American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages-Heritage Language SIG Newsletter

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1. News from the HL SIG Officers

Theresa Austin, Co-Chair

Questioning Inheritance: Conceptual Issues in Moving Toward a De-colonizing Heritage Language Education

Hopefully you have all enjoyed the summer and have great stories to tell. In this issue each one of the officers will share what they have come to know. As well, we provide news of what’s ahead. For me, the summer has provided a bit of uninterrupted time to read further about our field. Have you ever thought about the nature of the research agenda in heritage language education? When we consider the growing field of heritage language education, there is no doubt a
large inheritance of knowledge that has been generated from prior research, particularly from second and foreign language fields, and most recently from social theories and cultural studies. This inheritance benefits the heritage language field by sustaining knowledge production through research in social uses of language, wider analysis of changing ideologies and instructional practices, and heritage language structural features. However, can heritage language education research avoid the neo-colonial influences of this “research” heritage?

By neo-colonial, I mean those values regarding language and language learning that have been recognized as worthy of instruction; e. g., only dominant varieties of a language and not the actual varieties of the heritage language used by particular communities. In essence, a neo-colonial perspective narrows HL research and instruction to only standard prestige varieties and even discourages and disparages other HL varieties in instruction, hence re-colonizing HL education with pre-existing values about the definition of language and its appropriate use. In the past, a monolingual model has been used to determine a target for multilingual learners. For heritage learners this has meant considering them as two monolinguals in one (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011). In contrast, a decolonizing perspective would entail thinking about heritage language learners as having a holistic combination of languages, multiple dynamic varieties. This “heteroglossic” characteristic is one that Bakhtin defined as common to all users of language. Moreover, these multiple varieties are viewed as being useful for developing critical consciousness within communities and creatively used for learners’ own growth to overcome social injustice. A decolonizing perspective would disrupt taken-for-granted assumptions about where and how “legitimate” languages, literacies, and learning take place and who facilitates it.

How else can one conceive of de-colonizing heritage education? If heritage is defined as a language inherited through family and rooted in familial experiences in communities, can we keep our research and instruction open to all the varieties in use by our communities? Clearly we have work ahead to identify uses that have not been recognized or those that have been de-legitimized. We would need to put those varieties that have been left out of our vision in contact with those that have been accepted as “standard.” We would also need to understand their distribution and usefulness. It would not suffice to say “That is street language or broken.” It would be important to inquire into what varieties exist, who uses a particular variety, for what purposes, and with what effect. Correa (2011, p. 317) advocates, “After all, these students will have to function in a world in which their local variety might be rejected, looked down upon, or simply not understood. They will be in a much better position if they are able to critically know why this is so and take the best approach to deal with the situation.”

Examples from research in heritage language and literacy that elaborate on a decolonizing and critical perspective can be found in Correa (2011) and in university settings in Beaudrie and Ducar (2005).
Examples from a decolonizing instructional stance are easily found in translinguaging pedagogy in teaching world languages and English as a second language. At the beginning levels, some instructors call on students to use their parents’ language variety in projects that explore roots through family interviews. Then, as students collect and document the varieties, they learn how to translate these forms into the standard variety and evaluate what is gained or lost when addressing particular audiences. At middle levels within a heterogenous class, some instructors have students collect contemporary music in the heritage language and create playlists including lyrics of the songs. Students examine the imagery in the songs and how the lyrics and beat work together to produce the tone and theme. Local varieties and standard language examples abound and can be used to introduce an appreciation for the richness of knowing both.

If we keep in mind that learners need to move between varieties of language in their communities, helping them accomplish this means understanding and preparing them to be flexible and skilfull. One way that researchers can contribute is by examining how moving away from separating languages in the classroom to the use of two or more languages in the same lesson affects learners’ ability to make choices and become flexibly multilingual and multiliterate. This would move the field into new territory that honors heritage learners in ways that challenge past colonizing research. What are other ideas about creating a decolonizing research agenda in heritage language education? Send us your thoughts, and we’ll include them in our next newsletter.

References


Yvonne Fariño, Co-Chair

Expeditionary Learning- An Effective Approach for Heritage Language Education

This summer has been a productive and engaging time for me to learn more about Expeditionary Learning for educating heritage language learners. This approach is one way I can draw on my students’ lived experiences, academic knowledge, and home literacies via learning expeditions.

I teach in an urban school that currently has 6th-10th grade, and the plan is to add a grade each year to eventually complete a full high school curriculum. Learning Expeditions give students an
opportunity to engage deeply in an inquiry about a single theme or topic at the core of the curriculum. School staff also work under the premise that students do not come as empty vessels and more importantly that they have had valuable life experiences, whether it is literacy skills, concepts, or funds of knowledge about the topic or theme. As a result, Learning Expeditions invite educators to become colleagues as students integrate skills and instruction across the content areas but in ways that allow students to demonstrate their knowledge in the best ways they know. For example, expeditions afford students opportunities to use their research, reading, writing, and public speaking skills, as well as their funds of knowledge in accomplishing their final product. In this manner, the expeditions become a highly focused, real-world application that engages learners to go beyond the curriculum and not just across the curriculum. I am finding that Learning Expeditions are a great way for heritage learners to share the richness that exists within each other, their families, and their communities, because it is centered from and about multiple perspectives, authenticity, and real-world application.

My objective for developing a two-week Learning Expedition on \textit{El Movimiento Muralista Mexicano} with my heritage language tenth grade learners was to not only beautify the school with students’ artistic talent but also for the school community to learn what students have to say via the images. The goals for these two weeks are to:

- learn about students’ and their families’ talents and history to affirm them in our curricula
- explore students’ cultural and linguistic identity as they converse with their families to learn about their stories
- engage the school community in multiple conversations of how critical literacy can support the school curricula to empower students and their families
- define what a community of learners means and identify communities of learners
- have students visualize their future selves

I used The Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA): Connecting Assessment to Instruction and Learning model, the AP Spanish and Culture Model from the Spanish AP Curriculum Frameworks (Lesson 1: El arte como ventana y espejo), and the Expeditionary Learning Model.

The description of El Movimiento Muralista Mexicano Learning Expedition I developed is included here. We would love to hear your ideas, or perhaps share in our ACTFL Heritage Languages Facebook page, how you assess your students’ academic and home literacies while also affirming their identity and increasing their knowledge of their heritage language.

\textbf{El Movimiento Muralista Mexicano}

\textbf{Theme:} Personal and Public Identities / Las identidades personales y públicas

\textbf{Time frame:} Two weeks / Dos semanas
Recommended Contexts:

- Constructing and narrating a new cultural identity through the arts (murals) / Construyendo y narrando una nueva identidad cultural a través del arte muralista

Overarching Essential Questions:

- How are aspects of identity expressed through the arts? / ¿Cómo se expresan los distintos aspectos de la identidad a través del arte?

- What symbols are important to represent the customs, traditions, and perspectives of a community? / ¿Qué símbolos son importantes para representar las tradiciones, costumbres, y perspectivas culturales de una comunidad?

- How do experiences shape a person’s identity? / ¿Cómo definen las experiencias de una persona su identidad?

- What stories [of those experiences] are essential to know, and how will knowing those stories empower a community? / ¿Qué historias son imprescindibles de conocer, and cómo el conocer esas historias le da voz y fortalece a su comunidad?

- How do the arts both challenge and reflect cultural perspectives and what is of value in a community? / ¿Cómo las artes desafían y reflejan las perspectivas culturales y lo que se valora en una comunidad?

Lesson Summary

The purpose of the lesson is to introduce art as a means to understand cultural identity and educate the public about the community’s funds of knowledge and struggles. Another goal is to give voice to that which may not be known in mainstream education and to understand the perspective of various members in a community. Lastly, the goal of the lesson is to empower a community to communicate their message in creative and unconventional ways.

In the lesson students will:

- Recognize the ways that relationships among cultural products, cultural practices, and cultural identity symbolize powerful examples of a community.

- Analyze how murals are unconventional ways to communicate a group’s struggles.

- Analyze how murals represent a cultural identity while depicting cultural products and practices in their art.
• Make inferences about cultural perspectives by analyzing the products and practices depicted in art.

• Identify the stories that will represent their funds of knowledge, struggles, traditions, and customs of their own community and compare them with those represented by the artists of the Mexican Muralist Movement.

• Compare the role of their community’s culture, as depicted in their art, with other members of the community a way to engage the larger community in conversations about and reflections on cultural identity and perspectives.

• Observe the process of the transmission of culture through products, practices, and symbols and how those can be interpreted, thus giving way to a multiplicity of perspectives.

Finally, I used the ten design principles that Thornton Creek, a Seattle Public School, follows for their expeditions, which I will post in the classroom as students begin El Movimiento Muralista Mexicano. Please view the school’s ten design principles at http://thorntoncreek.org/expeditions

References

http://elschools.org/

http://thorntoncreek.org/expeditions

http://www.apsva.us/Page/16415


AP Spanish and Culture Model from the Spanish AP Curriculum Frameworks. Lesson 1: El arte como ventana y espejo (http://vistahigherlearning.com/media/pdf/temas_authorised_syllabus.pdf)

*Rosario M. de Swanson, Vice Chair*

**Participating in National Study- Are You Ready?**

Hello again, language enthusiasts!!

As the summer comes to a close and we take a moment to catch our breath before the Fall Semester begins, I wanted to share some news with you about a study in which you might wish to participate.
This past July The American Academy of Arts and Sciences announced the formation of the Commission on Language Learning, as part of a national effort to examine the current state of U.S. language education, in order to project what the nation's education needs will be in the future and offer recommendations for ways to meet those needs. The Commission will work with scholarly and professional organizations to gather available research about the benefits of language instruction at every educational level, from preschool through lifelong learning, to help initiate a nationwide conversation about languages and international education.

Among the many compelling reasons cited for engaging in such a study were the fact that American society is increasingly multilingual, and the fact that Americans are more engaged with other realities around the globe, either through service, volunteering, or international politics, activities that require intercultural understanding and cooperation. The study is important given that by some estimates, as many as 80% of Americans can speak only one language. In contrast, 50% of Europeans over the age of 15 are able to converse in a second language. That’s why, "Language learning should be among our highest educational priorities in the 21st century," said American Academy President Jonathan Fanton. Further, "By reviewing existing practices and proposing new ideas, the Academy’s Commission will advance the conversation about language education, focusing on a body of knowledge and a set of skills that will become more critical as communication between and among cultures increases."

The Commission will study all of the ways in which Americans receive language education, from classes in traditional academic settings to government programs to workplace enrichment, in order to identify best practices and opportunities for improvement. The last major, national report on language learning was Strength Through Wisdom: A Critique of U.S. Capability, published in 1979 by the President's Commission on Foreign Languages and International Studies.

The Commission will be chaired by Paul LeClerc, the Director of the Columbia University Global Center in Paris, an expert in the French Enlightenment. Dr. LeClerc is the past president and CEO of the New York Public Library, and he also served as President of Hunter College. Other appointees are: Martha Abbott, Executive Director, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages; Dan Davidson, President, American Councils for International Education; Rosemary Feal, Executive Director, Modern Language Association; and Pauline Yu, President, American Council of Learned Societies.

I hope many of you get involved!

Joy Kreeft Peyton, Secretary

Considering a Framework for American Sign Language as a Heritage Language
In June this year I participated in a conference on American Sign Language (ASL), hosted by Dr. Ted Supalla and held at Georgetown University (A Roundtable Conference on the Stewardship of Sign Heritage, June 6, 2015, https://www.gallaudet.edu/daily-digest/roundtableconferencestewardshipsignheritage--.html).

Leaders in the ASL education and research community described innovative projects that they are involved in to document and promote the use and learning of ASL and sign languages from other countries. It was exciting and motivating to see the incredibly creative work being done to make sign language heritage easily available to everyone interested, both Deaf and Hearing. I had the privilege of talking about a framework for thinking about ASL as a heritage language. Together we agreed that when thinking about a specific language, including ASL, we often focus all of our attention on “What?” What will we do to develop the capacity/proficiency of speakers of the language and others who want to learn it? However, language policy experts Francois Grin and Joseph LoBianco (references below) have argued that while focus on capacity building is necessary, it is not sufficient. We also need to focus on opportunity creation and desire enhancement, or we will not see the development and vitality of the language that we seek. So at the conference, in thinking about ASL as a heritage language, we asked these questions, in this order:

Why? Why do specific individuals and groups want to (or don't want to) use and learn ASL?  
Who? Who are ASL users? What is their identity? Who do they think they are in terms of being users of the language? Who do others think they are?  
What? What varieties of ASL are we interested in and focusing on? In what ways and in what contexts is ASL used? How is ASL influenced by English and other languages?  
When? What is the current context for ASL users for language use and learning? What future for ASL are we seeking to develop? What are the roles of specific factors in the current reality?  
Where? Where is ASL used? For what purposes? What opportunities are there outside the home and formal education programs for using and developing proficiency in it?  

After considering these questions, we were able to ask the question we love to ask:  
How? This included questions such as: What program quality standards do we want to set? What are some program models? What levels of proficiency are expected, and how will it be measured? What materials and instructional approaches are available? What do parents and community members believe and care about? Do they think of the language as a resource? What is their vision for and their role in promoting its use?  

After developing this framework for ASL, I believe it can be helpful for thinking about other heritage languages as well. I would love to talk more about this with anyone who is interested.

References


*Wei-Li Hsu, Outreach Coordinator and Organizer*

**Valuing Dialect-Speaking Heritage Learners in Chinese Language Programs**

In heritage language learning there is great diversity of learners and complexity in the development of their language variety. Many scholars have found differences of language use and learner identity between heritage language learners with different dialect backgrounds. In comparison to other languages, Chinese language programs are more challenged by this issue, since many Chinese “dialects” are not mutually intelligible to the Chinese dialect taught in language classes, which is Mandarin. Heritage language researchers have suggested creating space for dialect speakers in classrooms by honoring their home dialects and heritage.

Less-dominant dialects should be treated as equal to, not inferior to, the dominant dialect. Dialect-speaking participants in the study of Wong and Xiao (2010) often struggle with the “practical” use of Mandarin and personal relevance of their home dialect. Enrolling in a language class should allow learners to explore their heritage and strengthen connections with their family members. Similar in Vietnamese language classes, some students with southern dialects experience familial tension when they start sounding like a “northerner.” By recognizing the importance of home dialect and including other dialects in class, instructors are able to show students that their home experience and their dialects are valuable.

One example of incorporating dialect into Mandarin teaching is related to the two *de* in Mandarin, 的 and 得. Although the two characters have different meanings, their same pronunciation in Mandarin often causes confusion even among native speakers; however, in Taiwanese, a southern dialect, the two characters are pronounced differently. By asking students the Taiwanese pronunciations of the two *de*, students are more likely to utilize their dialect knowledge and to learn the different meanings and uses in Mandarin. Another example is developing home dialect through the Chinese characters
learned in class. When watching Chinese TV programs, students can connect the dialect pronunciation through Chinese subtitles (written in Chinese characters). For example, students can watch the Chinese character subtitles when watching a TV show spoken in Cantonese. By creating space for dialect in class, instructors are able to facilitate both Mandarin learning and dialect learning, value learners’ home language experiences, expand learning strategies, and develop metalinguistic knowledge.

Being a multilingual doesn’t mean that a person has to be capable of doing a whole spectrum of things in multiple languages. A multilingual can be only capable of speaking Cantonese when ordering a dish at a restaurant, understanding Taiwanese phrases when watching (Mandarin) Chinese TV programs from Taiwan, and reading Mandarin headlines in Chinese newspaper. It is not productive to expect language learners to be fully functional in the target language, and a more useful approach would be to expect learners to be able to use the most adequate varieties in certain circumstances.

Reference


2. Upcoming HL SIG Officer Elections

*Hseuh-Ming Tommy Lu, Immediate Past Co-Chair*

It is time for SIG Officer elections! This year these two positions are open:

**Co-Chair**
Term: Two years (2015-2017; starts after ACTFL conference)
Duties: Solicits, organizes, and selects presentations for the annual convention; assists the SIG in articulating and disseminating its issues and concerns to ACTFL; chairs the SIG’s annual business meeting; and acts as the liaison between the SIG and ACTFL staff.

**Secretary**
Term: Two years (2015-2017; starts after ACTFL conference)
Duties: Prepares the minutes of the SIG Annual Business meeting; receives the SIG session proposals for the next year’s conference; and manages the proposal review process for the SIG

If you are interested in running for one of these two positions, please submit a bio/vision statement of 250 words or less to Tommy Lu (tommylu1999@gmail.com) via email by Monday, September 28. Include the position that you are interested in and HL SIG in the subject line of the email.
After all statements of interest are received and placed on a ballot by the SIG, voting will take place between 10/1 and 10/15/2015. Jocelyn Hofstede will send out a voting link to all SIG members who have paid dues before 10/1. If any SIG officers are running, the exiting Co-Chair will call for nominations and formulate the ballot.

3. Looking Forward to ACTFL 2015

2015 ACTFL Annual Convention and World Languages Expo
Friday, November 20 to Sunday, November 22, 2015 | San Diego, CA

Don’t forget to register for ACTFL and to select the Heritage Language SIG as your special interest group! (http://www.actfl.org/)

We are looking forward to seeing you in San Diego at our HL SIG meeting and sessions, open to all.

HL SIG Business Meeting: Saturday, November 21, 5:15-6:15, Convention Center Room 23A

Two inspiring sessions will be announced in our next newsletter. They promise to engage you in the transformation of your instruction and research agenda. Stay tuned!

4. Other News from the Field

Please join your colleagues working in the field!
Registration is open!
Friday & Saturday, September 18 & 19, 2015
Community-Based Heritage Language Schools:
Promoting Collaboration Among
Educators, Families, and Researchers
Location: American University, Washington, DC

The keynote speaker is Dr. Olga Kagan, past founding officer of the ACTFL Heritage Language SIG and current Director of the National Heritage Language Center (NHLRC) at UCLA, who will talk about the field of heritage language education and research: where have we been, where are we now, and where are we going. In addition to interesting panels and workshops, the conference will providing
excellent networking opportunities. Visit this link to read the conference program and to register: conference information page

5. A Glimpse of Our Upcoming Issue #4

- **Meet the candidates on the ballot for election** - We will introduce you to the candidates running for office. So don’t forget to nominate yourself, or if you know of someone who you would like to nominate, contact Tommy Lu (tommylu1999@gmail.com).

- **Exciting Heritage Language sessions at ACTFL 2015** - We will share with you these informative upcoming sessions, and look forward to seeing you in San Diego!

**Spread the news** - share our newsletter widely and send us news of what you are doing!