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Recommended Citation

Ali, F. (2021). Identity and Investment in Language Learning: A Case Study of Heritage Spanish Speakers. *Spanish in Context*, 18(3), 430-458. <https://doi.org/10.1075/sic.19026.ali>

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Spanish in Context

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*Citation: Ali, F. (in press). Identity and investment in language learning: a case study of heritage Spanish speakers. *Spanish in Context*.

**Journal link: <https://www.benjamins.com/catalog/sic/>

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Identity and investment in language learning: a case study of heritage Spanish speakers

ABSTRACT

Norton (2000) argues that investment in L2 acquisition is also an investment in learner identity, which changes in the context of time and space - a notion that also has relevance for heritage learners. As such, the purpose of this study is to examine investment in language learning among HL Spanish speakers and the role of identity in their learning experiences. This study comprises of ten participants enrolled in an HL Spanish course who completed a background questionnaire, interviews, and writing prompts. Using narrative analysis, this study examines participants' reflections on their heritage identity, HL exposure, and their investment, experiences and progress in their HL course. Results show that participants demonstrate varying degrees of investment in the HL, and heritage identity plays a role in this variance.

KEYWORDS: *Heritage speakers, investment, heritage identity*

INTRODUCTION

While many studies in heritage language acquisition focus on the cognitive aspects of acquisition processes and outcomes, research in the early 2000s began shift to focusing on the role of identity; while identity was often approached as fixed, individual traits in language learning studies (Schumann 1978, 1986), sociolinguistic research has recently challenged this categorical approach to identity, proposing that it is more dynamic than it is invariant, and that social contexts and societal constructs play a role in its formation and negotiation. In an SLA context, this approach to identity has sought to relate learners to the social world vis-a-vis their language learning and acquisition experiences (Anya 2017; Barnes 2019; Dávila 2019; Norton 2000, 2013; Lantolf 2000; Zuengler and Miller 2006; Block 2007; Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004; Menard-Warwick 2009). However, the role of identity as it relates to language learning is still a burgeoning topic in the area of HLA. This is arguably a critical component to HL learning, in part because heritage identity uniquely positions HL speakers in relation to the language of instruction. Additionally, in a classroom context, HL speakers' interactions and learning experiences contribute to the construction and negotiation of their heritage identities. As such, this study aims to provide an analysis of identity and its connection to investment in language learning among heritage Spanish speakers. Using narrative analysis to look at how HL speakers' identities play a role in their experiences as learners, this case study focuses on how heritage identity interacts with HL speakers' investment in HL learning. This study, then, serves to illustrate the impact of social structures on an individual's identity and linguistic investment, as well as reflect on the importance of establishing best practices in the HL classroom that not only enable advancement in linguistic proficiency, but also allow and encourage HL speakers to contest and recalibrate marginalized or stigmatized aspects of their heritage identities.

BACKGROUND

Much of the existing research on the relationship between language and identity - and consequently how they may be tied into research on language learning - has approached this relationship from the perspective of treating elements of identity as a categorical and static variable that influences language use (Schuman 1978; Labov 1972; Lakoff 1973; Oxford 1993; Goodwin 1990; Freed and Greenwood 1996). A more prevalent approach in recent scholarship,

however, takes the view that different layers of an individual's identity - such as gender, race, ethnicity, and/or social class - are fluid, socially constructed, and negotiated (Butler 1990, 1993; Darvin and Norton 2014; Inda 2000; Kang 2004). Furthermore, these facets of identity are embedded in each other and not necessarily separable. Using this intersectional approach, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) propose a framework for studying identity, defining it as the result of discourse and sociocultural factors, rather than a pre-existing entity. They outline this framework through a number of principles, describing identity as the emergent product of social and cultural practices, constructed in specific contexts and situations, discursively produced, constructed in relation to others, and subject to shifting according to sociocultural and interactional factors.

The construction and contestation of identity can occur in any given social context and include any layer of an individual's identity. Because this dynamic approach to identity sprung from theory focusing on gender as a social construction (Butler 1990, 1993), gender is frequently the focus of language and identity research. Freed (1996) observes that: "...language and gender studies conducted in natural settings may often find differences...in women's and men's speech simply because women and men are frequently engaged in different activities and not because of any differences in women and men themselves." (p. 67). These distinct gendered differences are evident in Zentella's (1987) study on language and social identities among Puerto Rican women in East Harlem, in which gender and heritage identities are examined together. In this investigation Zentella found that female participants were not only expected to preserve Spanish-speaking traditions but were also expected to mediate between dominant and minority cultures. Additionally, they were found to have greater linguistic loyalty towards Spanish in comparison to their male counterparts, as evidenced by their comparatively more elaborate intrasentential codes-switches.

The social construction and contestation of identity, however, extends to other socio-political components that make up an individual. For instance, Inda (2000) argues that - like gender - racial and ethnic categories are made meaningful through reiterative historical discourse, citing the construction of black identity and Mexican identity through the use of discursive representation that would - over time - naturalize their racial and ethnic differences from white identity. Similarly, racial identity may be discursively contested; various studies have documented the use of Spanish among Dominican Americans as a way of differentiating themselves from African Americans (Bailey 2000; Toribio 2000a). In another study on ethnic identity, Blackledge and Creese (2008) examine how language use among young, bilingual students and their teachers in Bengali schools in the UK was used to negotiate multilingual and multicultural identities among the students. Their findings indicate that while participants were being taught that learning about language and heritage was a means of maintaining Bengali identity and preserving it for future generations, students contested these imposed identities and negotiated them in a way that was far more complex than the heritage identities that were attributed to them institutionally by their teachers and administrators. Darvin and Norton (2014) also demonstrate how social class may impact the social and educational opportunities for language learners, and suggest that individuals' class privileges and constraints play a role in learning outcomes. These findings are further supported by Block (2012), who similarly looks at the role of social class in language learning in a migrant context, as well as how this aspect of identity is linked with other identities, such as nationality and gender.

Norton (2000) similarly theorizes identity as a socially situated construct in the context of second language acquisition by proposing the notion of investment, or a learner's commitment to learning a language. Norton argues that investment in a second language is also an investment in a learner's identity, an identity which is always changing in time and space. In her (2000) study on language learning among immigrant women in Canada, Norton emphasizes the need to relate the language learner to the social world by focusing on examining the opportunities that immigrant women have to practice the target language, how such opportunities are shaped by unequal power relations, and finally, how their social positioning plays a role in their investment in learning the target language. These findings are echoed in Menard-Warwick's (2009) study on language learning among immigrants, in which she argues that language learning and acquisition are informed by how learners respond to expectations placed on them, and if/how they exert their own agency.

While both Norton and Menard-Warwick focus on L2 acquisition in immigrant contexts, the notion of investment and its connection to identity is also relevant to HLA research and HL learners; regardless of HL proficiency, a degree of investment in the heritage identity is often involved, and is often a central theme in many HL classrooms. Here, the present study employs Valdés' (2000) criteria for defining heritage learners or speakers, or individuals who: 1) are raised in homes where a language other than the socially dominant language (English in the U.S.) is spoken; 2) are to some degree bilingual in the dominant language and the HL; 3) have acquired the HL before or along with the dominant language, but did not necessarily acquire it to the same extent as the socially dominant language because of the individual's increased exposure to the socially dominant language; 4) demonstrate any degree of proficiency in the HL; significant variation of skill level among heritage speakers. Considering the above criteria, HL learners enter the language classroom with a different background and skill set from L2 learners, and therefore exhibit different linguistic behavior than L2 learners, as evidenced by scholarship in heritage language acquisition (Brinton, et. al. 2008; Fishman 2006; Kim 2007; Lynch 2003; Montrul 2006, 2007, 2010; Pascual y Cabo 2018; Polinsky 2008; Polinsky and Kagan 2007; Potowski et. al. 2009; Rao and Ronquest 2015; Valdés 1997, 2005); this also entails that HL learners will have different needs from and expectations of their instructors. However, besides differences in linguistic knowledge, HL speakers whose identities are tied to their HL may also invest differently in their classroom learning experiences. Hornberger and Wang (2008), in fact, charge educators with the responsibility of understanding who heritage students are in different contexts, how they see, perceive, interpret and represent themselves in those contexts. The importance of implementing such sensitivities into heritage language pedagogy is especially salient in Helmer's (2011, 2013) ethnography of Spanish HL classrooms in the Southwest, in which Helmer highlights a white teacher's references to Pachuco culture in a way that - while intended to validate students' identities - resulted in students' regarding the Pachuco references as a slur and an inaccurate identity label for them, which in turn impacted their attitudes towards their teacher.

Escobar and Potowski (2015) also highlight the importance of identity in HL classes, citing that Spanish heritage learners have a number of affective necessities that need to be addressed in the classroom, such as feelings of insecurity towards one's Spanish as a result of being criticized by

monolingual Spanish speakers for the way they speak or because of the influence of English in their speech, a tendency corroborated in a number of studies (Goble 2016; Park 2011; Sánchez-Muñoz 2016). The use of a monolingual model for measuring bilingual HL speakers' proficiency is also used as a yardstick for Latinx identity, as evidenced by Urciuoli's (2008) study, in which the Latinx identity is tied to Spanish proficiency among college students, resulting in linguistic insecurity among those who do not identify as having a high degree of proficiency in Spanish. Likewise, deviating from monolingual norms through the use of English - be it syntactic or lexical influences - also contribute to these insecurities of being deemed linguistically deficient or exhibiting "semilingualism" (Leeman 2012). It is also not uncommon for heritage speakers to reject Spanish because they have internalized messages about its inferior social position compared to English (Escobar and Potowski, 2015), or even when comparing their home language practices to those in a classroom (Showstack 2018). This is evident in Showstack (2012)'s study on how classroom discourse is used among Spanish-speaking bilingual students to construct cultural and linguistic identities. In this study, Showstack demonstrates through participants' narratives that some of the hegemonic ideologies held by heritage speakers regarding language, bilingualism and identities are also reinforced in the classroom, although at times students challenge these ideologies in subtle ways. Furthermore, Showstack argues that it is crucial to analyze and discuss such discourse in the classroom setting as part of the curriculum so as to encourage consciousness of these ideologies.

Much of the tendencies cited above are shaped by prevailing discourses regarding Spanish in the U.S., and play a significant role in shaping HL learners' identities. For instance, while Spanish is notably devalued in comparison to English, this negative evaluation is often limited to native speakers using Spanish in the U.S., while L2 speakers of Spanish are often more positively evaluated (Burns 2018; Pomerantz 2002) and in fact often forms the standard against which HL speakers are compared (Clark and Coryell 2009), thereby further perpetuating the ideology that U.S. Spanish is not valuable, neither to HL nor L2 learners (Torres et. al 2017). These ideologies are also intertwined with ideologies about race. Leeman (2012) argues that the aforementioned link between Latinx identity and linguistic proficiency is discursively constructed and naturalized to the point that the identity marker and language are used almost interchangeably, which, Leeman argues, contributes to the racialization of Spanish. Additionally, Leeman suggests that - in the context of the U.S. - public space may be discursively constructed as white through the use of "mock Spanish" and associating "Spanish as the language of a racialized underclass." (p. 48). This racialization may also stem from English use among Latinx bilinguals, particularly if their variety of English appears to be influenced in any way by their Spanish (Urciuoli 2003).

Negative attitudes can also focus on specific Spanish varieties and their speakers. For example, studies focusing on Spanish in New York have found that while negative attitudes and linguistic insecurities were not uncommon among speakers of any variety of Spanish, these attitudes are particularly salient among Dominicans, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans, and most frequently the case among Dominicans (García et. al 1988; Zentella 2002). Dominican Spanish in particular presents an interesting situation, being a dialect that has been stigmatized among other Caribbean varieties (Büdenbender 2010), even within the Dominican Republic (Toribio 2000a). In the context of the U.S., this stigma carries over, particularly when juxtaposed against higher status

varieties of Spanish from other regions, and contributes to linguistic insecurity (Zentella 2002). Still, while Dominican Spanish does not appear to hold overt prestige among speakers, Toribio (2000b) argues that this variety does maintain considerable covert prestige in its role as an identity marker despite the stigma often assigned to it. Potowski (2012) points out that linguistic stigmatization often is a contributor to language loss, typically by the third generation, and that this in turn helps explain why there exists a wide variety of heritage identities and degrees of proficiency in Spanish among U.S. Spanish speakers.

Given the important link between language and identity - particularly in the context of Spanish as a HL in the U.S. - learner investment as it pertains to HL speakers is a critical component to HL classroom pedagogy and HL maintenance. Potowski (2004) argues that "...if students' identity investments compete with their investments in developing the target language, or if the classroom environment denies them opportunities to participate in ways that are acceptable to them, their target language growth will not be as great as educators might hope." (p. 95). Investment in this Spanish-English bilingual context, however, has been explored to a limited degree beyond Potowski's (2004) study; for instance, Mateus (2014) similarly focuses on learners in a dual immersion program and examines how students socially position each other in a classroom environment and how this positioning is linked to investment in language learning. In this study, Mateus found that linguistic codes were stratified among students, where being bilingual in Spanish and English carried the most status, followed by being monolingual in English and then Spanish. As such, learners' proficiency in either or both languages positioned them as highly valued or limited in terms of what they were able to contribute to classroom interactions (Spanish dominant); this stratification would also play a role in learner investment in bilingualism in that learners would take risks in their less dominant L2 in order to gain the linguistic capital associated with being a balanced bilingual. However, it is worth noting that - because of the linguistic hierarchy Mateus observed - English is perhaps what adds to that linguistic capital for learners, rather than Spanish, and so investment in bilingual identity might appear to be linked to the status of English, and that Spanish alone does not carry the same capital on its own that English does.

While investment is a demonstrably important notion that has been operationalized extensively to gain a better understanding of the role of identity for learners, research has primarily focused on L2 contexts. Examining investment as it applies specifically to HL learners merits further exploration. Specifically, it is necessary to adapt the concept of investment in order to reflect not only the distinct experiences and characteristics of HL speakers, but also the sociocultural factors that may play a role in HL speakers' learning experiences.

PRESENT STUDY

The present study seeks to elaborate on previous research that deals with HL identity and its role in the HL classroom. Using Norton's concept of investment as a framework for exploring this connection, this study is guided by the following research questions: for HL speakers, what is the nature of investment in the HL? Specifically, what individual and social factors play a role in motivating and/or impeding HL speakers in their formal learning experiences? What individual and social factors construct the relationship between HL speakers' identities and the HL?

Methods

Participants and research context

This study uses data gathered from heritage Spanish speakers enrolled in an intermediate level course geared specifically towards heritage learners at a university in upstate New York. Specifically, this course is among one of three heritage-track courses offered (the others being a basic level course and an intermediate composition course) into which students must place, rather than complete a course prerequisite. Additionally, this intermediate course is designed for HL speakers who have had 3 or more years of high school Spanish, and focuses on grammar review and developing reading and writing proficiency. At the time of the study, this course was taught by a non-native-speaker that was periodically observed by the author.

Ten participants initially enrolled in this study, all of whom were enrolled in the same course. Participants represented diverse backgrounds, the majority indicated having Dominican heritage. This is a strong reflection of the demographics of the local Spanish-speaking communities, given that approximately 47% of the Dominican American population reportedly lives in New York state - 59% of whom live in upstate NY and 41% in New York City (United States Census Bureau 2010). Additionally, multiple participants indicated having mixed parentage, including Beatriz (Dominican/Honduran), Nico (Salvadoran/Honduran), Victoria (Dominican/German), and Shana (Peruvian/Mexican). Consequently, these participants' connections to their heritage identity may also be informed by different experiences with their maternal and paternal familial interactions.

In qualitative research, it is also crucial to acknowledge the researcher's role as a participant in the study, as the collection, observation, and interpretation of data are all socially situated and informed by the researcher's relationship to the topic of study. As an individual who identifies as a second-generation immigrant and HL speaker of Urdu, my positioning is simultaneously approximated to and distanced from the data and topic at hand. A number of experiences shared by the participants in this study are perhaps broadly applicable to HL speakers of any language, and were certainly relatable - and even expected, based on my own experiences rather than empirical findings of previous research; for example - as will be illustrated in the Results section - insecurities surrounding linguistic proficiency and the experience of grappling with and reconciling multicultural identities. However, my own experiences as an L2 speaker of Spanish also diverge and lend some distance from the context of the present study; first, in not being a member of the heritage communities with which the participants identified, and second, in not having the formal HL learning experience that situates this study.

Table 1: Participant background

Participant ¹	Gender	Age	Birth/move to U.S.	Heritage	Self-rated proficiency (1-10 scale): 1. Reading
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¹Pseudonyms have been assigned

					2. Writing 3. Speaking 4. Listening
Beatriz	female	18	U.S.	Dominican /Honduran	9 8 8 8
Nico	male	18	U.S.	Salvadoran /Honduran	9 9 8 9
Tania	female	19	Argentina; 4 years	Argentine	6 6 8 9
Victoria	female	18	U.S.	Dominican /German	8 6 5 9
Shana	female	20	U.S.	Peruvian/ Mexican	8 8 8 8
Juan	male	19	Peru; 2 months	Peruvian	7 7 8 9
Lola	female	19	U.S.	Dominican	10 7 6 10
Navarro	male	21	U.S.	Dominican	8 6 6 8

Danilo	male	18	DR; 6 years	Dominican	7	5	6	10
Marcela	female	19	Colombia; 3 years	Colombian	9	8	10	10

Participants were also asked to indicate their level of proficiency in Spanish by rating their reading, writing, speaking and listening skills on a scale from 1 (weak) to 10 (strong) at the beginning of the semester. Because the scope of the present study does not include any measurement of learning outcomes, these self-evaluations were only completed once by participants.

Tasks

First, participants completed an initial background questionnaire detailing their personal, linguistic and cultural background, the responses of which have been summarized in the above tables. Participants also completed two interviews and two writing prompts - once mid-semester and again near the end of the semester. While both interviews and writing prompts touched on themes relating to heritage identity and its intersection with linguistic investment, the purpose of having two meeting times was to have participants reflect on their progress and experiences in the HL course as they were in the midst of the semester, as well as near the end when they would be able to reflect on their overall experiences in the course, and whether or not their course expectations had been met. Both interviews and writing prompts were conducted in Spanish; however, due to space limitations, only the English translations will be included in the results.

Method of analysis

The present study uses a narrative analytical approach (e.g., Polkinghorne 1995; Park 2011) to interpret data. Through this approach, emerging themes were identified through an initial review of the data, and were subsequently used for creating thematic categories for coding data in a second review. Adopting this holistic approach is advantageous for the scope of the present study, first, because the focus remains on learners’ varied perspectives on their language learning and use, relying on their own understanding of their experiences and actions. Additionally, narrative analysis allows for comparisons between different participants' experiences regarding specific themes, and can also bring to the foreground any number of variables that may contribute to learners' perspectives. While a wide variety of themes became apparent through analysis, data will be organized by the three overarching themes that participants discussed in their interviews and writing prompts, and include the following: (1) early exposure to Spanish and its relation to attitudes towards Spanish and heritage identity; (2) familial and social dynamics, expectations and interactions as adult HL speakers; (3) learning Spanish formally as it relates to their classroom experiences, motivations, and attitudes. These results will be compared across participants in order to link these individual experiences to larger social structures that

may play a role in heritage speakers' investment in language learning.

Results

Language attitudes, identity, and early exposure to Spanish

One defining characteristic of HL speakers is the exposure to the HL at a young age that is often restricted to the home environment. Half of the participants in this case study - Nico, Juan, Danilo, Navarro, and Victoria - indicated being raised in Latinx communities in New York, as well as being active members of their respective communities:

I believe that the majority of my town was from...El Salvador, or Hispanic...from my school...my high school...60% were Hispanic. Because I played soccer a lot, I knew them, (and) through church, I used to do community service. *Nico, Interview 1*

I lived in a Spanish² neighborhood, so like I didn't really...got exposed to an American culture...people talk Spanish, knew Spanish. It was just like a Spanish community. *Danilo, Interview 1*

While neither Nico nor Danilo specified whether they spoke Spanish with those in their communities, exposure to and involvement with the heritage community suggests a greater degree of exposure to Spanish beyond the home environment, or at the least, exposure to the heritage culture, as Danilo pointed out. Here, it is also worth noting that Danilo's comment suggests that - for him - heritage and American cultures are distinct categories, despite the fact that the neighborhood to which he refers is in the U.S. Victoria indicated a similar upbringing, though additionally specifying that she used Spanish with her friends:

I lived in a very, like, Dominican-heavy part of Queens so I felt like, very a part of that community when I was younger. Like most of my friends spoke Spanish like my family, so... all my friends, like in preschool and in kindergarten and stuff, they were all Dominican...I definitely...feel like I lost a lot of, like, my connection with that because I moved -like, after, um, kindergarten - to a much like, whiter part of the city, so most of my friends were white and like, my parents spoke to me in English because they didn't want me to like, fall behind...in school..so I like, forgot a lot of my Spanish, like, maybe between the ages of like, 6 and like 10, I mainly only spoke English...so now I...I don't know, I feel less connected to..like being Dominican, than when I was younger...I wish it was different, like I definitely wish I spoke Spanish better...um, like, I speak it fine, um I just feel very insecure about it, and so, like, because of that I mainly only speak it with like, my family and like even then I still feel kind of insecure about it...yeah I wish I felt more...connected to it. *Victoria, Interview 1*

Here, Victoria points out the change in her language use when her family moved away from the Dominican neighborhood in which she had been raised. However, this switch to English - which she notably connects to her loss of Dominican identity and insecurities about speaking in Spanish - is also attributed to her parents' decision to speak to her in English for the sake of her studies.

²Here, Danilo is referring to a Caribbean community whose members are predominantly Dominican and Puerto Rican.

Still, Spanish remains an important household language for most of the participants, particularly between parents and children:

I only used Spanish at home...my parents speak Spanish. My mom, she speaks almost no English, so the only way to communicate with her is with Spanish, and my dad, he can speak both, but it's best to speak in Spanish. (And your siblings?) But with them I speak in English. *Marcela, interview 1*

My first language is Spanish, but once I started to go to school...I learned English, but at home, Spanish is always, always spoken...well, with my little brother, between us we speak English, but my parents don't let me speak English with them, I always have to speak Spanish. *Tania, interview 1*

While Victoria's parents chose to incorporate English at home, Tania was the only one to indicate that her parents had strict rules relating to language use and required her to use Spanish with them at home. For both participants, however, Spanish use was limited to parent-child communication, while English was used between siblings. Nico similarly indicated that he used Spanish with his parents, as well as a preference for doing so:

I like to listen to Spanish...I used to watch soccer, so I'd listen to different accents like from Spain, or South America, from Central America, and I always liked it...I never had any trouble speaking Spanish...my mom likes to compare me to my cousins...now they're very...compared to me...they understand it, they speak it, but it's not so...fluent...compared to the Spanish that I speak...they're more comfortable with English...they even speak English with their parents...I don't like doing that. *Nico, interview 1*

Here, it is evident that Nico spoke and understood Spanish with ease and confidence. Additionally, it is worth noting that Nico is the only participant to indicate that he was praised for his Spanish, as several of the participants shared negative experiences with Spanish among family and friends when traveling abroad to their heritage countries. Participants attributed these negative experiences to their limited proficiency in Spanish:

When I would go to Peru...I didn't know Spanish, and my whole family...they'd make of me...my cousins would say 'you can't speak Spanish' and it made me feel bad because I wanted to communicate with them. *Juan, interview 1*

I feel like in other people's eyes you wouldn't be considered a true Peruvian just because you don't speak the language. *Juan, interview 2*

Um...I liked it (Spanish) when I was little, but then it was like, funny to my family that I could speak Spanish...they'd laugh if I spoke it, so then it made me self-conscious about it, I guess. So I just like, didn't do it...unless I'm like, talking to my grandmother or my grandfather or something like that. *Lola, interview 1*

I felt stupid...I avoided speaking Spanish...they'd make fun of me a lot...I felt...different, because they called me the...American...as an insult. *Navarro, interview 1*

From these comments, it is clear that - at least for Juan, Lola and Navarro - the negative comments from family and friends relating to their linguistic competence resulted not only in shame - but also wanting to avoid using Spanish, as well as having feelings of not belonging and/or identifying completely with their heritage backgrounds. Victoria, Beatriz and Shana also indicated sentiments of not identifying entirely with their heritage backgrounds and attributing this to either their linguistic abilities or to being American:

All my cousins speak very good Spanish and like, I don't...and they like to make fun of me...also, like, not being fully Dominican...like...I don't know, it just makes me more insecure that I don't have like, that full identity or experience that all of my family did...like, all of my cousins heard it (Spanish) from both of their parents³.
Victoria, Interview 1

I know a lot of people that say...that when they go to their countries...they'll never be Dominican enough, or they'll never be Honduran enough...because they come here and...we've assimilated to American culture, so it's like we have part of that culture and then, because of that we won't be 100% like them. *Beatriz, interview 1*

When I went to Peru with my mother and grandmother in 2016, and everyone said that my language wasn't the best...everyone from my mom's side criticized because I had an American accent. I feel a disconnection with Peruvian culture because there was a barrier and that barrier was my Spanish. I felt upset. I couldn't communicate with my cousins like before because I was frustrated all the time...when the rest of my family made fun of my Spanish, I didn't want to speak Spanish anymore. *Shana, essay 1*

The above comments highlight arguably one of the biggest challenges for HL speakers who identify multiculturally. Through interactions with those who identify as Latinx, these participants indicate that also identifying as American comes at the expense of their heritage identities, as reflected in their remarks about not identifying “fully” or “enough” with their heritage background. Much like Danilo's previous comment that suggested a separation between heritage and American culture, the above comments similarly indicate that - perhaps to members of Latinx communities outside the U.S. - being an English-speaking American made these participants less Latinx. Tania offers further observations about the challenges of having a multi-faceted identity that others occasionally do not accept:

I believe there's a lot of ignorance...first because I don't look like a typical Hispanic, or it's not that there is a...look...there is no typical Hispanic but a lot of people, when they see me, they'll never think that I'm not...American...when they find out I'm Jewish, and they say that 'you aren't from Argentina,' and I say, 'yes...and 'I'm also Jewish.' And they don't understand that you can be both. It happened in high school that...in this class

³As indicated in her background questionnaire, one of Victoria's parents is German.

for natives...the substitute teacher comes in and asks, 'Oh, what are you, the *gringa* (American) of the class?' *Tania, interview 2*

Here I'm different from Americans, and there I'm different from Argentines...I'm in two boxes. *Tania, interview 1*

In the supermarket (in upstate New York), a lot of people who work there are Hispanic, and when I go or my parents go and they ask them...in Spanish - because it's easier for my parents to speak in Spanish than in English - and they...they answer in English, even though it's harder for them...to speak in English. .. because they think that we're practicing our Spanish...they don't think we speak Spanish and it's easier for both people to speak in Spanish instead of English - which is the second language for both people - they think we're Americans and we want to practice our Spanish with these people. . it happens a lot...like they don't accept us as Hispanics or Latinos. *Tania, interview 1*

Here, Tania similarly acknowledges her dual identity as an American and Argentine. Like her classmates, she does not describe these multiple facets as being part of a single identity, but rather places each of these identities in distinct "boxes." Furthermore, Tania is also in the unique position of being the only Jewish participant in this study, and indicated that for many, having an Argentine and Jewish identity appears unexpected and incompatible. Additionally, she also indicates that because of her light-skinned appearance, she is usually assumed to not be Latinx, owing to prevalent assumptions about homogeneity of Latinx appearances, including by others who also identify as Latinx. This theme is echoed by Shana, who indicates that there are specific expectations of Latina women:

...everyone has to look good, and especially for Latinas, there's one specific image for Latinas...they have to look good, like, you know, tan, but like..light tan. . not too dark, it's just like tan-ish...perfect face, eye lashes, nice long hair, it's just like...I feel like it's all kind of the same. . and I just feel like we're kind of pressured to be like that because all the men say, 'oh I like a girl like that,' and it's just like. . that's makeup, that's money. *Shana, interview 1*

Like Tania, Shana is also critical of the generalizations made about Latinx appearances, focusing specifically on heterosexual male expectations of women. Additionally, Shana indicates that these expectations assume a degree of socioeconomic privilege, where conforming to this specific Latinx image requires money. While Shana did not specify how she positioned herself among these expectations, based on our interactions throughout this study, Shana did not appear to conform to the physical expectations described above, maintaining short hair over the course of the semester and wearing minimal to no makeup.

Familial and social dynamics, expectations, and interactions as adult HL speakers

Participants' interactions with family and friends also connected to their language use in various ways. For instance, Lola and Juan both indicated that their relatives had specific expectations about their speaking abilities, both in terms of proficiency and accent:

...when I first started talking in front of my family, they were like ‘Oh my gosh, you don't have an accent, you don't talk like a white girl that's trying to learn Spanish’ ...you feel pressured to really blend in, like talk, not have an accent and all this stuff (in Spanish)...and then I don't really have, like any pressures from, like the American side.
Lola, interview 1

I think that if you're from a Spanish-speaking country, like your family would assume that you know how to speak Spanish, and you're supposed to know Spanish...like, even when I was little, my family, like...they always viewed me as...already knowing how to speak Spanish, but once they heard me speak...they were like, really surprised that I couldn't, ‘cause...I grew up here in the United States, because I uh, left Peru when I was like, 2 months old, so I didn't have the ability to like, learn Spanish like, a lot, like others, and...the only people that helped me, was like my parents. *Juan, interview 2*

In addition to having linguistic expectations centering around proficiency, participants also indicated that others expected them to use Spanish for specific contexts. For example, Danilo shared that a Mexican friend had teased him for not listening to Spanish-language music, which - to her - made him more American than Latinx:

I had a conversation with my friend the other day - she's Mexican...she always jokes around with me, saying, like I'm a *gringo* (American) because I don't like - even though I'm Dominican, I came here - like, I listen to like, rock, pop, um...indy-rock, rap, and I like, don't listen to Spanish music, ‘cause she does...like Spanish rappers, those types of Spanish music...She says, ‘you little *gringo*, you don't listen to Spanish artists.’ like Spanish artists and all that. but like I don't feel like I'm..a white person or American. I'm still Dominican, right? *Danilo, interview 1*

In contrast, Marcela indicated that she had a friend who encouraged her to appreciate her heritage identity:

...in a Catholic school and I met a friend, who's from Cali in Colombia and...we're still friends...when I met her, I started to understand my...my heritage....I understood more, why I'm Colombian, and why I must feel pride in it...she was like...she had more pride in being Colombian. *Marcela, interview 1*

For Danilo and Marcela, Latinx peers appear to not only hold expectations of each other regarding having connections to one's heritage culture, but - as in the case with Danilo's friend - may connect specific cultural components - such as music - to heritage identity. Danilo, however, rejected the idea that his taste in music impacted his sense of identity.

Learning Spanish formally: experiences, motivations, and attitudes

When discussing the experience of learning Spanish formally, participants shared mixed experiences. Navarro explained his motivation to take Spanish classes, once again introducing shame as a factor:

I couldn't translate a medical letter for my older aunt. I didn't know how to translate the sentences in Spanish. I felt very bad because I couldn't help...that motivated me to improve my Spanish. *Navarro, Essay 1*

The above demonstrates that Navarro's limited proficiency and inability to help his relative serve as a motivation to improve his Spanish. This contrasts with Navarro's previous comment in which he indicated that he was made fun of for his limited proficiency when he was younger, and cited his feelings of shame as a reason to not use Spanish. Upon enrolling in their HL course, Juan and Lola indicated feelings of self-consciousness in the classroom setting:

When there's an activity that has to do with...someone from class, like partner (work), and he'd know more Spanish than me...I'd feel ashamed because I'm in a Spanish class...he thinks I must know...all of this. *Juan, Interview 1*

...we did a debate, and we had to present in front of the class and...I was just like nervous to mess up, because I feel like, there's a pressure in that class, kind of...like, almost to...be able to speak Spanish, even though some of us like, can't really like, speak fluently, there's just like, more repression in class because everybody is like, of a Hispanic background. *Lola, interview 1*

Juan's connection between assumed linguistic competence and being enrolled in a Spanish class is an unclear one; this may refer to a self-consciousness that stems from interacting with classmates whom he perceives to be more proficient than he is. This may also stem from perceiving his classmates to assume in one another a certain level of linguistic knowledge, given the intermediate level of the course, or even the heritage learner focus of the course. Lola expresses a similar self-consciousness about the level of proficiency she would project during a class debate, and further indicated that this discomfort leads her and her classmates to hesitate to participate. Nico, however, was exceptionally confident about his Spanish skills in comparison to other participants and indicated a strong willingness to participate in his class:

If I have the answer to the professor's question...I also want to give a chance to the others, but if I have the answer...I'm always ready to respond. *Nico, Interview 1*

As mentioned previously, Nico is the only participant to have indicated receiving positive reinforcement for using Spanish at a young age, while other participants shared negative experiences. This distinguishing aspect of his upbringing may have thus contributed to his confidence as an adult Spanish speaker. Additionally, participants commented on specific course content that they felt was relevant to them on a personal level, as well as expectations they had prior to enrolling in the heritage Spanish course:

We're also dealing with things that like...we can relate to...this is stuff that we like, experience, that we've witnessed, that we've lived through...like, they talk about immigration a lot and..like...the majority of us know people who have - who are immigrants, or who have parents who are immigrants, or even are immigrants...so like, that's a topic that's very like, important to us. *Beatriz, interview 1*

I thought maybe...like, we'll talk more about identity and like, how you associate with yourself with the Spanish world, or like how maybe like, um...like you get made fun of for being a bit more of this culture than that, you know? *Shana, interview 1*

As illustrated above, Beatriz and Shana both express an interest in course content that was particularly relevant to them as HL speakers, though Shana indicated not discussing identity-related themes to the extent that she had expected. However, in terms of linguistic outcomes, most participants reported that the HL course in which they were enrolled had met their expectations in that they had made gains in their communication skills, more positive attitudes towards variation in Spanish, and overall confidence in their speaking abilities, the last of which was perhaps the most salient issue among HL speakers:

I think I had like...stereotypes...of Dominicans, like, you know, that they have like...like, bad accents...but now I know that...I'm like, more open to that. *Shana, interview 2*

...before, I didn't like (Spanish) so much because I didn't know anything about Spanish...but...the more I...know...Spanish, the more I like it. *Juan, interview 1*

...I had problems because I didn't know enough...I didn't know...quite how to pronounce things in Spanish, so...it's the only problem that I had but...more and more in class...like I saw I got better and so...I started answering more questions. *Juan, interview 2*

Tania, however, had notably different experiences - both in the HL course she was enrolled in at the time of the study, as well as previous Spanish courses - owing to her own heritage background that often set her apart from other Spanish speakers:

As my ancestors are from Europe, I look more American and not like a Hispanic or Latina. A lot of times it's happened to me that someone doesn't trust my abilities in Spanish, or that the teacher or professor thought that I shouldn't be in their class because of how I look. *Tania, Essay 1*

Today we had to read a...a story about communion, so, like...I can't participate in this part, because I don't have...experience...or we talk about...Easter, and Jewish Easter. He talked about both holidays, but afterwards we had to read articles and he only posted Easter, not Jewish Easter....I didn't feel bad, but...I couldn't relate to the others. *Tania, Interview 2*

I believe that we learned what being Hispanic or Latina means, and the differences...I still struggle to be able to...I don't know...like there's no box that I can check that applies to people like me. *Tania, Interview 2*

While not attributing her experiences as strongly negative ones, Tania indicates that these experiences still set her apart from others, ranging from assumptions being made about her linguistic proficiency based on her appearance, to being unable to relate to specific course

content the way her peers could.

Finally, participants used their formal classroom experiences to reflect on their motivations and attitudes towards learning, using and maintaining Spanish - and frequently indicated that they connected it to familial relationships:

...maintenance of my heritage language/culture is important because it gives me the ability to communicate with my family and other people that speak Spanish. *Juan, Essay 2*

It was only among the female participants, however, that passing Spanish on to the next generation was mentioned as a priority:

Since it's not my first language it's hard for me to talk sometimes and I don't want it to stop me from teaching my children. *Beatriz, essay 2*

I believe it's important to maintain one's heritage language and culture...it's important for a lot of people, specifically children of immigrants, because they have a very strong connection to their heritage country, due to their parents. It's very important for me, because I want my children to speak Spanish, and have a Dominican identity. *Victoria, Essay 2*

I hope that when I'm older, I can speak with my kids...it's important for me to be able to pass my language and heritage on to the next generation. I hope that they don't need to learn Spanish in school and understand everything...because I spoke with them. *Lola, Essay 2*

It's important to maintain Spanish and my heritage culture because I want the next generations to remember their heritage language/culture. Also, it's a thing that gives one some identity, it's something that makes a difference. Heritage language/culture gives a story and it's a memory of where you are from/an origin. *Shana, Essay 2*

These comments suggest that perhaps HL maintenance is - at least to some extent - grounded in gendered expectations, where language maintenance across generations has been notably associated with mothers rather than fathers (Ehlich, 1997; Mukherjee, 2006). Outside of connections to their heritage identities, however, Nico and Marcela connected learning Spanish to their professional aspirations, which they had shared at the start of the semester:

I want to learn to speak it better, in order to speak with my family, to converse with them, with my family in El Salvador...and also because I have a desire to be a Spanish teacher. *Nico, Interview 1*

So, I want to (be) um...an immigration lawyer and after that I want to be a judge, a judge, so I want to perfect my Spanish in order to be...a bilingual lawyer. *Marcela, interview 1*

While Nico and Marcela were the only participants to connect HL education with their professional goals, it is evident that - for several participants - further developing proficiency was not only a central goal in enrolling in their HL course, but was also viewed as being additive to their heritage identities.

Discussion and conclusion

Several themes emerged when looking at participants' responses collectively. First, participants frequently indicated not identifying completely with their heritage backgrounds, often using terminology that reflected an "identity deficit," such as Juan indicating not being seen as a "true Peruvian," Victoria not being "fully Dominican," or Beatriz sharing that second generation immigrants did not feel that they identified "enough" in comparison to those in their countries of origin, or were not "100% like them." Moreover, these reflections - similar to findings from previous studies (Goble 2016; Park 2011; Sánchez-Muñoz 2016) - are often tied to Spanish language skills and not having a level of proficiency that is comparable to native speakers from their countries of origin. Additionally, this is attributed to associating with American culture alongside their heritage cultures. The theme of multifaceted identities, was in fact a common sentiment among participants. While this often meant a dual identity for some participants - Juan, Danilo, Lola, and Navarro - several participants also associated with more than one heritage identity, and often indicated relating to one identity more than the other, primarily due to the comparative degrees of exposure to each culture. In the case of Tania, her Jewish background also emerged as a significant part of her identity, which was - as she noted - at odds with her Argentine identity, or at least perceived to be the case by others though not necessarily for herself.

Furthermore, while participants frequently acknowledged and embraced their connections to multiple cultures, it is noteworthy that participants in this study typically referred to heritage culture as being separate from - rather than part of - American culture. This often appeared in connection with the aforementioned sense of identity deficit, where social interactions in and outside of Latinx communities led participants to not feel a full sense of belonging, due to either not "looking" American enough in their appearances, or not "sounding" Latinx enough when speaking Spanish. This would suggest a causal relationship between social interactions that rely on monolingual and monocultural standards, and participants' tendency to regard heritage and American identities as separate instead of as overlapping or intersectional.

Additionally, when sharing about their perceived linguistic deficiencies and their motivation to formally learn Spanish, participants typically cited having difficulty with productive skills - speaking and writing - while none of them indicated having any difficulty with understanding written or spoken Spanish. These responses were also reflected in participants' self-evaluations of their skills, where the majority of participants rated their speaking abilities as their weakest skill, often alongside writing. Developing these productive skills, as indicated by participants' responses, serves to help them achieve their reported goals of being able to better communicate with their families, and - in the case of Nico and Marcela - serve them professionally as well. Additionally, participants' perceived improvements to their proficiency in taking the HL course resulted in improved attitudes towards Spanish and identifying more with their heritage cultures, offering further support to Norton's (2000) argument that a learner's linguistic investment is also

an investment in identity. However, while participants reported that improving their productive skills was a motivating factor for enrolling in the HL course, it should also be pointed out that some participants - specifically, Navarro, Juan, and Lola - commented on insecurities with regard to using Spanish in the classroom, while Nico's strong productive skills made him more comfortable with participating actively in class. In other words, throughout the academic term, learners functioned under the belief that their productive skills needed to approximate that of a monolingual Spanish speaker in order to be able to participate and meet their classmates' expectations. Given these findings, it is evident that many HL learners may approach language learning through a proficiency-based approach; as demonstrated in previous studies (Burns 2018, Clark and Coryell 2009, Pomerantz 2002, Showstack 2018), this approach often uses monolingual standards and/or is utilized in L2 classrooms - in order to measure their success as bilinguals.

One of the most critical observations, however, is the extent to which language learning is a social practice, as evidenced by participants' comments on how their language use and attitudes - as well as the way they relate to their heritage identities - is shaped by their interactions: family and friends teasing or encouraging their use of Spanish or their accents; how other individuals - including other members of the HL community - perceive them and sometimes do not accept them for not conforming to a preconceived model of what a Latinx should look or sound like. Moreover, these influences come into the HL classroom as well, as seen by participants maintaining beliefs that they are expected to speak Spanish a certain way or at a certain level of fluency. Given that these negative attitudes stem from HL speakers' early exposure and experiences with Spanish, it would perhaps be beneficial to HL speakers if HL programs were available earlier on in their academic careers - well before the university level.

This study also offers new insight into how participants invest in their HL, as well as its connection to one's heritage identity. Specifically, while participants often discussed their motivations for studying Spanish, being motivated to learn was not necessarily indicative of static personality traits of these individuals, but rather, a form of investment, as described by Norton (2000). Participants indicated a great degree of investment in formally learning their HL because of the range of benefits they perceived in acquiring a higher level of proficiency in Spanish: while only two participants indicated that they were motivated to study Spanish for professional gains, all participants understood their language skills as being deeply rooted in their heritage identities, often citing that a lack of proficiency in Spanish made one feel or appear to be less Latinx. More than that, this investment is evidently rooted in participants' various negative experiences with speaking Spanish outside of - and before enrolling in - their HL course. Juan in particular - who had vocalized in multiple contexts that he had been teased for the way he spoke Spanish and was not seen as a "true Peruvian"- observed a positive impact from formally learning Spanish, indicating that doing so not only improved his proficiency and therefore confidence in communicating, but also improved his attitude towards Spanish. As such, investment in HL learning is also an investment in heritage identity for these participants, where linguistic capital is attached to the HL and plays an important role in how HL speakers are socially positioned among other Spanish speakers. Lastly, only the female participants refer to language maintenance in relation to their potential roles as mothers by indicating a desire and/or responsibility to transmit their HL identity to the next generation. Like the female participants in

Zentella's (1987) study, these attitudes may suggest a greater degree of linguistic loyalty to Spanish in comparison to the male participants and thereby a potential connection to HL investment as a gendered practice that merits further exploration.

Finally, this study bears pedagogical implications for HL programs, as well as second language programs that include HL learners. First, while HL learners can be contrasted against L2 learners in terms of their linguistic differences, heritage learners as a group also come from diverse backgrounds - both linguistic and sociocultural - which shape their relationship with their heritage identity and language. Such diversity needs to be acknowledged and accommodated in the HL classroom. Additionally, unequal social processes - such as gender, race, and ethnicity - can place learners in positions that may silence them or exclude them in the classroom. As educators, it is crucial to be mindful of these differences and inequities in order to create inclusive learning environments. In order to achieve this, educators must examine their own assumptions about learners' backgrounds and critically examine HL and L2 curricula for perspectives that systematically go unrepresented. Finally, it is necessary to look critically at how discussions on Latinx identity are framed in the HL classroom. While it is evident from this and previous studies that this is a recurring topic in HL classrooms, it is important to acknowledge that many HL learners' social experiences - and therefore their relationship with the HL - are shaped by monolingual and monocultural expectations. These expectations not only provide HL learners with an unreliable yardstick against which they measure their own proficiency, but can perpetuate and naturalize a dichotomy between heritage and American cultures, which, for many HL speakers, contributes to the identity-related conflicts that they often seek to reconcile in an HL classroom.

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Appendix: Participant tasks

Writing prompts

Short Essay #1

Please respond in detail (1-2 paragraphs) to the following topic in Spanish. You may choose to insert English whenever it feels necessary and/or natural.

Describe cualquier experiencia(s) que ha(n) tenido un impacto en tus actitudes hacia tu lengua/cultura de herencia, tanto si son experiencias positivas y/o negativas.

Short Essay #2

Please respond in detail (1-2 paragraphs) to the following topic in Spanish. You may choose to insert English whenever it feels necessary and/or natural.

¿Qué opinas del mantenimiento de tu lengua/cultura de herencia? ¿Es importante a ti? ¿Por qué sí/no? ¿Es algo que viene de expectativas familiares, o por ti mismo?

Interview questions

Interview #1

1. De niñez, ¿hasta qué punto usabas español? ¿Con quién? ¿Frecuencia?
2. Cuando eras niño/a, ¿te gustaba usar/escuchar el español? ¿Lo evitabas? ¿Preferías inglés (u otro idioma) sobre él?
3. ¿Te considerabas más [su herencia] o estadounidense? ¿Por qué?
4. ¿Y la cultura de herencia vs. estadounidense? ¿Había ciertos aspectos que (no) te gustaban de cada? ¿Cosas que apreciabas o no entendías?
5. ¿Eras parte de la comunidad de herencia? ¿Hasta qué punto?
6. Como adulto, ¿ha cambiado esto? (pensando de conexiones con la comunidad, uso del español fuera de clase, el interés en español o cultura)
7. ¿Sientes que tu identidad ha cambiado como adulto - no solo la identidad de herencia, pero cualquier aspecto de tu identidad?
8. Pensando de tu crecimiento e interacciones con la familia y la comunidad de herencia, ¿has experimentado presión/expectativas de otros en cuanto a cómo debería ser tu identidad, o cuál debería ser tu rol como (su herencia) o como estadounidense, como hombre, mujer, etc.?

9. ¿Por qué decidiste inscribirte en una clase de LH? Algunas expectativas o metas específicas?
10. A este punto, ¿se cumplen tus expectativas? ¿Algunas sorpresas?
11. ¿Cómo describirías tus habilidades en español: leer, escribir, hablar, escuchar/entender?
¿Algunas dificultades/fortalezas?
12. ¿Alguna vez has tenido problemas/dificultades participar en la clase, en cuanto a hacerte oír, dudas en participar, comunicarte con tus compañeros o con el/la instructor/a, sentirte incómodo? Algunas veces te sientes excluido/a?

Interview #2

1. Como [su género], ¿cómo es diferente tu experiencia como (su herencia) en comparación con otros?
2. Pensando de tus expectativas en el comienzo del semestre, ¿cómo va el semestre en cuanto a satisfacer esas expectativas?
3. ¿Cómo describirías tus habilidades en español: leer, escribir, hablar, escuchar/entender?
¿Algunas dificultades/fortalezas?
4. ¿Cómo ha avanzado tu español a lo largo del semestre?
5. ¿Cuáles son las cosas más importantes que has aprendido en tu clase de LH?
6. ¿Hay algunas cosas que querías que hubieran hecho diferente en la clase de LH, como las materias, el currículo, la instrucción, la interacción con los compañeros de clase?
7. ¿Alguna vez has tenido problemas/dificultades participar en la clase, como en cuanto a hacerte oír, dudas en participar, comunicarte con tus compañeros o con el/la instructor/a, sentirte incómodo? Algunas veces te sientes excluido/a?
8. ¿Has tenido algunas experiencias específicas que han determinado tus actitudes hacia la lengua/cultura de herencia?
9. ¿Piensas que tus experiencias en tu clase de LH han cambiado tu relación con tu lengua/cultura/identidad de herencia? ¿Cómo?