginning-level classes was a good thing, almost all HLLs agreed with that statement, i.e., 8 participants (53.3%) *strongly agreed*, 3 participants (20%) *agreed*, 2 participants (13.3%) *somewhat agreed*, while only two participants 1 either *somewhat disagreed* (1=6.7%) or *strongly disagreed* (1=6.7%) with that idea.

When HLLs were asked in question 14d if their ideal Spanish course would include the presence of both HLLs and NHLLs, the great majority (13/15=87%) agreed. Only two of them answered negatively, saying that the NHLL presence would slow the class pace and that the NHLLs would be in an advantageous position by easily obtaining the answers from the HLLs. Thirteen (87%) of the HLLs indicated that they favored a mixed class since that offered them the opportunity to help the NHLLs in the classroom. The answers to this question confirm the results of Table 4 where HLLs indicated that mixing HLLs and NHLLs in a beginning level Spanish class was a good thing.

When asked in question 31 if the mix of students in beginning level courses encourages learning a lot about their classmates' cultures, all but one participant agreed

to some extent with that idea, i.e., 5 participants (33.3%) *strongly agreed*, 5 participants (33.3%) *agreed*, 4 participants (26.7%) *somewhat agreed*, and only 1 participant (6.7%) *somewhat disagreed*.

When asked in question 34 if the fact that there were some non-native speakers of Spanish in class seemed to affect their professors' expectations for how much material they could have covered and how thoroughly they covered it; or in other words, if they could have covered more and could have discussed things more in depth if all students were bilingual, HLL students were mixed in their reactions. For example, 3 participants (20%) *strongly agreed*, 1 participant (6.7%) *agreed*, 3 participants (20%) *somewhat agreed*, 2 participants (13%) *somewhat disagreed*, 3 participants (20%) *disagreed*, and 3 participants (20%) *strongly disagreed*.

In regards to question 35 when participants were asked if they believed that there should be special sections of some beginning level courses specifically for heritage speakers and other sections for non-native speakers, students reactions were also mixed (46.7% agreed to some extent, while 43.3% disagreed to some degree with that idea). Specifically, 3 participants (20%) *strongly agreed*, 1 participant (6.7%) *agreed*, 3 participants (20%) *somewhat agreed*, 3 participants (20%) *somewhat disagree*, 3 participants (20%) *disagreed*, and 2 participants (13.3%) *strongly disagreed*.

When asked in question 36 if the HLL speakers helped NHL speakers in class, the indication was overwhelmingly positive, i.e., 11 participants (73.3%) *strongly agreed*, 1 participant (6.7%) *agreed*, 2 participants (13.3%) *somewhat agreed*, and only 1 participant (6.7%) *somewhat disagree*.

When asked in question 39 if they would take a course specifically for Heritage learners instead of a mixed group class if offered, slightly over half of the HLLs (8= 53.3%) generally indicated that they would do so and 46.7% indicated they would probably not take such a course. Specifically, 1 participant (6.7%) *strongly agreed*, 3 participants (20%) *agreed*, 4 participants (26.7%) somewhat agreed, while 3 participants (20%) *somewhat disagreed*, 2 participants (13.3%) *disagreed*, and 2 participants (13.3%) *strongly disagreed*.

The great majority (13/15= 87 %) of the HLL participants would expect a course for Heritage Speakers to be more challenging. For instance, in their open-ended answers to the survey (question 12) they used the following descriptors to characterize such a class: ‘more advanced in speaking, reading and writing’; ‘a higher level of grammar’; and ‘taught exclusively in Spanish.’

Just over half of the HLLs (8/15=53%) indicated that their reason to take a mixed beginning-level Spanish class was because it was a requirement for their major; however they also indicated that there were not any other options. Two of them said they wanted to improve their speaking skill and become fluent in Spanish, 3 indicated they wanted to improve their writing skills, 1 said s/he wanted to learn academic Spanish, and 1 took it “for no particular reason.”

Table 5 presents data regarding the HLLs’ personal reaction to mixed beginning-level Spanish classes.

Table 5. HLLs Personal Reactions to Mixed Beginning-Level Spanish Classes

Questionnaire Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Agree
30. I am as happy to work in a group with non-native Spanish speakers as I am to work with another heritage Spanish speaker.	9 (60%)	2 (13.3%)	2 (13.3%)	1 (6.7%)	0	1 (6.7%)
32. I believe that I can learn from the insights and contributions of non-native speakers in my beginning level Spanish courses.	3 (20%)	10 (66.7%)	2 (13.3%)	0	0	0
37. I feel impatient sometimes when non-native speakers try to express their ideas in Spanish in some of my classes.	0	0	0	5 (33.3%)	2 (13.3%)	8 (53.3%)

The data in Table 5 that overall HLLs had a positive personal reaction to mixed beginning level Spanish classes. In regards to question 30, where they had to express if they were as happy to work in a group with non-native Spanish speakers as they were to work with another heritage Spanish speaker, 9 participants (60%) *strongly agreed*, 2

participants (13.3%) *agreed*, 2 participants (13.3%) *somewhat agreed*, 1 participant (6.7%) *somewhat disagreed*, and 1 participant (6.7%) *strongly disagreed*.

When asked in question 32 if they thought they could learn from the insights and contributions of non-native speakers in their beginning level Spanish courses, most HLLs answered positively, i.e., 3 participants (20%) *strongly agreed*, 10 participants (66.7%) *agreed*, 2 participants (13.3%) *somewhat agreed*.

When HLLs were asked in question 37 if they felt impatient sometimes when non-native speakers tried to express their ideas in Spanish in some of their classes, all participants disagreed with that idea to a greater or lesser extent, i.e., 5 participants (33.3%) *somewhat disagreed*, 2 participants (13.3%) *disagreed*, and 8 participants (53.3%) *strongly disagreed*.

Table 6 indicates the views that HLLs had of their NHLL classmates.

Table 6. Views HLLs had of their NHLL Classmates.

Questionnaire Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
29. Non-native speakers seem intimidated by the fact that there are many heritage speakers in beginning-level courses.	2 (13.3%)	1 (6.7%)	7 (46.7%)	3 (20%)	1 (6.7%)	1 (6.7%)
33. I feel embarrassed for the non-native speakers in my classes, especially because of their language skills in	0	1 (6.7%)	0	0	5 (33.3%)	9 (60%)

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Spanish.

38. My non-native speaker classmates respect me and appreciate my contribution to class.

6 (40%)	3 (20%)	5 (33.3%)	1 (6.7%)	0	0
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The data in Table 6 show that when HLL participants were asked in question 29 if they thought NHLLs seemed intimidated by the fact that there were many heritage speakers in beginning-level courses, most agreed to some extent that this was, indeed, the case, i.e., 2 participants (13.3%) *strongly agreed*, 1 participant (6.7%) *agreed*, 7 participants (46.7%) *somewhat agreed*, 3 participants (20%) *somewhat disagreed*, 1 participant (6.7%) *disagreed*, and 1 participant (6.7%) *strongly disagreed*.

When asked in question 33 if they felt embarrassed for the non-native speakers in their classes, especially because of their language skills in Spanish, almost all HLLs either *disagreed* (5=33.3%) or *strongly disagreed* (9=60%) with that idea. Thus, the HLL speakers strongly denied that they felt any embarrassment for their NHLL peers' lack of proficiency in the language.

When asked in question 38 if their non-native speaker classmates respected them and appreciated their contribution to class, almost all HLLs agreed to some extent with that idea, i.e., 6 participants (40%) *strongly agreed*, 3 participants (20%) *agreed*, 5 participants (33.3%) *somewhat agreed*, and only 1 participant *somewhat disagreed*.

Therefore, generally speaking most participants felt their classmates respected and appreciated their contributions in class.

### Non Heritage Learners

Table 7 NHLL comfort level with Speaking and Writing Spanish.

Questionnaire Statement	Very Comfortable	Comfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	Somewhat Uncomfortable	Uncomfortable	Very Uncomfortable
6. How comfortable do you feel speaking Spanish?	1(3.4%)	3 (10.3%)	12 (41.4%)	8 (27.6%)	3 (10.3%)	2 (6.9%)
7. How comfortable do you feel writing Spanish?	2 (6.9%)	6 (20.7%)	9 (31%)	5 (17.2%)	6 (20.7%)	1(3.4%)

The data in Table 7 shows that most NHLLs feel *somewhat comfortable* speaking and writing Spanish. However, they feel more uncomfortable speaking the language than writing it; 41.4% of the NHLLs state they are *somewhat comfortable* and 27.6% of the same group felt somewhat *uncomfortable* speaking the language, while only 27.6% of the same participants felt *very comfortable* or *comfortable* writing the language.

Table 8 presents data on NHLL self-assessment of Spanish language skills.

Table 8. NHLL Self-Assessment of Spanish Language Skills

No skills	Some skills	More skills	Native-Like
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	(NS)	(SS)	(MS)	(NL)
a. Speaking	3 (10.3%)	18 (62.1%)	6 (20.7%)	2 (6.9%)
b. Listening	0	16 (55.2%)	12 (41.4%)	1 (3.4%)
c. Writing	4 (13.8%)	12 (41.4%)	12 (41.4%)	1 (3.4%)
d. Reading	0	6 (20.7%)	19 (65.5%)	4 (13.8%)

Table 8 shows how NHLLs self-assessed their abilities in speaking, listening, writing, and reading Spanish. In general, they believe their Spanish reading abilities are the most developed, followed by listening, speaking, and writing. Thus, NHLLs believe their Spanish abilities to be higher in the receptive skills (reading and listening) than in productive skills (speaking and writing). The results also show that only a small percentage of NHLLs consider their Spanish skills to be native like (3.4%-13.8%). The fact that any of these beginning-level NHLLs self-assessed their Spanish abilities as native-like in any of these four skills (a highly unlikely fact) points toward the need for more objective measures of the participants' linguistic abilities.

Four participants (13.8%) said they had NL (native –like) reading skills, 2 participants (6.9%) said they had NL speaking skills, and only 1 participant each (3.4%) stated that they possessed NL listening and writing skills. Table 8 also shows that while the majority of participants (19=65.5%) said their reading ability was at the MS level, and that their writing level was evenly categorized as either the SS or MS level, most believed they possessed only SS (*some skills*) at the speaking (18=62.1%) and listening (16=55.2%) level.

Table 9 indicates the self-assessed abilities of the NHLL participants in speaking, listening, writing, and reading English.

Table 9 NHLL Self-Assessment of English Language Skills

	1 no skills (NS)	2 Some Skills (SS)	3 More Skills (MS)	4 Native-Like (NL)
a. Speaking	0	0	0	29 (100%)
b. Listening	0	1 (3.4%)	0	28 (96.6%)
c. Writing	0	0	0	29 (100%)
d. Reading	0	0	0	29 (100%)

Table 9 shows that NHLLs overwhelmingly self-assessed all their English language abilities (speaking, listening, reading and writing) as NL. Only one student believed his/her listening ability to be at the SS level.

Table 10 indicates the NHLL participants' general view of mixed beginning Spanish classes.

Table 10. NHLL Views of Mixed Beginning-Level Spanish Classes

Questionnaire Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
21. The fact that there are many heritage speakers of Spanish in class seems to affect my professors' expectation for how much material we cover and how thoroughly we cover it.	5 (17.2%)	7 (24.1%)	10 (34.5%)	2 (6.9%)	1 (3.4%)	4 (13.8%)

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26. If a course specifically for non-Heritage learners were offered I would take it instead of a mixed group class.	6 (20.7%)	4 (13.8%)	5 (17.2%)	4 (13.8%)	3 (10.3%)	7 (24.1%)
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Table 10 shows that when NHLLs were asked in question 21 if they thought the presence of HLLs in their beginning level Spanish class seemed to affect the professor’s expectations for how much material should be covered and how thoroughly it should be covered, over three-quarters of the NHLLs (75.9%) agreed that this was the case to some extent, i.e., 10 participants (34.5%) *somewhat agreed*, 7 participants *agreed*, 5 participants (17.2%) *strongly agreed*, while 4 participants (13.8%) *strongly disagreed*, 2 participants (6.9%) *somewhat disagreed*, and 1 participant (3.4%) *disagreed*.

Table 10 also shows that when NHLLs were asked in question 26 if they would take a course specifically for NHLLs instead of a mixed course, over half (51.7%) of them said that they would, i.e., 6 participants (20.7%) *strongly agreed*, 4 participants (13.8%) *agreed*, 5 participants (17.2%) *somewhat agreed*, while 4 participants (13.8%) *somewhat disagreed*, 3 participants (10.3%) *disagreed*, and 7 participants (24.1%) *strongly disagreed*.

When asked in an open ended question (Q#12) about their expectations for a course for “Heritage Speakers” only, the NHLLs indicated it would be more ‘challenging,’ ‘move at a faster pace,’ ‘would be all in Spanish,’ ‘focus on writing,’ ‘focus on conversation,’ and ‘help improve all Spanish language skills.’

When asked their reasons for taking a mixed beginning-level Spanish class (Q#11), 15 (51.7%) of the NHLLs indicated they took it to fulfill their major requirements, 13 (44.8%) responded they just wanted to learn Spanish, while 1 student (3%) said s/he took the class to learn about Spanish language and culture.

In another open ended question (Q#14d) they were asked their opinion about a mixed beginning level Spanish class. Sixteen (55.2%) indicated they liked the idea because NHLLs would benefit from the help of the HLLs and also would help each other. Eleven of them (37.9%) indicated they did not like the mixed classes, because it was intimidating for the NHLLs, it took away the opportunity to learn without getting the answers from the HLLs, it was distracting, it was too easy for the HLLs, and was too hard for them.

Table 11 presents data on NHLL personal reactions to mixed beginning-level Spanish classes.

Table 11. NHLL Personal Reactions to Mixed Beginning-Level Spanish Classes

Questionnaire Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15. Having heritage Spanish-speakers in my classes is good for my Spanish listening skills.	9 (31%)	10 (34.5%)	4 (13.8%)	1 (3.4%)	4 (13.8%)	1 (3.4%)
16. I find the heritage Spanish speakers in my classes intimidating; I feel uncomfortable speaking in front of them.	1 (3.4%)	4 (13.8%)	4 (13.8%)	4 (13.8%)	11 (37.9%)	5 (17.2%)

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17. I am as happy to work in my group with a heritage Spanish speaker as I am to work with another non-native Spanish speaker.	7 (24.1%)	13 (44.8%)	4 (13.8%)	1 (3.4%)	4 (13.8%)	0
18. I learn a lot about Spanish-speaking culture from my heritage Spanish speaking classmates.	5 (17.2%)	6 (20.7%)	6 (20.7%)	3 (10.3%)	6 (20.7%)	3 (10.3%)
19. The presence of heritage Spanish speakers in my class has helped me to understand and to feel more comfortable with a variety of Spanish dialects.	8 (27.6%)	3 (10.3%)	5 (17.2%)	9 (31%)	1 (3.4%)	3 (10.3%)
20. Having heritage Spanish-speaking classmates makes me feel good because I am reminded that even their language skills need polishing.	5 (17.2%)	6 (20.7%)	12 (41.4%)	3 (10.3%)	2 (6.9%)	1 (3.4%)
22. The fact that there are many heritage speakers of Spanish in class seems to affect my grades. That is, in a Spanish program without so many heritage Spanish-speakers, I would probably receive better grades.	5 (17.2%)	2 (6.9%)	9 (31%)	5 (17.2%)	4 (13.8%)	4 (13.8%)
23. The presence of heritage Spanish-speakers negatively affects my motivation to participate in class.	2 (6.9%)	3 (10.3%)	5 (17.2%)	3 (10.3%)	10 (34.5%)	6 (20.7%)

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25. The presence of heritage Spanish-speakers motivates me to participate more in class.	2 (6.9%)	3 (10.3%)	8 (27.6%)	9 (31%)	2 (6.9%)	5 (17.2%)
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Table 11 shows that when the participants were asked in question 15 if they felt that having heritage Spanish-speakers in their classes was good for their Spanish listening skills, over three-quarters of the participants (79%) agreed that this was the case.. i.e., 10 participants (34.5%) *agreed*, 9 participants (31%) *strongly agreed*, and 4 participants (13.8%) *somewhat agreed*, while 4 participants (13.8%) *disagreed* 1 participant (3.4%) *somewhat disagreed*, and 1 participant (3.4%) *strongly disagreed*.

When NHLL students were asked in question 16 if they felt intimidated by the presence of the HLLs or if they felt uncomfortable speaking Spanish in front of them, most did not agree that was the case, i.e., 11 participants (37.9%) *disagreed*, 5 participants (17.2%) *strongly disagreed*, 4 participants (13.8%) *strongly disagreed*, while 4 participants (13.8%) *somewhat agreed*, 4 participants (13.8%) *agreed*, and 1 participant (3.4%) *strongly agreed*.

When NHLL students were asked in question 17 if they were as happy to work with HLLs in their class, as they were to work with fellow NHLLs, most participants (82.7%) said that they were, i.e., 13 participants (44.8%) *agreed*, 7 participants (24.1%) *strongly agreed*, 4 participants (13.8%) *somewhat agreed*, 4 participants (13.8%) *disagreed*, and 1 participant (3.4%) *somewhat disagreed*.

When NHLL participants were asked in question 18 if they learned a lot about Spanish speaking cultures from their Spanish speaking classmates, most (58.6%) answered in the affirmative, i.e., 5 participants (17.2%) *strongly agreed*, 6 participants

(20.7%) *agreed*, 6 participants (20.7%) *somewhat agreed*, while 6 participants (20.7%) *disagreed*, 3 participants (10.3%) *somewhat disagreed*, and 3 participants (10.3%) *strongly disagreed*.

When NHLL participants were asked in question 19 if the presence of HLLs in their class helped them to understand and to feel more comfortable with a variety of Spanish dialects, over half of the participants agreed with that statement, i.e., 8 participants (27.6%) *strongly agreed*, 5 participants (17.2%) *somewhat agreed*, 3 participants (10.3%) *agreed*, while 9 participants (31%) *somewhat disagreed*, 3 participants (10.3%) *strongly disagreed*, and 1 participant (3.4%) *disagreed*.

When NHLL students were asked in question 20 if having HLL students in their class made them feel good because it reminded them that even their language skills needed polishing, most participants agreed that this was the case, i.e., 12 participants (41.4%) *somewhat agreed*, 6 participants (20.7%) *agreed*, 5 participants (17.2%) *strongly agreed*, 3 participants (10.3%) *somewhat disagreed*, 2 participants (6.9%) *disagreed*, 1 participant (3.4%) *strongly disagreed*.

When NHLLs were asked in question 22 if they thought they would receive better grades without the presence of HLLs in the class, most of them (55.2%) agreed that would be the case, i.e., 9 participants (31%) *somewhat agreed*, 5 participants (17.2%) *strongly agreed*, 2 participants (6.9%) *agreed*, 5 participants (17.2%) *somewhat disagreed*, 4 participants (13.8%) *disagreed*, and 4 participants (13.8%) *strongly disagreed*. Overall, a larger number of participants (55.1%) thought they might obtain better grades without the presence of HLLs in the class.

When NHLLs were asked in question 23 if they thought that the presence of HLLs negatively affected their motivation to participate in class, most of them disagreed with that statement, i.e., 6 (20.7%) *strongly disagreed*, 10 (34.5%) *disagreed*, 3 (10.3%) *somewhat disagreed*, while 5 (17.2%) *somewhat agreed*, 3 (10.3%) *agreed*, and 2 (6.9%) *strongly agreed*.

When NHLLs were asked in question 25 if the presence of HLLs motivates them to participate more in class, most (55.1%) did not agree that was the case, i.e., 9 (31%) *somewhat disagreed*, 2 (6.9%) *disagreed*, 5 (17.2%) *strongly disagreed*, while 8(27.6%) *somewhat agreed*, 3 (10.3%) *agreed*, and 2 (6.9%) *strongly agreed*.

Table 12 presents data on the views NHLL had of their HLL classmates.

Table 12. Views NHLLs had of their HLL Classmates.

Questionnaire Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
24. I feel that my heritage Spanish-speakers peers respect my contributions to class.	5 (17.2%)	7 (24.1%)	10 (34.5%)	2 (6.9%)	1 (3.4%)	4 (13.8%)

Table 12 shows that when NHLLs were asked if they felt that their HLL peers respected their contributions in class, over three-quarters (79.9%) of NHLL participants agreed to some extent that this was the case, i.e., 10 participants (34.5%) *somewhat agreed*, 7 participants (24.1%) *agreed*, 5 participants (17.2%) *strongly agreed*, while 4 participants (13.8%) *strongly disagreed*, 2 participants (6.9%) *somewhat disagreed*, and 1 participant (3.4%) *disagreed*.

## DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to identify the attitudes and experiences of Heritage learners in a beginning-level Spanish course with mixed populations (HLLs and NHLLs) in the same class and to explore how these attitudes and experiences compare to those of non-Heritage Spanish L2 learners in the same mixed class.

### Skills

Regarding their self- assessed level of comfort in their speaking and writing abilities in Spanish, HLLs felt comfortable speaking and writing Spanish, but felt more comfortable speaking than writing. These results coincide with the results of Alarcon

(2010), whose results showed that her HLL participants felt more confident in their oral abilities, and interested in improving their writing skills.

In contrast, NHLLs believe their Spanish receptive skills (reading and listening) were more developed than their productive skills (speaking and writing). In essence, the HLLs perceive their greatest strengths to be the skills they already possessed before taking the class (listening and speaking) while NHLLs believe they are strongest in skills that only require understanding the target language (reading and listening) rather than producing it (speaking and writing). This poses a challenge for the teacher who has to decide what skills to focus on teaching in a mixed class in order to meet the needs of both types of students.

The majority of HLL participants self-assessed themselves as having NL abilities in all English speaking skills. They also indicated an overwhelmingly higher level of confidence in all their English skills than in their Spanish skills. As it would be expected, NHLLs overwhelmingly self-assessed all their English language abilities (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) as NL. Thus, the data show that both groups have more confidence in their English than in their Spanish language abilities.

### **Attitudes**

The HLL and NHLL attitudes on being placed together in mixed beginning-level Spanish classes were explored using a survey that posed questions regarding their attitudes toward the mixed course itself, their personal reactions to the presence of the other group under study in their classes, and attitudes toward the members of that other group of classmates.

**Courses.** The current study corroborated Edstrom's (2007) findings that upper-division HLLs and NHLLs viewed mixed classes favorably, as most participants in the current study felt that being in a beginning-level mixed Spanish class was a good thing. This study also corroborates Alarcon's (2010) and Campanaro's (2013) research in that their results also showed that both HLL students and NHLL students expressed similar positive perspectives for being together in a mixed language class and that it was advantageous for their learning process.

Almost all HLLs agreed that mixing non-native speakers with heritage Spanish speakers in beginning-level classes was a good thing. All but one HLL participant agreed that the mix of students in beginning level courses encouraged learning a lot about their classmates' cultures. In addition, the majority of them expressed that mixed classes are beneficial because HLL and NHLL students would help each other. The HLLs felt good about being able to help the NHLLs and the NHLLs felt that they learned from the HLLs.

However, HLL participants were mixed in their reactions regarding the effect of the presence of non-native speakers of Spanish in class on their professor's expectations for how much material they could have covered and how thoroughly they covered it, or in other words, if they could have covered more and could have discussed things more in depth if all students were bilingual. On the other hand, over three-quarters of the NHLLs agreed that the presence of HLLs in their beginning-level Spanish class seemed to affect their professor's expectation for how much material should be covered and how thoroughly it should be covered.

HLL students' reactions were also mixed regarding whether there should be special sections of some beginning level courses specifically for heritage speakers and other sections for non-native speakers. Slightly over half of the HLLs generally indicated that they would take a course specifically for Heritage learners instead of a mixed group class if offered. However, most of the NHLLs said they would take a course specifically for NHLLs instead of a mixed course.

Both HLLs and NHLLs expressed they would have similar expectations for a course for HLLs, since the majority in both groups indicated they would expect such a course to be more challenging, be exclusively in Spanish, and focus on developing more advanced levels of speaking, reading and writing skills.

**Personal Reactions.** In general, both HLLs and NHLLs had a positive personal reaction to mixed beginning-level Spanish classes. HLLs were as happy to work in a group with non-native Spanish speakers, as they were to work with other heritage Spanish speakers; and most NHLLs also were as happy to work with HLLs in their class, as they were to work with fellow NHLLs. Over three-quarters of the NHLLs believed that having heritage Spanish-speakers in their classes was good for their Spanish listening skills, and did not agree that the presence of HLLs in the classroom negatively affected their motivation to participate in class. However, they felt that they would receive better grades without the presence of HLLs in the class. Most of them agreed that the presence of HLLs in their class helped them to understand and to feel more comfortable with a variety of Spanish dialects and that they learned a lot about Spanish speaking cultures from their Spanish speaking classmates. HLLs also said they could learn from the insights and contributions of NHLL speakers in their beginning level Spanish courses.

Additionally, all HLL participants disagreed with the idea that they felt impatient sometimes when non-native speakers tried to express their ideas in Spanish in some of their classes, and NHLLs did not agree that they felt intimidated by the presence of the HLLs nor did they feel uncomfortable speaking Spanish in front of them. The results of this study showing that NHLL participants did not feel intimidated by the presence of HLLs and their language level, differs from those of Edstrom (2007), who found that that NHLL participants felt intimidated by the presence of HLLs in the same class.

In Edstrom's (2007) study, Spanish speakers felt that they also benefited by sharing the classroom with NHLL's since they also learned more about the non-native speakers' culture, got a better understanding of cultural differences, and perceived positive validation of their heritage. These results confirm the results of this study, in which most of the NHLLs agreed that the presence of HLLs in their class helped them to understand and to feel more comfortable with a variety of Spanish dialects and that they learned a lot about Spanish speaking cultures from their Spanish speaking classmates. The current study's results also coincide with those of Campanaro (2013), as her participants also felt positively toward the fact that they were immersed in a Spanish-speaking environment, exposed to their heritage speaker partners' different accents and dialects, and learned about their culture.

**Thoughts about the Other Group in Class.** Even though the NHLLs stated that they did not feel intimidated by the presence of HLLs in the mixed classes, HLLs believed that NHLLs seemed intimidated by the fact that there were many heritage speakers in beginning-level courses. Almost all HLLs disagreed to a greater or lesser extent that they felt embarrassed for their non-native speakers in their classes, especially

because of their language skills in Spanish. In addition, almost all HLLs believed to some extent that their non-native speaker classmates respected them and appreciated their contribution to class. Similarly, over three-quarters of the NHLLs felt that their HLL peers respected their contribution to class.

When comparing this study results about the thoughts of the HLL and NHLL participants about their classmates from the other group, one can say the groups saw each other in a positive light. These results differ from those of Edstrom's (2007), who found that the native speakers of Spanish in the class expressed that sometimes the class was too easy and Heritage speakers felt as intimidated by the native speakers as the non-native speakers felt.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The main purpose of this study was to find about the attitudes and experiences of Heritage learners (HLLs) in beginning-level Spanish courses with mixed populations (Heritage and non-heritage learners) in the same class and how these attitudes and experiences compared to those of non-Heritage Spanish L2 learners (NHLLs) in the same mixed classes.

The study found that HLLs felt more comfortable speaking and writing Spanish than reading and writing the language. In addition, NHLLs believed their Spanish reading abilities are the most developed, followed by writing, speaking, and listening. Both groups felt more comfortable with their abilities to listen, speak, read, and write in English than in Spanish.

The findings of this study also revealed that, in general, both HLL and NHLL students had positive attitudes toward being in a mixed beginning-level Spanish class.

Both groups noted specific advantages to learning in mixed classes (e.g., the opportunity to learn about each other's cultures, the fact that each group felt appreciated and valued by the other group) and very few disadvantages (e.g., HLLs had mixed reactions to the effect that a mixed class might have on a teacher's expectation for how much material is covered and how thoroughly while NHLLs mostly agreed that a teacher's expectations would affect the breadth and depth of material covered; NHLLs also thought the presence of HLLs in their class might negatively affect their grades). However, when asked if they would take a Spanish course with only members of their group (other HLLs or NHLLs), both groups mostly answered affirmatively (NHLLs more so than HLLs).

The current study's findings agreed for the most part with those of prior studies (e.g., both groups noted advantages of mixed classes), with the exception that some prior research (Edstrom, 2007) found overt admission of a feeling of intimidation of both groups by the other, which was not found in the current study.

### **Pedagogical Implications of this Study**

Beaudrie, Ducar & Potowski (2014) suggest that HLLs would benefit most from taking language courses specifically designed to them. Hence, they recommend teachers be trained to effectively teach this population to improve their speaking, listening, reading, writing skills and expand their cultural knowledge in their heritage language. This is particularly true since all of the HLLs are not at the same level in their language abilities, and being in a traditional second language class could be detrimental to their personal self-esteem and linguistic strengths and needs (Beaudrie, Ducar & Potowski, 2014).

In contrast, the majority of the participants in this study, both HLLs and NHLLs viewed being in a mixed beginning-level Spanish class as advantageous for their learning process both linguistically and culturally. However, it should be noted that the data for this study was collected at the end of the semester, after students had gotten to know each other as classmates; this may, in part account for their positive views of their mixed class experience. If this survey were given to HLL and NHLL students before taking classes together and getting to know each other as colleagues, the results may have been different. In any process of curricular planning, the concerns of the few students in this study who viewed the mixed classes as a disadvantage should also be taken under consideration and serve as a point of departure for future research into best practices for teaching both HLL and NHLL learners. In addition, when asked if they would take a Spanish class designed for either HLLs or NHLLs (instead of a mixed class), most informants said they would take a class with only students like themselves in that class. It should be noted, however, that the NHLLs felt more strongly about wanting a class for themselves than the HLLs.

Taking into consideration these findings, this researcher/ teacher would recommend creating separate classes for HLLs and NHLLs (when enough of each population exists in one educational pool), as it would be more advantageous for both groups to receive lessons designed for their particular needs. For instance, the self-assessment of skills by HLLs and NHLLs in this study would call for a greater focus on literacy skills and the acquisition of formal spoken registers for HLLs, and more practice of productive skills (speaking and writing) for NHLLs in separate classes. However, this author would not recommend an HL class to those HLLs who have a very low level of proficiency in their heritage language. Beaudrie & Ducar (2005) and Beaudrie, Ducar &

Potowski (2014) also recommended that those HLLs students who do not have even receptive levels of proficiency (as passive bilinguals) have different linguistic needs that would be best met in an L2 class. This contrasts with those HLLs who fall under Valdés' (2000) definition, who had received more exposure to their heritage language at home and at their community. The latter need to receive instruction with a combination of native language arts and traditional second language education. HLLs with an intermediate level of heritage language proficiency should start at the 200-level and carry on with HLL courses through upper-division classes (300-level and beyond).

### **Limitations of this Study**

The main limitations for this research was the small sample (and consequent lack of generalizability of the results), the lack of availability of much prior research on this topic, and the lack of the inclusion of a qualitative analysis of the results of interviews with HLL and NHLL students about their answers to the survey.

In addition, as most of the informants in both groups were female (HLLs: 3 males and 12 females, a 4:1 ratio of females to males; NHLLs: 8 males and 21 females, just over a 2.5 ratio of females to males), it is possible that the similarities and differences in attitudes of both groups could be the result of the gender of the informants and not attributable only to the type of learner.

Finally, the fact that only one instrument (a self-assessment survey) was used to gather data limits the validity of the results. More objective instruments (e.g., proficiency tests in both Spanish and English, focus groups, interviews, observations, graded coursework) should also have been used in order to triangulate and strengthen the results.

## **Future Research**

As mixed Spanish language classes are becoming more popular due to the increase of HLL enrollments in American universities, this researcher encourages further research to determine the advantages and disadvantages of mixed beginning-level classes and to create a set of best practices for teaching mixed HLL and NHLL classes at all levels.

In addition, future research on HLL and NHLL attitudes towards mixed classes should use a pre- vs. post-test longitudinal design so that any changes that may occur in attitudes by either group towards those classes may be measured. Moreover, making gender a variable in a future study of this type would assure that the variable *type of learner* (HLL vs. NHLL) is not conflated with the gender variable (e.g., if most of the HLLs were female and most NHLLs were male, it would be impossible to tell if the results were due to one of these variables and not the other. The use of more than one instrument for data gathering that involve elicitation of different types of data (e.g., outside evaluations as well as self-assessment) would strengthen the validity of the results.

This topic deserves more thorough and nuanced treatments with a larger and broader data set (e.g., interviews as well as surveys). It is only through such emic approaches to the data analysis that the needs of both HLL and NHLL students can be identified and met.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY FOR HERITAGE/NON-HERITAGE LEARNERS IN A MIXED  
BEGINNING-LEVEL SPANISH CLASS

(These survey questions have been adapted from Alarcón [2010] and Edstrom [2007])

Please respond to these questions as candidly as possible.

Sex: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ ID# \_\_\_\_\_

1. What language(s) do you speak with family members at home?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What language(s) do you speak most frequently in your daily life outside of your home? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What language(s) did you use at these ages?

0-5: \_\_\_\_\_

6-18: \_\_\_\_\_

18+: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Based on the following definition of Heritage learner, do you consider yourself a

Heritage learner of Spanish? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

A Heritage learner is defined by Valdez (2000) as “a student who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or merely understands the heritage language and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language” (p.1).

5. Did you take Spanish as a subject in school.....

a. In elementary school? Yes – No If yes, for how many years?

b. In Middle School? Yes – No If yes, for how many years?

c. In High school? Yes – No If yes, for how many years?

Questionnaire Statement	Very Comfortable	Comfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	Somewhat Uncomfortable	Uncomfortable	Very Uncomfortable
6. How comfortable do you feel speaking Spanish?						
7. How comfortable do you feel writing Spanish?						

8. How would you rate your Spanish skills in ..... (Place an X in the box corresponding to your self-rating in these areas.)

	1 (no skills)	2	3	4 (Native-Like)
a. Speaking				
b. Listening				
c. Writing				
d. Reading				

9. How would you rate your English skills ..... (Place an X in the box corresponding to your self-rating in these areas.)

	1 (no skills)	2	3	4 (Native-Like)
a. Speaking				
b. Listening				
c. Writing				
d. Reading				

10. Is Spanish your major/minor? \_\_\_\_\_

11. What are some of the reasons for you taking this mixed course (with both Heritage and non-Heritage learners in the same class)?

\_\_\_\_\_

12. What would be your expectations from a course for “Heritage Speakers” only?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

13. On what aspects of language and culture would you like this current course to focus?

Please circle all choices that are important to you.

- a. Speaking
- b. Writing
- c. Accent marks and spelling
- d. Listening
- e. Reading
- f. Grammatical accuracy
- g. Vocabulary

h. Culture

14. Please indicate the features that describe the ideal Spanish course for you. Consider the following:

- a. Language spoken in class (Spanish, English, which? How much of each?)
- b. Instructor's specific Spanish variety (any preference? If so, why?)
- c. Group size (why? Advantages/disadvantages?)
- d. Presence of Heritage learners (bilinguals) and non-Heritage learners (English-speaking Spanish students) in the same class (why or why not?)
- e. Methodology used by your instructor (lecture, seminar, group discussions, etc.)
- f. Class activities (pair-work, drills, questions-and-answer, self-correction, etc.)
- g. Instructor's correction of your Spanish (how and why?)
- h. Evaluation (daily quizzes, journals, presentations, exams, etc.)
- i. Others (specify)

**If you are a Heritage learner of Spanish, please skip to question 28.**

Table 1. Survey Questions for Non-native speakers of Spanish (second language learners)

Questionnaire Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15. Having heritage Spanish-speakers in my classes is good for my Spanish listening skills.						
16. I find the heritage Spanish speakers in my classes intimidating; I feel uncomfortable speaking in front of them.						
17. I am as happy to work in my group with a heritage Spanish speaker as I am to work with another non-native Spanish speaker.						
18. I learn a lot about Spanish-speaking culture from my heritage Spanish speaking classmates.						
19. The presence of heritage Spanish speakers in my class has helped me to understand and to feel more comfortable with a variety of Spanish dialects.						
20. Having heritage Spanish-speaking classmates makes						

me feel good because I am reminded that even their language skills need polishing.						
21. The fact that there are many heritage speakers of Spanish in class seems to affect my professors' expectation for how much material we cover and how thoroughly we cover it.						
22. The fact that there are many heritage speakers of Spanish in class seems to affect my grades. That is, in a Spanish program without so many heritage Spanish-speakers, I would probably receive better grades.						
23. The presence of heritage Spanish-speakers negatively affects my motivation to participate in class.						
24. I feel that my heritage Spanish-speakers peers respect my contributions to class.						
25. The presence of						

heritage Spanish-speakers motivates me to participate more in class.						
26. If a course specifically for non-Heritage learners were offered I would take it instead of a mixed group class.						

27. Please, provide any additional comments.

Table 2. Survey for Heritage Spanish Speakers

Questionnaire Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
28. I think that mixing non-native speakers with heritage Spanish speakers in beginning-level classes is a good thing.						
29. Non-native speakers seem intimidated by the fact that there are many heritage speakers in beginning-level courses.						
30. I am as happy to work in a group with non-native Spanish speakers as I am to work with another heritage Spanish speaker.						

<p>31. The mix of students in beginning level courses encourages learning a lot about our classmates' cultures.</p>						
<p>32. I believe that I can learn from the insights and contributions of non-native speakers in my beginning level Spanish courses.</p>						
<p>33. I feel embarrassed for the non-native speakers in my classes, especially because of their language skills in Spanish.</p>						
<p>34. The fact that there are some non-native speakers of Spanish in class seems to affect my professors' expectations for how much material we can cover and how thoroughly we cover it. In other words, we could cover more and could discuss things more in depth if all students were bilingual.</p>						
<p>35. I believe that</p>						

there should be special sections of some beginning level courses that are specifically for heritage speakers and other sections for non-native speakers.						
36. The heritage Spanish speakers try to help the non-native speakers in class.						
37. I feel impatient sometimes when non-native speakers try to express their ideas in Spanish in some of my classes.						
38. My non-native speaker classmates respect me and appreciate my contribution to class.						
39. If a course specifically for Heritage learners were offered I would take it instead of a mixed group class.						

40. Please, provide any additional comments.