

REPORT

SPANISH-ENGLISH BILINGUAL CHILDREN: PROFICIENCY AND LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

“Moving through countries and continents people often leave their families and belongings, but the things they always take for a lifelong journey are their languages and culture. As a consequence, we observe a vast increase in cultural and linguistic diversity within all nations and the expansion of bilingualism and multilingualism all over the world.” Tamara Vorobyeva



LANGUAGE
& COMPETITIVENESS

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1. INTRODUCTION

This subproject consists of a study about Spanish as a heritage language in Trinidad and Tobago. Valdes (2000) defined a heritage language as a language that is acquired by individuals raised in homes where the dominant language of the region is not spoken or is not exclusively spoken. This is the situation in many households in T&T where at least one of the parents has Spanish as their native language. According to Michele Reis “estimates by the Roman Catholic Church in Trinidad and Tobago indicate that there are approximately 20,000 Spanish speakers”. This is not strange given Trinidad and Tobago’s unique situation. It is surrounded by Spanish-speaking countries, and its arguably stable economic and political situation makes it a desirable destination for many; and also an easier one — terms of immigration laws — than others like the United States of America.



Montrul (2010) states that “heritage speakers are a special case of child bilingualism. Because the home or family language is a minority language, not all heritage language children have access to education in their heritage language. Consequently, the vast majority of adult heritage speakers typically have very strong command of the majority language, while proficiency and literacy in the family language varies considerably”. Although one can certainly find some heritage speakers with very advanced or even native-like proficiency in the two languages (e.g., some Spanish heritage speakers studied by Montrul (2005)), for most heritage speakers, the home language is the weaker language. Proficiency in the weaker language can range from mere receptive skills (most often listening) to intermediate and advanced oral and written skills, depending on the language, the community, and a host of other sociolinguistic circumstances.

One of the aspects that is being researched in this paper about Spanish as a heritage language in Trinidad and Tobago is to what extent are heritage speakers bilingual; in other words, what is their use and command of their heritage language (usually their first language) before starting formal education and once involved in the school system? We are looking at their vocabulary, grammar, and pragmatic competence and whether they are limited to informal environments or whether it seems that, in the future, they could become fully functional in a formal environment. We believe that the fact that formal education is conducted exclusively in the dominant language is one of the factors contributing to their loss in their first language. While it is understandable that Spanish becomes the vulnerable language once a Spanish-speaking family moves to Trinidad and Tobago—an English-speaking country—there are proven ways to help those heritage speakers. If they receive formal education in their heritage language they will most likely not have literacy problems in that language and they will also develop the level of sophistication to use that language outside the home. A bilingual school system would be ideal but there are other less expensive ways to make a difference in heritage speakers' competence, like Saturday morning classes where students can learn different subjects (literature, history, and maths for example) in Spanish.

There are also other significant factors related to socioeconomics that have an impact on heritage speakers' competence, and we will be addressing them in this study. When interviewing the families that took part in this study we took into account questions like 'What is the situation in terms of prestige of the heritage language in that household? Is the heritage language stigmatized as the language they can only use (usually) with mom at home? What is the level of education of the parents and what impact does this have in the perception of both the heritage language and the dominant one? Can parents make up for the lack of literacy training in the heritage language in school? Are the parents giving enough importance to their L1 language or do they want their kids to just be fluent in English to have "better" opportunities (e.g. to avoid having an accent when speaking English)? What are some of the parents' beliefs/myths about children acquiring both English and Spanish (children might be confused; Spanish will produce an accent in their English, etc.)'. We believe that Saturday morning classes could also address these issues by educating the parents in the importance of Spanish in the world and in the future of their children as well as transmitting to the children a sense of pride in their roots while making them feel like the valuable citizens of Trinidad and Tobago that they will become. To allow this generation of Trinidadian

children to be fully functional in their heritage language as well as in English is without a doubt of great value to this beautiful country since they will become bridges within the region.



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Bilingualism has been a popular research field since the 1920s (see Cummins & Hornberger, 2010), although the majority of the research was conducted in the 1960s. But was not until recently that studies on heritage languages, a type of bilingualism, started to emerge, and it can still be considered a relatively new and undiscovered area in linguistic science (Benmamoun, Montrul, & Polinsky, 2013).

There are different definitions of heritage speaker. In the previous section we used Valdes (2000) and Montrul's (2010) definitions. Polinsky (2015, p. 145) defined heritage speakers as "bilingual speakers of an ethnic or immigrant minority language whose L1 does not typically reach native-like proficiency, due to a shift (whether abrupt or gradual) to L2, the socially-dominant language, by the child learner. Thus, the order of linguistic acquisition will not necessarily reflect the relative strength of heritage speakers' L1 and L2".

As Polinsky's definition suggests, we believe that it is very important to distinguish between the L1 and L2 of heritage speakers. Vorobyeva (in press) states that usually for the L1 and L2, we understand the temporal order in which these languages are acquired but when two languages (L1s) are acquired simultaneously from birth or before the age of 3 (Montrul, 2008, 94), we can speak about simultaneous bilingualism. When children acquire one language after another, they are referred to as sequential bilinguals. It is important to note that the functional dimensions of these languages can vary in terms of their prevalence of use; the one that is predominantly used is the primary language (and in the case of heritage speakers often this is the L2) and the other one is a secondary language (usually the L1 for heritage speakers). From a socio-political point of view, languages can also be classified into majority and minority languages. Following Montrul (2008, 2012) a majority language is a standard, prestigious, and commonly used language spoken by the ethno-linguistic dominant community, whereas a minority language is a language spoken by immigrants in limited contexts, and one that is considered to be of relatively lower prestige and of lesser or no official status within the same community.

There are three aspects to take into account when studying this special case of bilingualism: the temporal order of acquisition of the two languages, primary versus secondary language depending

on which one has more predominance in use, and majority versus minority language depending on which one is dominant in the community and therefore has all the prestige. There are some controversies regarding this last point since, for example, for some speakers English will never be considered a heritage language even if it is spoken by a family that lives in a non-English-speaking country due to the prestige and dominance that this language has in the world. Therefore not all researchers agree with this point (see Elabbas, Montrul, & Polinsky (2015)).

As Vorobyeva (in press) explains beautifully, heritage speakers are exposed to the L1 mainly in the home environment in their childhood; however, due to migration or the beginning of schooling, an abrupt switch to the L2 can occur. From this moment on, exposure to the L2 is overwhelming; it is the dominant language of schooling and communication in the society. Eventually, heritage speakers have strong linguistic skills in the L2 in all language domains.

Usually this involves a deterioration in their L1 skills but their proficiency in the L1 can significantly vary depending on many factors. Some heritage speakers possess native-like mastery of their heritage language while others have very limited productive abilities and/or even no literacy skills (Montrul, 2005, 2010; Valdés, 2000, 2005). The three main factors that play a role in the different command that heritage learners have of their L1 are the age when the child begins learning the L2, the quality and the quantity of exposure to both the L1 and the L2, and the socioeconomic status of the family.

Regarding the age of introduction to the L2, different studies have demonstrated that the later a child starts acquiring the L2, the better his/her L1 competence will be (Montrul, 2008). When a young heritage speaker starts the acquisition of the L2 at a very early age the L1 skills are more likely to be affected, which would result in incomplete L1 acquisition (Anderson, 1999, 2001) and in L1 attrition in adult heritage speakers (Polinsky, 2008).

Another important factor is the quantity and quality of input exposure to L1. The quantity can vary depending on such factors as what languages are spoken at home (with siblings, grandparents, etc.) or outside the home (friends at school, neighbours etc.), how often they travel to their countries of origin and if they watch TV or listen to radio and music in their heritage language. Another aspect

is the quality of exposure that includes the context of L1 acquisition (naturally at home or formally at school), variety (e.g., standard Spanish, dialects etc.), and modality (written or aural).

Last but not least, the socioeconomic status of the heritage speakers' families has also proved to be of noticeable influence on language development (Gathercole & Thomas, 2005). The higher the socioeconomic status of the family the most likely their children will achieve a complete acquisition of both the heritage and the dominant language spoken in their community.

Vorobyeva (in press) explains that, despite all differences in social, cultural, and educational factors, heritage speakers of different languages face similar problems in the following domains: syntax (e.g., loss of pro-feature in null-subject heritage languages, Albirini, Benmamoun, & Saadah, 2011 for Arabic; Montrul, 2005 for Spanish), lexicon (verb bias, Polinsky, 2005 for heritage Russian; Lee, 2012 for Korean), semantics (direct object marker omission in Spanish, Montrul, 2005), and morphosyntax (errors in agreement in Arabic, Albirini et al. 2011, and Russian, Polinsky, 2008). All heritage speakers are bilinguals, acquiring their languages simultaneously or sequentially, who are subjected to socio-linguistic situations when one of their languages becomes dominant over the other and the linguistic skills between their languages can vary drastically.

All the heritage speakers who took part in this research were therefore bilingual to some extent. In the next sections we are going to try to analyse to what extent the children of the Spanish-speaking families studied have lost proficiency in their heritage language and how the age of introduction, the quantity and quality of the input, as well as the socioeconomic status of the families play a role in their language acquisition. We will end by offering some recommendations for the educational sector in the hopes that Trinidad and Tobago will develop a language policy that protects heritage speakers of Spanish in Trinidad. We believe it is an investment in the development of the country and the region.

3. The Project

Our aim was to describe the situation of bilingual (English-Spanish) families in Trinidad and Tobago in order to make recommendations for the educational system. In our proposed plan of action one of the main points relevant to our project was to conduct a census in T&T of Spanish-speaking families or families in which at least one parent is a native Spanish user, and count, therefore, all the children with Spanish as a heritage language. This was determined to be another sub-project of its own due to the enormous amount of work that was involved.

We decided that we wanted to assess the situation via questionnaires/interviews using a sample of the heritage Spanish-speaking families in Trinidad. We were interested in finding out about the perception/beliefs of the parents regarding their children's language acquisition process (beliefs like the children would be confused if they learned two languages at the same time, greater importance of the English language, etc.). We also wanted to explore the perceptions/beliefs of the children. Some of them reported being ashamed when their moms spoke to them in Spanish at the entrances of schools. They did not want to be different from other kids. Finally we needed an even smaller sample of heritage Spanish-speaking children to analyze their real command of their heritage language, Spanish. We were especially interested in comparing the situation pre- and post-being schooled since it has been proven that attending classes exclusively conducted in the majority language may result in a progressive loss of their command of their heritage language.

We designed two different questionnaires (see annexes), the first one to be distributed to as many heritage Spanish-speaking families as possible, the second to be administered to a small sample of families. The first questionnaire was conducted online. We used different ways of distribution, the main one being via a local Facebook group with over one hundred members called "Mama Latina en Trinidad". The questionnaire was distributed to a total of 120 families but only 38 of them actually decided to take part in the study.

The second questionnaire (Annex 2) was administered in person to a few selected families (5). a total of eighteen (18) interviews were conducted and recorded: five (5) mothers and thirteen (13) children. The questionnaire had two different parts; in the first one the mothers were interviewed and questions were asked related to their perceptions and beliefs. In the second part we spoke with

the children about their beliefs and we used visual aids to elicit the narration of a story to be able to assess their use and command of Spanish.¹ All the interviews with the children had a similar structure and were conducted in Spanish. There was an initial phase where the students were asked to state their name and age, exchanged greetings with the interviewer and responded to a few general questions about their day, and a second phase where the interviewer attempted to elicit the largest possible volume of linguistic production from each participant. Different visual aids were used (see Annex 2). In the third and last phase the interviewer asked a few questions that did not pose a great challenge such as “¿A dónde vas ahora?” The objective of this last part was to close the interview and not leave the participant with a sense of failure in case he or she had challenges describing the visual aid presented before. The three phases applied in this study were an adaptation of the phases of the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) designed by the American Council of Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL).

Montrul (2010) states that linguistically-oriented studies of heritage language systems show that, in many respects, heritage language grammars reveal processes of simplification attested to in language contact situations, the emergence of new linguistic varieties, and diachronic language change. Once the data was collected in the analyzed samples of speech from the heritage Spanish-speaking children in Trinidad, we were looking for:

1. Non-native phonological features.
2. Reduced lexicon (their knowledge of vocabulary is limited to the spheres of the home and childhood).
3. Erosion of inflexional morphology (errors in gender, number agreement or case marking).
4. Overuse of overt subjects in contexts where null subjects would be pragmatically more appropriate.
5. Problems with complex structures like relative clauses and with the use of pronominal reference.

In the following table we present an overview of the sub-project activities and their implementation schedule.

¹ The first two images were taken from “Frog, where are you?” an illustrated storybook by Mercer Meyer. This is probably the visual stimulus that has been more broadly used to elicit narration in multilingual children. The rest of the visual aids were taken from a Spanish textbook (see reference in Annex 2).

SUB-PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE	
Activity: Planning stage; construction of questionnaires and interview protocols.	Duration (months)
<p>Planning stage (background preparation/preparation for field work)</p> <p>Literature review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -On theories/methodologies (language and competitiveness) -On existing/previous worldwide studies on language and competitiveness <p>Construction/preparation of survey/questionnaire/interview protocols</p> <p>Clearance from human subjects/bureaucratic/academic exigencies</p> <p>Initial/preliminary communication with potential research participants/stakeholders.</p> <p>Other unexpected/incidental background/preparation work</p>	3 months
Milestone: By the end of the first three (3) months after the approval of the project proposal the research instruments will be ready for data collection.	Completed on time
Activity: Phase one data collection; questionnaires to Spanish-English bilingual families	Duration (months)
<p>Phase one data collection: Questionnaire designed to assess the situation of Spanish-English bilingual families with bilingual children in Trinidad and Tobago. The questionnaire will be distributed to as many families as possible.</p>	2 months
Milestone: Two (2) months after the research instruments have been completed the general questionnaire will have been distributed and collected.	Completed with some delay. The questionnaire was launched on 28 July 2014
Activity: Phase one data collection part two; revision of the questionnaires to Spanish-English bilingual families	Duration (months)

SUB-PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE	
A preliminary analysis of the questionnaires will be conducted in order to identify ten (10) families that can represent the Spanish-English bilingual families of Trinidad and Tobago and the different age groups of the bilingual children.	1 month
Milestone: One (1) months after the general questionnaire has been distributed and collected the ten (10) families that will participate in the second phase of the data collection will have been selected.	Completed on time
Activity: Phase two data collection; interviews and language assessment of ten Spanish-English bilingual families.	Duration (months)
Phase two of data collection: Interviews will be conducted with the parents and the children to study their beliefs and perceptions regarding their linguistic competence. A language assessment of the real Spanish competence of the bilingual children will be conducted.	2 months
Milestone: Two (2) months after the ten families have been identified interviews and assessment of the Spanish linguistic competence of the bilingual children will have been conducted.	Completed on time by December 2014
Activity: Data analysis	Duration (months)
Quantitative and qualitative data analysis of the interviews and questionnaires.	4 months
Milestone: Four (4) months after all the data have been collected the quantitative and qualitative analysis will have taken place.	
Activity: Writing of reports, recommendations and publications; conference.	Duration (months)
After the data have been analyzed and while writing all the final reports and recommendations the results will be presented in an international conference. A publication will come out of the conference presentation.	10 months
Milestone: A year after the data has been analyzed, the results of this subproject will be presented at an international conference and a	Will be completed by February 2016

SUB-PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

publication will come out of the conference presentation. A report and a list of recommendations will have been produced as well.



4. The Results

In this section we present the data collected and we analyse it. We will first look at the findings of each questionnaire separately and then we will draw some general conclusions that will feed section 5, the recommendations for the educational sector and the Trinidad and Tobago government.

4.1. Questionnaire 1

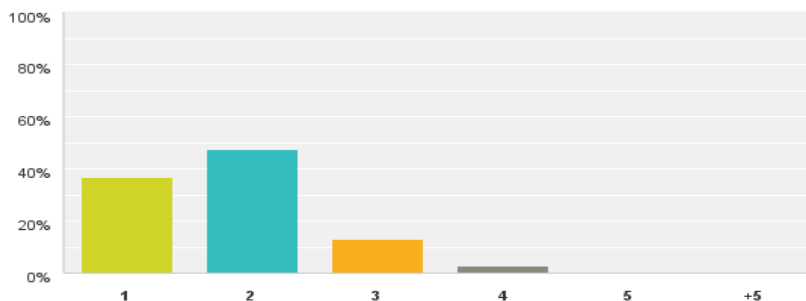
As stated before, the first questionnaire (Annex 1) was distributed digitally. It was designed in the online platform Survey Monkey and a link was shared via email and through the local Facebook group "Mama Latina en Trinidad". Although the link was shared with over 120 families we only collected 38 responses. The reasons why this happened are not clear; lack of time probably being one of them. We suspect, however, that some of the questions asked relating to the level of education of the caregivers and who exactly lived at home with the children may have been sensitive questions and although we stated that the information shared would be kept strictly confidential the questionnaire wasn't anonymous. It may have prevented some of the respondents from submitting their answers. We decided to keep the questionnaire available online for a longer period of time due to the lack of participation.

From the thirty-eight ($n = 38$) respondents, fourteen ($n = 14$) had one heritage Spanish-speaking child, eighteen ($n = 18$) had two children, five ($n = 5$) had three children and one ($n = 1$) had four. A total of sixty-nine ($n = 69$) heritage Spanish-speaking children living in Trinidad with ages varying from 1 to 18 years old were covered with their responses.

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Q5 Number of children, in your care, that are being raised in a bilingual situation / Número de niños a su cargo creciendo en una situación bilingüe.

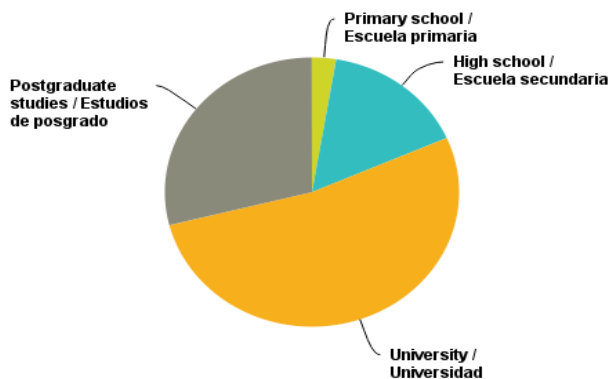
Answered: 38 Skipped: 0



Regarding their socioeconomic status and their educational level 80% of the mothers had tertiary education (n = 31), 15% had a high school diploma (n = 6) and only 2 % had only primary school education (n = 1).

Q7 What is the highest level of education completed by the mother? ¿Cuál es el nivel educativo de la madre?

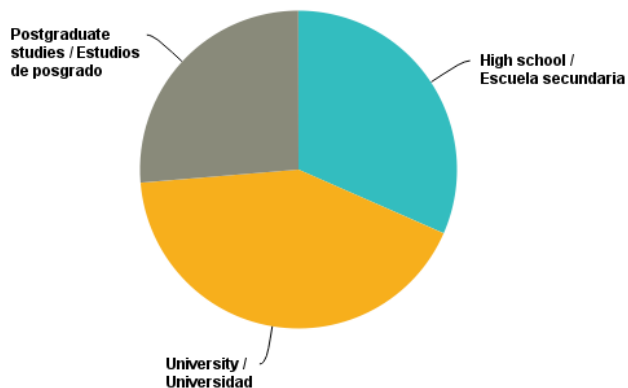
Answered: 38 Skipped: 0



The situation with the fathers was a little bit different. All of them had at least a high school diploma but only 70 % (n = 26) had tertiary-level education.

Q8 What is highest level of education completed by the father? / ¿Cuál es el nivel educativo del padre?

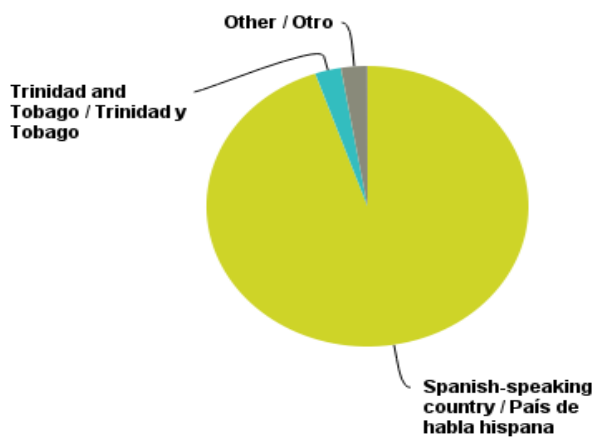
Answered: 38 Skipped: 0



Regarding their countries of origin most of the households were composed of a Spanish-speaking mother (n = 36) and an English-speaking father (n = 27) as can be seen in the following two charts corresponding to questions 9 and 10 of the questionnaire.

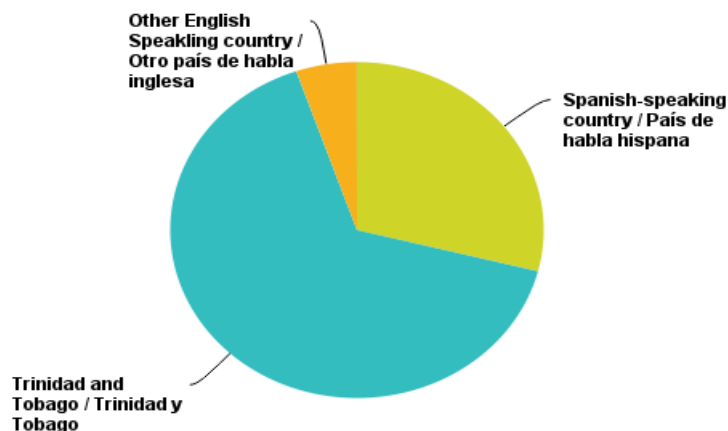
Q9 What is the mother's country of origin? / ¿Cuál es el país de origen de la madre?

Answered: 38 Skipped: 0



**Q10 What is the father's country of origin? /
¿Cuál es el país de origen del padre?**

Answered: 38 Skipped: 0



In the rest of the data we can see that most of the children began learning Spanish from birth ($n = 60$), only seven ($n = 7$) before three years of age, and two ($n = 2$) after five. The onset age of English acquisition was also very early; forty-nine ($n = 49$) from birth, only twelve ($n = 12$) before three years of age, one ($n = 1$) before five, and six ($n = 6$) after five. One child was not accounted for in this question. These factors, according to the literature, will result in a better command of the English language and a gradual loss of their heritage language.

In their use of languages fifty-seven children ($n = 57$) used Spanish only or mainly in speaking to their mothers, while only twelve ($n = 12$) preferred to use English. As expected the numbers changed regarding the language spoken with their fathers; forty-seven ($n = 47$) children used English when addressing their fathers. Fathers were reported to use mainly English when addressing their children. With respect to the language used at home when interacting with siblings, English seemed to be the preferred language ($n = 38$). The mothers reported giving a lot of importance to the use of the Spanish language at home and that they corrected their children when they made mistakes speaking the language. In terms of exposure to the heritage language the mothers stated that their children preferred to watch TV and use the Internet in English and very few had grandparents or other adult Spanish-speaking members of the family living in the household. On the other hand, the mothers preferred to read stories in Spanish for bedtime and

many of the children visited a Spanish speaking country at least once a year ($n = 37$) and spent time with other Spanish-speaking families while in Trinidad ($n = 54$).

Regarding their preference in language use thirty-eight ($n = 38$) children preferred to use English as their language of communication while twenty-two ($n = 22$) showed a preference for the heritage language and the rest didn't seem to have a preference. The mothers reported that they had observed a change in some of their children's ($n = 20$) preference for the use of English over Spanish, especially after starting formal education.

4.2. The second questionnaire and interviews

The second questionnaire was administered to and interviews were conducted with a total of 5 mothers ($n = 5$) and thirteen children ($n = 13$) during December 2014.

During the interviews with the mothers all of them reported thinking that speaking Spanish was a valuable skill for their children and an important part of their identity. They did not think that their children felt embarrassed at any time when they spoke to them in Spanish in front of other children. They all also reported that being a heritage speaker of Spanish had been an advantage in making friends since other children saw their children as different and they felt curious and gave them more positive attention.

Regarding their perceptions of their children's teachers they all reported to have had cases where the teachers told them that speaking in Spanish to their children was going to make it more difficult for them to learn English. Most of the mothers knew that bilingual children take a little bit longer to acquire both languages but, if one is consistent, there should not be any problems in their acquisition. In one case, **RA**, the mother of **A** (7 years old) reported that, when **A** was 4, he was sent to a speech therapist and both the therapist and the paediatrician asked her to stop speaking Spanish to him and she did.

The first mom, a mother of four spoke to her children constantly in Spanish and read to them in Spanish as well. The father of the children is also a native Spanish speaker, like herself, but the children — as soon as they started formal education in English — preferred English as a method of communication among themselves and, although they understood everything when addressed

in Spanish, tended to answer in English. The eldest who, lived in Venezuela her first years, has more vocabulary in English than in Spanish but a better pronunciation in Spanish than in English (her classmates say she has an accent when she speaks English). On the other hand, the three other children are reported to have a “gringo” accent when they speak Spanish during their stays in Venezuela visiting their family. For this mother, trying to keep her children from losing their Spanish was a constant effort and she only saw good results when they travelled to Venezuela and they spent time speaking in Spanish with their cousins. The language spoken by their peers seemed to have a bigger impact than the one spoken by the adults.

The second mother, from Mexico, had two children, ages 7 and 3. The father was from Trinidad and Tobago and spoke mainly in English to their children. Her case allows us to see the impact that formal education in English has on their dominant language. The 3 year-old had Spanish as his dominant language while the 7 year-old who was already in school had a better command of, and vocabulary in, English. When the 7 year-old was 3 he also had Spanish as the dominant language. The important thing is not to avoid English but to try to enable them to progress as equally as possible in both English and Spanish.

The case of the third mother is similar; the father was also a native English speaker and spoke to both his wife and the children only in English. She thought that their children were very good in distinguishing between both parents and they always addressed their father in English and their mother in Spanish. The second child had just begun school and the third had not yet begun school so the language preferred to communicate among the siblings was Spanish. We believe that this will change once the three of them have been schooled. The teacher has also told the mother that the child is having problems acquiring English since his language skills are not as good as those of the rest of his classmates who are not bilingual. She understands that this is just part of the process of acquisition for any bilingual child.

The fourth mother, from Chile, was, at the time of the study, separated from the father who is a native English speaker. Despite her efforts her three children has a poor command of Spanish and they lacked vocabulary. The oldest was, in her opinion, the one with the best command of Spanish due to the fact that he had travelled more often than the others to Spanish-speaking countries. She

reported being consistent in speaking to them in Spanish and we can attest that they had good comprehension skills. The siblings communicated among themselves mainly in English and often answered their mother in English.

Our last mother was a native Spanish speaker from Colombia married to a Trinidadian who had English as his native language but a good command of Spanish as well. Her child was not yet schooled and her first words, as expected, were mainly in Spanish. Her grandmother took care of her while her parents were at work and she was also a native speaker of Spanish.

Voices of the mothers

“Dejan de leer en español y el vocabulario se pierde, si los padres les leen mantienen el esfuerzo de los papas y la familia es muy importante.” **RA**

“Mi hijo ha aprendido a leer español él sólo, pero pronuncia como un gringo.”

RA

“Desearía que pudieran acudir a un colegio bilingüe.” **CH**

“El inglés es muy importante pero el español también, es parte de nuestra identidad y es importante para su futuro.” **PO**

The following table shows the children who were interviewed. Their command of Spanish varied a lot from one to another, as was expected. As their ages ranged from 2 to 18 years old, when evaluating their Spanish skills they were compared to Spanish monolingual children of their same age. The younger children tended to be more fluent in Spanish than in English while the older children, already receiving formal education in English, tended to have a better command of English than Spanish. There were many other factors involved like how often they travelled to Spanish-speaking countries and if the mother was the only Spanish-speaking parent, but the most important valuable seemed to be whether they had already started school or not. Once they attended school in a monolingual English-speaking system English became their dominant language.

Child	Age	Place of birth	Dominant language
R	18	Venezuela	Pronunciation Spanish, vocabulary English

JD	13	Venezuela	English
L	9	Trinidad and Tobago	English
A	7	Trinidad and Tobago	English
AL	7	Mexico	English
ML	3	Mexico	Spanish
MR	5	Trinidad and Tobago	Spanish
JCR	3	Trinidad and Tobago	Spanish
MaR	2	Trinidad and Tobago	Spanish
RR	13	Trinidad and Tobago	English
GR	11	Trinidad and Tobago	English
AR	6	Trinidad and Tobago	English
E	2	Trinidad and Tobago	Spanish

We could attest that they all had good comprehension skills but some of them were not able to answer questions in Spanish and used English instead, specially **A** (7 years old), **L** (9 years old) and **AR** (6 years of age).

We observed a case where one of them was able to correct himself while using Spanish, but this wasn't the norm.

(1) “*el niño es, no, el niño está...*” **AL (7 years old)**

With the exception of **R** (18 years old) and **AL** (7 years of age) we observed that, once they were schooled in English, their use of Spanish vocabulary wasn't near that of a native Spanish-speaking child. Their lexicon was reduced. We can see some examples here:

(2)

- a. *“Se quedó esperando en el “waiting room” del hospital y le pregunta al “nurse” que si son los dos de él.”* **JD (13 years old)**
- b. *“El perro ladra a las bees.”* **L (9 years old)**
- c. *“Parece muy ¿Cómo se dice? muy alegre.”* **RR (13 years old)**
- d. *“Un papa está sentado leyendo un, no sé cómo se dice.”* **RR (13 years old)**

We also found phonological problems, mainly involving the pronunciation of the Spanish double *r* and the vowels; some of the children were opening and closing them as is done in English. We also saw the erosion of inflexional morphology, mainly errors in gender and number agreement. Below are some examples from their speech.

(3)

- a. *“el casa de abeja se cayó.”* **L (9 years)**
- b. *“Una perro, una niño.”* **AR (6 years)**
- c. *“No tengo un preferido (hablando de asignaturas) .”* **GR (11 years)**

In the case of the verbs we could see cases of lack of agreement in person and number (example 4)

(4)

- a. *“tengo medicinas que me ayuda a controlar.”* **JD (13 years old)**
- b. *“Quiere (yo) enseñar español a mi papa.”* **MR (5 years)**
- c. *“Yo tiene 9 años.”* **L (9 years)**

We also found some incorrect uses of the verbal tenses, including the lack of use of the subjunctive (see examples in 5).

(5)

- a. *“No creo que fue bien.”* **JD (13 years)**
- b. *“Lo quería entregar rápido para que podía salir con los amigos.”* **JD (13 years)**
- c. *“Yo tiene 9 años.”* **L (9 years)**
- d. *“El esposo está esperando a que el bebe nace (subjunctive omitted) .”* **RR (13 years)**

There was only one case where the order of the words corresponded that in English (adj + verb) instead of the one in Spanish (verb + adj)

(6) *“...donde está el grande árbol.”* **A (7 years old)**

And one case where the article didn't appear before the noun in a context where in Spanish it is mandatory.

(7) “*En escuela se habla inglés.*” **RR (13 years)**

On the other hand, the overuse of overt subjects in contexts where null subjects would be pragmatically more appropriate was common in all the children.

(8)

- a. “*Yo ayer hice los trabajos de la casa.*” **JD (13 years old)**
- b. “*Yo veo un perro.*” **A (7 years old)**
- c. “*Yo no sé.*” **AR (6 years)**

We could attest to problems with complex structures like relative clauses and with the use of pronominal reference because they avoided using them. To better illustrate this point it is necessary to create a task designed to elicit that type of structure. We could say that they were not native or near native proficient, English had become their primary language and Spanish was now secondary to English and was used only in limited contexts.

4.3. General Conclusions

The caregivers who participated in the study stated that they gave great importance to their heritage language and culture. The children stated that, although they valued their Spanish language, English was more important and had a higher status. One of the main reasons given was that it is the formal language used at school. They were not native or near native proficient; English had become their primary language and Spanish was now secondary to English and was used only in limited contexts.

After eliciting narrations in Spanish with the use of visual aids we could see that their Spanish language grammars revealed processes of simplification as we expected. We found:

- ✓ non-native phonological features,
- ✓ reduced lexicon (their knowledge of vocabulary was limited to the spheres of the home and childhood),
- ✓ erosion of inflexional morphology (errors in gender and number agreement as well as in verbal personal agreement and tense),
- ✓ overuse of overt subjects in contexts where null subjects would be pragmatically more appropriate, and

- ✓ that they tried to avoid the use of complex structures like relative clauses and the use of the subjunctive.

5. Recommendations

We believe, as do Peyton et al. (2001), that to preserve the languages of heritage speakers is actually preserving a national resource. To maintain and develop heritage language skills in the Trinidadian population is a must, and a benefit for the development of the country and of the region. But it is also challenging and involves taking action. Teachers should be prepared and have access to resources when working with heritage language learners. Language policies should be drawn up and both the public government and members of the community should come together to work towards preserving this richness and preventing its loss.

In the long term we recommend more studies to be conducted to better understand the needs of the heritage Spanish-speaking population of Trinidad and that the government allocates a budget to invest in these Trinidadian bilingual children. Bilingual educational programs like the ones implemented in the USA should be put in place in strategically located public schools and teachers, curriculum developers, and members of the public schools administration should be trained in the importance of heritage languages to avoid language loss.

In the short term we recommend the implementation of a Saturday morning public Spanish school for heritage learners, where children can learn different subjects (i.e. history, maths, literature) in Spanish. Having access to formal education in Spanish in addition to their current education in English is crucial. It is a way to prevent the deterioration of their language abilities in their heritage language and this would allow a generation of Trinidadian children to be fully functional in both English and Spanish.

We also recommend that a question regarding the languages spoken in each household be added to the next census conducted by the Trinidadian government. This would allow researchers and members of the educational sector to better understand the linguistic and cultural composition of

Trinidad and Tobago. As an example of this the Modern Languages Association of the United States of America has created an interactive map available online.²



² The MLA Language Map is for students, teachers, and anyone interested in learning about the linguistic and cultural composition of the United States. It uses aggregated data from the 2006–10 American Community Survey (ACS) to display the locations and numbers of speakers of thirty languages commonly spoken in the United States. Data from the MLA's 2013 survey of enrollments in languages other than English indicate where these languages are taught in colleges and universities. The Language Map Data Center provides information about over three hundred languages spoken in the United States, using data from the 2006–10 ACS, ACS 2005, and the 2000 US Census. Comparative tables and graphs provide snapshots of changes between 2000 and 2010 in American language communities, showing speakers' ages and ability to speak English (taken from their web page <http://www.mla.org/map>).

6. Annotated Bibliography

Alarcón, I.V. (2011). Spanish gender agreement under complete and incomplete acquisition: Early and late bilinguals' linguistic behaviour within the noun phrase. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 14, 332-350.

The author measures written comprehension and other oral production in advanced proficiency L2 learners, as well as in advanced proficiency heritage speakers, and concludes that they both have the gender feature in their underlying grammars. Her theory is that the errors in oral production that L2 learners occasionally produce are due to difficulties in the surface manifestations of the abstract features of gender. This is an example of how studies in heritage speakers are helping researchers to understand how language acquisition works.

American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese. (2000). Spanish for native speakers, volume 1. AATSP professional development series handbook for teachers K-16. New York, NY: Harcourt College Publishers.

This is a handbook designed to serve as a guide for high school and university teachers and administrators who are interested in establishing programs for native speakers of Spanish or for those teachers who presently teach native speakers and are looking for more information. There are many points that are very relevant to the Trinidadian situation.

Anderson, R. (1999). Loss of gender agreement in L1 attrition: Preliminary results. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 23, 389–408.

The author presents in this article data on the effects of first language (L1) loss on the Spanish of bilingual children, particularly with respect to noun phrase (NP) gender agreement. He maintains that gender errors are the result of the language contact situation, and not because of language learning deficits. Gender error was one of the factors we were looking for when analyzing the speech of our heritage speakers. Unlike Anderson we believe that this type of error is one of the many ways to measure language loss in heritage speakers of Spanish.

Anderson, R. (2001). Lexical morphology and verb use in a child's first language loss: A preliminary case study investigation. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 5, 377–401.

The author observes the language loss of two sibling heritage speakers of Spanish who move to an English-speaking country. During her longitudinal study she recorded and analyzed two years of spontaneous speech examples. She observes as expected a gradual loss in their inflectional morphology but she also notices individual differences among the two siblings. This last part is

very interesting since individual variation is usually not taken into account as an important variable in case studies dealing with language loss in heritage learners.

Andrews, D. (1998). Sociocultural perspectives on language change in diaspora: Soviet immigrants in the United States (Impact: Studies in Language and Society, 5). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

In this book the author examines the Russian speech of the American “Third Wave” of migration from the Soviet Union. She addresses matters of interest not only to Russianists, but to linguists in general and heritage language specialists in particular.

Beaudrie, S. M. & Fairclough, M. (Eds.) Spanish as a heritage language in the United States: The state of the field. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

In this comprehensive volume, different experts offer an interdisciplinary overview of research on Spanish as a heritage language in the United States.

Benmamoun, E., Montrul, S., & Polinsky, M. (2013). Heritage languages and their Speakers: opportunities and challenges for Linguistics. Theoretical Linguistics, 39, 129-181.

This article offers a general overview of heritage languages reviewing the latest state-of-the-art works on heritage languages. The authors propose a set of connections between heritage language studies and theory construction, underscoring the potential that this population offers for linguistic research. They also examine several important grammatical phenomena from the standpoint of their representation in heritage languages, including case, aspect, and other interface phenomena.

Benmamoun, E, Montrul, S. and Polinsky M. (2015) “Defining an ‘ideal’ Heritage Speaker: Theoretical and Methodological Challenges | Reply to Peer Commentaries.” Theoretical Linguistics 39 (3-4).

In this article, publically available online thanks to the Harvard community, Benmamoun, Montrul and Polinsky reply to the comments made by their peer reviewers on their original article. The revision they make of the definition of heritage learners is especially relevant; they give less importance to the dominance factor and the minority vs majority language dichotomy in favour of other factors that have to do purely with language acquisition.

Blom, E. & Unsworth, S. (Eds.) (2010). Experimental Methods in Language Acquisition Research. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

This comprehensive book that can be used as a textbook for graduate students, offers a revision of the most commonly used experimental methods in first and second language acquisition. It is

useful not only for students but also for researchers in language acquisition and in heritage languages who want to evaluate different research methods before approaching their investigation.

Brinton, D., Kagan, O. & Bauckus, S. (2008). (Eds.) *Heritage language education: A new field emerging*. New York, NY: Routledge.

A reference book for investigators, students and teachers, it addresses questions related to both research and curriculum design in heritage language education.

Cummins, J. & Hornberger, N. (2010). Introduction. In J. Cummins & N. H. Hornberger (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education: Vol. 5. Bilingual education* (5th ed., pp. 1–30). Netherlands: Springer.

This paper introduces the term ‘heritage speaker’ as applied to Canadian bilingual situations.

De Houwer, A. (2007). Parental language input patterns and children’s bilingual use. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 28, 411-424.

This article studies the correlation between parental input in the heritage language and the children’s command. The author collected data from a total of 1899 families where at least one of the parents spoke the heritage language Spanish. The results show that the general idea of the “one parent one language” approach doesn’t work as well as we suppose; children growing in households where both parents spoke the minority language had a better chance of successfully speaking both languages: the majority and the minority language.

Edwards, J. (2010). *Minority languages and group identity: Cases and categories*. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

The author of this book offers a general descriptive framework of contact language situations that starts with previous cases and categories but expands on them. The book also presents four case studies that serve as an example of the descriptive framework discussed in the first part of the book.

Garcia, O., Zakharia, Z., & Otcu, B. (Eds.). (2013). *Bilingual community education and multilingualism: Beyond heritage languages in a global city*. Salisbury, UK: Short Run Press.

This book explores bilingual community education in the multilingual city of New York. It takes a fresh look at bilingual America and the importance of the role played by public schools and community language education programs.

Mueller Gathercole, V.C. & Thomas, E.M. (2005). Minority language survival: Input factors influencing the acquisition of Welsh. In J. Cohen, K. T. McAlister, K. Rolstad, & J. MacSwan

(Eds.), **Proceedings of the 4th international symposium on bilingualism (pp. 852-874). Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.**

In this study carried out in Wales the writers study children coming from English-speaking families vs. Welsh-speaking families and their process of language acquisition in both languages. It is a very interesting situation since, due to language policy, every child educated in county schools is taught in their early primary school years through the medium of Welsh. Thus, children coming from Welsh-speaking and English-speaking homes acquire Welsh. They found that children who hear only Welsh at home catch up to monolingual English-speaking children in their English language skills by the age of 9 and the socioeconomic status of the families plays a very important role in the process.

King, K.A., Schilling-Estes, N., Fogle, L., Lou, J.J., & Soukup, B. (Eds.). (2008). *Sustaining linguistic diversity: Endangered and minority languages and language varieties*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

This book is a compilation of theoretical and empirical work from leading researchers and practitioners in the field. Together all the contributions provide a state-of-the-art overview of current work in defining, documenting, and developing the world's smaller languages and language varieties.

Marian, V., Blumenfeld, H. K., & Kaushanskaya, M. (2007). *The Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (LEAP-Q): Assessing language profiles in bilinguals and multilinguals*. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 50 (4), 940-967.

A must read for anyone designing a questionnaire intended for language assessment in bilingual and multilingual speakers. It is intended for adult speakers.

McDaniel, D., McKee, C., & Smith Cairns, H. 1996 (eds.), *Introduction*. In D. McDaniel, C. McKee, and H. Smith Cairns (eds.), *Methods for assessing children's syntax* (1-25). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Necessary reading for any researchers aiming to assess syntax in children, a very difficult task indeed since it involves a very direct way of eliciting oral production.

Montrul, S. (2005). *Second language acquisition and first language loss in adult early bilinguals: Exploring some differences and similarities*. *Second Language Research*, 21(3), 199–249.

In her study the author compares the linguistic knowledge of adult second language (L2) learners, who learned the L2 after puberty, with the potentially ‘eroded’ first language (L1) grammars of adult early bilinguals who were exposed to the target language since birth and learned the other language simultaneously, or early in childhood (before age 5). It offers some answers to the language loss process in heritage speakers.

Montrul, S. (2008). *Incomplete acquisition in bilingualism*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins.

The book proposes an overarching and comprehensible overview of bilingualism and of heritage speakers in particular. It aims to extend and improve knowledge about language acquisition in the context of heritage language learning and also to see what factors are crucial and important.

Montrul, S. (2010). *Current issues in heritage language acquisition*. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 30, 3-23.

In this indispensable article the author discusses the development of the linguistic and grammatical knowledge of heritage language speakers from childhood to adulthood and the conditions under which language learning does or does not occur.

Montrul, S. (2011). *Introduction*. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 33, 155-161.

Brilliantly written introduction to a special volume of *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* devoted to heritage learners and bilingual populations.

Montrul, S. (2012). *Is the heritage language like a second language?* *EUROSLA Yearbook*, 12, 1-29.

This article addresses whether exposure to the family language since birth even under reduced input conditions leads to more native-like linguistic knowledge in heritage speakers as opposed to L2 learners with a later age of acquisition of the language.

O’Grady, W., Schafer, A. J., Perla, J., Lee, O.-S., & Weiting, J. (2009). *A psycholinguistic tool for the assessment of language loss*. *Language Documentation and Conservation*, 3, 100-112.

The authors explain that, while there is never a natural inclination to abandon one’s native language (language loss is always in response to ‘external’ economic, social, and political pressures), language loss is ultimately a neurological phenomenon and can be studied as such.

Peyton, J., Ranard, D. A., & McGinnis, S. (Eds.). (2001). *Heritage languages in America: Preserving a national resource*. McHenry, IL: Delta Systems Co.

Completely available online in pdf this edited volume and its different authors represent the idea that the present research wanted to transmit. It describes the population of heritage speakers in the USA and outlines what needs to be done in order to help them develop their languages for use in academic and professional environments.

Polinsky, M. (2005). World class distinctions in an incomplete grammar. In D. Ravid, & H. Bat-Zeev Shyldkrot (Eds.). Perspectives on language and language development (pp. 423–438). Dordrecht: Kluwer.

The author considers heritage speakers as having a type of incomplete acquisition of the L1. This paper examines the knowledge of word classes under incomplete acquisition, a not previously investigated area of research. She presents the results of an experimental study which investigated the knowledge of major word classes (verb, noun, adjective) under incomplete acquisition.

Polinsky, M. (2008). Gender under incomplete acquisition: Heritage speakers' knowledge of noun categorization. Heritage Language Journal, 6(1), 40-71.

The author believes that heritage speakers and their characteristic incomplete acquisition of the L1 are crucial to the understanding of general language acquisition. For her it is especially key to focus on the changes these heritage speakers have in the structural and grammatical areas where the heritage speakers differ from native speakers. In this article she focuses on noun categorization of Russian heritage speakers.

Polinsky, M. (2015). When L1 becomes an L3: Assessing grammatical knowledge in heritage speakers/learners. Bilingualism: Language and Cognition, 18, 163-178.

The author examines heritage speakers who re-learn their childhood language in adulthood. Their unique characteristics make them an important group for the study of L3 acquisition and language acquisition in general. They may have certain advantages over other L2/L3 learners in phonetics/phonology but, according to the author, they lack a global advantage at re-learning the prestige variety of their L1.

Popova, M. I. (1973). Grammatical elements of language in the speech of pre-school children. In Studies of Child Language Development, ed. C. A. Ferguson and D. I. Slobin, 269–280. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Important reading for those researchers attempting to assess language competence in heritage speakers younger than 6 years old, as it is in our case.

Potowski, K., & Cameron, R. (Eds.). (2007). *Spanish in contact: Policy, social and linguistic inquiries*. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

A very interesting read that connects topics such as Spanish as a heritage language in the United States and Bozal (Creole) Spanish; both being particular cases of Spanish in contact with other languages.

Roca, A. (Ed.). (2000). *Research on Spanish in the United States: Linguistic issues and challenges*. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.

A very well selected compilation of 29 original articles that is intended to be used as a textbook as well as a reference for researchers interested in the situation of Spanish in the USA.

Roca, A., & Colombi, M. C. (Eds.). (2003). *Mi lengua: Spanish as a heritage language in the United States*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Written in English and Spanish *Mi lengua* digs into the research, theory, and practice of teaching Spanish as a heritage language. The editors and contributors examine theoretical considerations in the field of heritage language development as well as community and classroom-based research studies at the elementary, secondary, and university levels; very well written.

Siemund, P., & Kintana, N. (Eds.). (2008). *Language contact and contact languages*. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

The study was conducted to investigate gender under incomplete acquisition. The participants were adult heritage speakers of American Russian. Their gender knowledge was controlled by two experimental tasks: production and comprehension. Based on error pattern, Polinsky stated that “heritage speakers have difficulty with the same classes as uninterrupted L1 learners”. Moreover, the interaction between proficiency levels and results was found: heritage speakers with a higher proficiency level had better gender knowledge than speakers with less proficiency. However, the results represent only the first step in an investigation of Russian inflectional noun morphology by heritage Russian speakers and a further investigation is required.

Valdés, G. (2000). *Spanish for native speakers: AATSP professional development series handbook for teachers K-16, 1*. New York: Harcourt College Publishers.

Provides one of the first definitions of heritage speaker. Some find it a little bit narrow because but no one can deny that it represents the beginning of the conversation. Its work emphasizes the developmental trajectory and linguistic abilities of the heritage speaker population.

Valdés, G. (2005). Bilingualism, Heritage Language Learners, and SLA Research: Opportunities Lost or Seized? *The Modern Language Journal*, 89, 410–426.

In this article the author explores different intersections between SLA and heritage language research. She takes an interest both in understanding the language acquisition processes and the possible applications that SLA and heritage languages research can have in the educational sector.

Vorobyeva, T., & Bel, A. (2015). Productive and receptive vocabulary assessment of Russian heritage speakers in the school system of Catalonia. Unpublished oral presentation at: XXXIII AESLA International Conference, April 16-18, 2015, Madrid, Spain.

A very interesting presentation of the different methods a researcher can use to elicit oral production by children who are heritage speakers as well as measure their comprehension skills.

Vorobyeva, T (in press). Russian gender assignment and agreement by young heritage speakers living in Catalonia, a PhD dissertation project.

A very promising PhD project written by a novel researcher.

Webb, J., & Miller, B. (Eds.). (2000). Teaching heritage learners: Voices from the classroom. New York, NY: American Councils on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.

This volume offers a guide for language teachers, school administrators and support personnel that will enable them to work more effectively with heritage language learners in the classroom. It provides an overview of the research on heritage language education, and is fundamental reading for teachers and curriculum developers that will enhance teaching and learning of heritage speakers.

West, D. (2014). Assessing L2 lexical versus inflectional accuracy across skill levels. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 2014, 43(5), 535-554.

This study measures, with the use of statistical analyses, whether number and type of morphemes in an elicited utterance result in a greater number of modifications in L2 advanced groups of learners. A very inspiring way of using two-way ANOVAS in a practical situation of SLA research.

Wiley, T. G. (2005). Literacy and language diversity in the United States (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

In this second edition of his book the author reviews the differences between native and non-native speakers of English in the United States in terms of their literacy performance and educational

achievement. He also discusses social and educational policy issues trying to bring into the debate linguists, scholars, policymakers, educators, and students in teacher preparation programs.

Wiley, T. G., Kreeft Peyton, J., Christian, D., Moore, S. C. K., & Liu, N. (Eds.). (2014). *Handbook of heritage, community, and Native American languages in the United States: Research, policy, and educational practice*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

This volume provides background on the history and current status of many languages in the linguistic mosaic of the US. Based on the work of noted authorities, it draws from a variety of perspectives. Necessary reading for anyone interested in language policy and education.

