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HERITAGE LEARNERS OF MEXICAN DESCENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION:

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF PAST AND PRESENT EXPERIENCES

by

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Dissertation

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

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## Heritage Learners of Mexican Descent in Higher Education: A Qualitative Study of Past and Present Experiences

Chairperson: Darrell Stolle, Ed.D.

This is a qualitative interpretive study that explores the past and present experiences of heritage learners (HLs) of Mexican descent who were studying or had recently studied advanced Spanish in institutions of higher education. All of the participants had been exposed to Spanish in the home and began their studies in elementary or middle school in the United States. The population of HLs continues to grow and a need to understand this population exists. The statistics have shown that not all HLs of Mexican descent complete their studies in institutions of higher education and the reasons for this are not understood well.

The Seidman (1998) three-tier in-depth interview approach was used to gather information from the participants. The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed by the researcher, and reviewed multiple times. Categories, topics and themes emerged from the data and relevant quotes were segregated into separate documents. The data was organized further as patterns were studied. Several categories and themes were chosen and the data was gradually reduced. The findings include a thematic presentation of the participants' quotes and interpretive summaries for each section. In addition, the participants' profiles, which are based on demographic and self-identification surveys, are presented in the findings.

The findings give some insight into what the experience has been like for these students as Spanish speakers educated in the United States. Categories, topics, and themes that addressed the research question and which were relevant to the study were chosen. Three categories emerged and include education, language, and identity. Within these categories several topics and themes emerged. These include advising, language perceptions, connections with other Spanish speakers and culture, defining identity, insecurity, desire, uncertainty, and unawareness.

The implications include recommendations for addressing retention and recruitment. Insight into topics such as advising, placement, and reasons why HLs study the heritage language were gained. A strong desire to learn the heritage language in order to connect to and maintain the culture stood out in the findings. The participants also provided insight into their experience and identity issues. In addition, a need to provide resources for professors, advisors, and HLs was found. In sum, the study has inspired the researcher to work to improve the HL educational environment.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY.....	1
Statement of Problem.....	5
Grand Tour Question.....	7
Purpose Statement.....	7
Significance.....	8
Sample Selection.....	11
Bias.....	11
Definition of Terms.....	12
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	16
Statistics on Latinos.....	16
Bilingual Education and the Heritage Language Learner.....	21
Bilingual Education.....	21
Language Instruction and Education.....	23
Learning English.....	24
For and Against Bilingual Education.....	25
Models of Instruction for Students Learning English.....	26

Academic Preparation.....	27
Literacy Skills and Bilingual Education.....	29
Recommendations for Teaching English Language Learners.....	30
Teaching the Heritage Language in School.....	31
Spanish Instruction in Institutions of Higher Education.....	33
Attitude and Language.....	35
Attitude, Identity, and Empowerment.....	35
Conclusion.....	46
III. METHODS.....	47
Introduction.....	47
Grand Tour Question.....	47
Topic Question.....	47
Interview Questions.....	49
Research Design.....	50
The Role of the researcher.....	54
The Research Setting.....	55
Participant Selection Procedures.....	55
Number of Participants.....	56
Data Collection Procedures.....	58
The Survey and the Interview Process.....	58
Protocols.....	62
Data Analysis and Reporting Findings.....	62
Verification.....	64

Reliability.....	66
Limitations.....	67
Methods Chapter Summary.....	67
IV FINDINGS FROM THE QUALITATIVE INQUIRY.....	68
Introduction.....	69
Participant Profiles.....	69
Categories, Research Question, and Themes.....	78
Categories.....	78
The Grand Tour Question.....	78
Topics and Themes.....	78
Categories and Themes.....	79
Education Category.....	79
Advising.....	79
Summary: Education Category.....	89
Themes: Education Category.....	92
Language Category.....	93
Language Perceptions: Language Ability.....	93
Summary: Language Ability.....	100
Self-perception: Spanglish.....	102
Summary: Spanglish.....	106
Desire to Learn Spanish.....	106
Summary: Desire to Learn Spanish.....	115
Language Loss.....	116

Summary: Language Loss.....	123
Themes Language Category.....	124
Identity Category.....	124
Cultural Connection.....	124
Summary: Cultural Connection.....	133
Connections with Spanish Speakers.....	133
Summary: Connections with Spanish Speakers.....	145
Defining Identity.....	146
Summary: Defining Identity.....	157
Themes: Identity Category.....	159
Summary.....	159
V. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	160
Introduction.....	160
Grand Tour Question.....	161
Conclusions and Implications.....	161
Education Category.....	162
Education: Advising.....	162
Implications Recruitment and Retention: Advising.....	163
Language Category.....	165
Language Perceptions: Ability, Spanglish, Desire, and Loss.....	165
Language Background and Ability.....	165
Spanglish.....	167
Desire and Loss.....	167

Implications Recruitment: Language.....	168
Implications Retention: Language.....	169
Identity Category.....	170
Identity: Connections and Defining Identity.....	170
Connections: Culture .....	171
Connection: Spanish Speakers and Others.....	171
Defining Identity.....	172
Implications: Recruitment.....	175
Implications: Retention.....	171
The Researcher’s Epoche and Expectations.....	176
Recommendations for Future Research.....	178
Questions Raised by the Research.....	179
Summary.....	180
References.....	183
APPENDICES	
Appendix A- Letter of Inquiry for Department Heads .....	196
Appendix B- Letter of Invitation.....	197
Appendix C- Demographic, Self-Identification, and Language Survey.....	199
Appendix D- Interview Protocol and Interview Questions .....	204
Appendix E- Information and Consent Form.....	206

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
1. Participant Profile Chart.....	79
2. Categories, Topics, and Themes.....	81
3. Categories, Topics, and Themes.....	156

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

A constant and growing stream of Latino heritage learners (HLs) are entering the school system in the United States and face several education related challenges. One problem that has been documented is a low retention rate at the secondary and post-secondary level. According to several scholars, there is a need for research regarding heritage language learner issues in several areas Brecht and Ingold (2002), Carrier, (2007), Peyton, Lewelling, and Winke (2001), Roca (2003) Valdés, Fishman, Chávez, and Pérez (2006). This chapter includes the statement of the problem, the research question, the purpose statement, the significance of the study, and the definition of relevant terms. First, a definition of the heritage language learner follows and is essential to provide some background on the term.

Valdés (2001) defines the heritage learner (HL) as someone who is raised in a home where a language other than English is spoken. The HL may or may not speak the language, may understand the language, and have an interest in the heritage language (Valdés, 2001). Fishman (2001) contends that heritage language speakers have a personal connection to the language and puts heritage language speakers into three categories that are tied to origin and include: indigenous, colonial, and immigrant. As noted by Wang and Green (2001) Spanish speakers are the largest heritage language group in the United States and fit into the colonial and immigrant language categories outlined by Fishman (2001). Foreign language teachers in this country started using the term *heritage language learner* in 1996 after it appeared in

the Standards for Foreign Language Learning (Wiley, 2001). In this study, the heritage learner (HL) is of Mexican descent, learned or was exposed to Spanish in the home, and is bilingual to some degree. The HL of Mexican descent is sometimes identified as Latino, Chicano, or Hispanic. The terms are used interchangeably in this study.

Latino HLs face certain difficulties in the educational setting, some of which are related to limited proficiency in English. HLs have different levels of English speaking abilities and Latinos, in general, have low retention rates at the secondary and postsecondary level. Persistence is difficult for many of these students. There is a lack of persistence of Latinos in high school and institutions of higher education. According to Fry, a representative of the Pew Hispanic Center who was quoted at a forum on graduation rates for Hispanics, only 18% of Hispanics who begin their studies in institutions of higher education persist and receive degrees (Voke, 2003). Low retention rates for Hispanics, many of whom are HLs, are a concern. Moreover, other research needs and concerns exist regarding this population of learners.

For example, a University of California report titled, *The Heritage Language Research Priorities Report*, points to a need for research in the area of HLs and their educational domain. The main question addressed by the members of the Heritage Language Priorities Research Panel follows: “What are the major substantive issues and pressing research gaps in heritage language education?” (UCLA, 2000, p. 3). As a result of this focused gathering, the research priorities outlined by the Heritage Language Conference members support the need for the research in several areas,

some of which are of interest to the researcher of the proposed study. The members of the panel concluded that research is needed to add to the knowledge base in heritage language education research. For example, important issues and needs that are identified as viable for research topics in the Heritage Language Research Priorities Report (UCLA, 2000) include: the need to conduct research to measure the effects of heritage language learning on the individual, the question of how to encourage language learning, an assessment of attitudes, an analysis of the motivation that HLs have to study Spanish, a need to understand the background of the heritage language speaker, a need to determine the paths that result in maintenance of a heritage language, an analysis of individual student educational needs and an assessment of student attitudes towards instruction. The researcher of the current qualitative study found that some of these topics emerged from the open-ended in-depth interviews. The interviews were designed to encourage the participants to tell about their past and present experiences in general as heritage learners educated in the United States and who are studying or have recently studied advanced Spanish. The researcher was seeking the meaning the HL ascribes to the experience that included the period of time from early childhood through to the present and searched for themes and patterns that emerged to describe the lived experience from the HLs' perspectives. The researcher's interpretative presentation of the findings in the current study contributes information to the knowledge base concerning this fast growing population of learners and addressed some of the research needs identified in the Heritage Language Research Priorities Report as well as needs identified by other scholars in the field.

According to a 2006 report by the United States Census Bureau, there are approximately 42.7 million Hispanics in the United States and 64% of this population is of Mexican heritage. This figure does not include the estimated 11.2 million illegal immigrants living in The United States (Preston, 2008). In 1990, the estimated Hispanic population was 22.4 million. The growth of the Hispanic population has been substantial, but relatively few Hispanics of Mexican descent are found in institutions of higher education and few HLs study advanced Spanish. Latino faculty, including native speakers and heritage learners, represent less than three percent of full-time professors (Harvey, 2002). In addition, only a small fraction of the percent mentioned by Harvey (2002) is actually representative of Latinos who are also HLs. Valdés et al. (2006) notes that most of the university Spanish teaching faculty, which were included in a recent study on the state of heritage languages in California, were of non-Hispanic descent or native born. Additionally, the completion rates for Hispanics in institutions of higher education continue to fall behind that of non-Hispanic students (Fry, 2005). As the Spanish speaking population grows, the need for more teachers with the ability to speak Spanish and teach students with limited English skills will grow as well. A need exists to understand the lived experience of HLs in order to gain insight into the circumstances and motivations of these students. The current study provides insight into the need for advising, placement tests designed for HLs, and their attitudes regarding language instruction. The contribution of the findings in this study should provide educators with a deeper understanding of these issues.

This study focuses specifically on HLs of Mexican descent who were studying or had recently studied advanced Spanish in institutions of higher education. The meaning that HLs ascribe to their experience was explored through in-depth interviews in order to contribute to the knowledge base regarding retention and recruitment in HL educational domains. Several studies have been conducted on students of Mexican heritage, but very few have focused on students studying advanced Spanish language.

### Statement of Problem

HLs of Mexican descent are underrepresented in higher education and in advanced Spanish courses (Harvey, 2007; Valdés et al., 2006). Retention and recruitment of HLs of Mexican descent need to be addressed. Although retention of Latino students at the secondary and post-secondary levels varies from one state to another, improvement is warranted.

According to Harvey (2007), the undergraduate population of Latino students is only three percent nationwide, but due to efforts to recruit students, the percentage is seven percent at The University of Virginia in Charlottesville (Hawkins, 2007). Universities in the Southwest have high numbers of Latino students in comparison to the rest of the country as well. The data varies from institution to institution, however, data from the United States Census Bureau (2004) lists the percentage of Mexican Americans 25 years and older who have attained a bachelor's degree as 6.1 percent, while only 1.8 percent have an advanced degree. Evidence demonstrates that of this percentage, few HLs study advanced Spanish, retention is a problem, and few continue as professors in Spanish departments.

Given the large number of HLs in the United States and the growing need for teachers and other professionals who speak Spanish, why do so few HLs study advanced Spanish? Interviewing those who were or had recently studied advanced Spanish provided some insight into this issue. There is a need to enrich the knowledge base about the experience of HLs studying advanced Spanish in order to address and possibly begin to understand what led these students to pursue the study of the heritage language at the advanced level.

For instance, a recent work by Valdés, et al. (2006) on HLs and bilingual education acknowledges the need to understand the HL and the need to modify how they are taught. Valdés, et al. (2006) state:

The effective involvement by the foreign language teaching profession in maintaining and developing the non-English languages currently spoken by immigrants, refugees, and their children will require that the profession expand and broaden its scope very much beyond the mere recognition of heritage students as more advanced learners of the ‘target’ language. To serve heritage students’ needs, the professions’ areas of interest need to extend to include a population of students who are very unlike traditional foreign language learners at the beginning, intermediate, and even advanced levels (p. 267).

In addition to the need identified by Valdés, et al (2006) to improve Spanish courses for HLs, a need for translators has also been identified. Brecht and Ingold (2002) believe that heritage speakers are a natural resource that has been untapped. They state that the number of students graduating with professional level skills in Spanish is not meeting the needs of the nation. Heritage speakers who develop the

skills in the first language benefit our society in many ways. For example, translators are needed in hospitals, courts, and government offices every day. More teachers with Spanish speaking skills will be needed as well. Exploring and understanding the experiences of heritage speakers in this qualitative study will potentially provide material that may be valuable for informing HL educational practice and the recruitment and retention of HLs.

### Grand Tour Question

Few students of Mexican descent study advanced Spanish and the reasons for this are not understood well at this time. In order to shed some light on this phenomenon, the following research question guides this study:

What can be learned from the past and present experiences of heritage learners (HLs) studying or who have recently studied advanced Spanish that might provide insight about recruiting HLs and retaining HLs in Spanish programs in institutions of higher education?

### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this interpretive study was to explore, understand, and describe the past and present experiences of HLs of Mexican descent who have been educated in the United States and were or had recently studied advanced Spanish at the university level. The researcher sought to understand their experiences and gain insight into the motivations and factors that led these students to study advanced Spanish. This study was important at a time when many HLs were entering and were expected to continue entering educational institutions in the United States into the future.

## Significance

The focus of this qualitative study was the heritage learner in institutions of higher education who made the decision to study advanced Spanish. This study contributes to the knowledge base on HL educational issues and sheds light on topics such as language perceptions, language loss, advising, and identity.

The descriptive data reveals information about the HLs' language educational needs and attitudes towards the study of Spanish and the educational environment. The researcher of the present study and several scholars claim that gaining an understanding of the lived experience and the needs of HLs is essential for educators. For instance, *Recruiting for Success*, an inclusiveness series publication of the Council of Graduate Studies (2003), notes that a need exists to understand cultural differences in order to promote and maintain a multicultural environment. The article addresses the importance of understanding first-generation HLs, retention issues and the educational needs of multicultural students. A well-known scholar and the director of the UC Consortium for Language, Blake (2005), identified a need to investigate several HL topics.

These include the need to understand the multilingual and multicultural nature of the student population and the need to focus specifically on language education, and the importance of family to the HLs (Kramersch, 2005). Azarian (2005) suggests that scholars collect data with interviews about language communities, family, and oral histories in order to inform course design for HLs. Moreover, the interest in HL education is currently very high.

The United States Department of Education recently awarded a grant for 2006 through 2010 to establish A National Heritage Language Resource Center to The Center for World Languages at UCLA and The University of California Consortium for Language Learning and Teaching (2006). The participants' quotes and the interpretive description provided in this study regarding the past and present experiences of HLs in institutions of higher education provides insight regarding HLs in higher education and their educational domain. Information related to attitudes, motivation, and higher education emerged from the findings. In addition, the participants spoke to their experiences within Spanish departments.

The topic regarding ideologies in Spanish departments pertaining to students' backgrounds and language variety is of interest. Valdés et al. (2006) found that the tradition of teaching in Spanish departments might not be beneficial for HLs because it often fails to validate the HLs' experience or dialect. Peninsular Spanish is often considered prestigious. Their study was based on surveys completed by faculty and Latino professionals. While Valdés et al. (2006), addressed the attitude of faculty and Hispanic professionals, the present study gained information on HL attitudes and student perspectives. Other scholars, such as Nieto (1999, 2000), Harvey (2007), and Giroux (1989, 1991), suggest a need for research in the areas concerning student attitude, cultural background, empowerment, education, and the identity of the minority student. The researcher's findings in the present study address the educational background of the HL. Some of the topics presented through quotes address attitude, identity, and empowerment issues.

In the area of curriculum development, Byrnes (1998) states that heritage speakers will be attracted to colleges if the courses are relevant to their needs and language learning profile. This involves providing courses that address the HLs language background and instructors who are knowledgeable and sensitive to HL attitudes about language. This reiterates the outcome of Valdés et al. (2006) who suggest that there is a need to respect the heritage learners' cultural and language experience and a need to include language maintenance and societal bilingualism topics in the curriculum. Therefore, studies that, in part, analyze the personal educational experience of HLs are important because they give insight into the learning experience and needs of the heritage language learners from their perspective. The research topics mentioned are issues of concern to educators. The researcher provides insight into HLs' interests and addressing this through course design, and suggestions for addressing retention, and recruitment of students of Mexican descent in the last chapter of this thesis.

Finally, the outcome of this study should provide educators and institutions of higher education with a deeper understanding of HLs and their lived experience. Harvey believes that the institution of higher education should reflect society (Hawkins, 2007). In essence, more HLs need to be present in institutions of higher education in order to represent the population of Hispanics in our society. A deeper understanding of the HLs lived experience may add valuable information to the knowledge base in this research area.

### Sample Selection

The study included ten participants that represented a stratified sample in order to narrowly focus the dissertation topic. The participants are HLs of Mexican Descent who learned or were exposed to Spanish in the home. They attended grade school, and/or middle school, and high school in the United States. None of the parents of the participants have graduated from a university. They were currently or recently studying advanced levels of Spanish at the university level. The participating universities were located in the Western United States. Two males participated in the study. According to the research, there tend to be more Latino females in institutions of higher education than males (Fry, 2002). The researcher found this to be true.

The participant information regarding the past is based on childhood memories and therefore, may not be completely accurate. However, this did not take away from the value of the study. The study group was small, however, it is important to note that generalizability is not an issue in a study that employs a qualitative approach of this nature. Overall, the knowledge gained from the interviews provides valuable insight for scholars interested in the field of heritage learner education.

### Bias

The researcher is a heritage language learner with a BA and an MA in Spanish and took steps to avoid bias. These included keeping a journal to record impressions, and answering the interview questions prior to conducting the interviews. The researcher also understood the importance of not asking leading questions and allowed and encouraged the participant to tell what the experience was like as an HL educated in the United States who has studied advanced Spanish. The researcher understood the

importance of not imposing personal opinions on the participants during the interview as well. In addition, the researcher used the participants' quotes to bring the reader closer to the experience of the heritage language learner and allow the participants' voices to be heard.

### Definition of Terms

#### *Advanced Spanish*

An advanced Spanish course is a 300, 400, or 500 level university level course. These may include literature, linguistics, methodology, and/or classes of Spanish for the professions.

#### *Bilingualism*

A bilingual individual is able to comprehend and/or speak more than one language. The level of comprehension, skills and abilities in the languages vary widely from individual to individual. Often, the languages are used within one community to fulfill different needs (Peyton, Ranard, & McGinnis, 2001).

#### *Circumstantial Bilingualism*

A second language is learned due to exposure, circumstances and a need to learn the second language (Valdés, 1992).

#### *Culture*

Culture encompasses the idea that meanings and behaviors are shared by a society (Marsella & Yamada, 2000). The concept of culture as it relates to adjustment, growth and development is an important concept to consider when researching participants who are exposed to two cultures (Cuéllar, 2000).

### *Dropout Rate*

This is the rate that students leave school. The fact that students may leave after having accomplished certain personal goals or not or whether they continue in another institution is not known and beyond the scope of this study.

### *English-Language Learners (ELL)*

A term used to describe students who are learning English. Previously, Limited English Proficient was used to describe these students (Wiley, 2001).

### *English as a Second Language (ESL)*

This term is used to describe programs, courses, and resources used to teach English as a second language. It is also applied to students learning English as a second language.

### *Ethnic Identity*

Ethnic identity has been defined in several ways including the following: the feeling of belonging to certain group, such as a social class, community, or nationality (Fishman, 1999).

### *Ethnocultural Identity*

This involves the extent to which an individual practices the behaviors of the ethnic group (Marsella & Yamada., 2000). For example, some cultural practices include language use, celebration, and food preparation.

### *Heritage Language*

The language, other than English, that is learned in the home. Spanish is the heritage language discussed in the current study.

### *Heritage Learner (HL)*

The HL in this study is of Mexican descent, has studied advanced Spanish, and has been educated in this country. HLs grew up in a home where a non-English language was spoken. HLs do not all speak the first language.

### *Heritage Speaker*

As defined by Valdés (2001), Heritage speakers are or were exposed to a heritage language other than English in the home, and/or understand the heritage language, and are bilingual to some degree.

### *Hispanic Serving Institute*

A Hispanic Serving Institute has a Hispanic population of at least 30%.

### *Hispanic*

The term Hispanic is used interchangeably with the term Latino in this study. In some circles, Hispanic has negative connotations related to colonization. Many prefer the term Latino because it is detached from the idea of colonization.

### *Language Maintenance*

The speaker maintains and uses a language in a multilingual environment. The use of a certain language is sometimes restricted to specific situations or with the community of speakers of the same language.

### *Language Shift*

The shift from using one language to another is due to various reasons. This may occur when a speaker begins to use the dominant language more than the first language due to various factors. In this study, language shift refers to the shift from the first language, Spanish, to English (García, 1992).

### *Limited English Proficient (LEP)*

This term is applied to students who are not proficient in English. They often speak or are exposed to a language other than English in the home.

### *Retention*

The National Center for Education statistics defines retention as an institutional measure of how many students remain in the institution and graduate. This definition will be used in the present study.

### *Spanish for the Professions*

These Spanish classes address teaching communication and vocabulary as well as other writing skills for professionals such as: doctors, lawyers, teachers, or people in the field of business or tourism.

### *Societal Bilingualism*

This includes having a knowledge or understanding of the society in which the bilingualism exists (García, 1992). The language use is specific to the society in which it is used.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The heritage language learner population continues to increase, as does the need for teachers with Spanish speaking skills in educational settings. The number of HLs of Mexican descent taking advanced Spanish at the undergraduate and graduate level is low. Furthermore, many Latino students who begin their bachelor degrees do not complete their studies. The review of the literature addresses topics regarding descriptive statistics, language education, background, attitudes, and research in the area of HL education.

#### Statistics on Latinos

This section of the literature review includes descriptive statistics on the Latino and Spanish speaking population. The statistics reveal some figures on population growth, retention, and other relevant educational HL (heritage learner) student information. The growth of the Spanish speaking population in this country has been quite rapid and will have an impact on educational institutions. For instance, the constant influx of large numbers of Spanish speakers will influence the services that will be needed in educational settings (Cuéllar, 2000). These include translation services in hospitals, educational institutions, and more. Because of the increasing number of immigrants in the United States implications on education are worth considering.

The Hispanic population has increased substantially in the United States since 1990. Only four other countries in the world have a larger Spanish speaking population than the United States (Sweley, 2006). The number of heritage speakers

of Spanish entering the school system will continue to grow. Spellings (2006), the United States Secretary of Education, in a No Child Left Behind report on Limited Language Learners, states that by 2025, one in four will be Limited English Proficient (LEP) students and that this is one of the fastest growing groups of students in the United States today. By 2013, the enrollment in public schools is expected to grow by 1.4 million and most of the growth is expected to be from the immigrant population (Kronholz, 2006). Kronholz (2006) notes that 20% of children under five years of age are Hispanic. Valdés (2001, p. ix), a Stanford professor and expert in the field, states that there is an “enormous” influence on all levels of the nation’s educational institutions due to the influx of immigrants. This will most likely include teacher education departments in institutions of higher education as well.

Garcia (1992) points out that the Hispanic-origin population was about 20.8 million in 1990 according to the United States Bureau of the Census 1991 report. This figure was equal to about 8.4% of the population in the United States at the time (Garcia, 1992). According to Cuéllar (2000) the United States census bureau has limitations. For instance, in 1990 the census was estimated to have missed 5% of the Hispanic population (Cuéllar, 2000). Roca (2003), who lists a 2001 United States Census figure of 21.7 million Hispanics of Mexican descent living in the United States, affirms that the use of Spanish is increasing as new immigrants come in to the country and the impact on schools is substantial as well.

Currently, it is estimated that there are approximately 12 million illegal immigrants in the United States and approximately 42.7 million citizens of Hispanic origin are living in the United States (Census Bureau, 2006). According to the United

States Census Bureau 2006 report, the percentage of Hispanics of Mexican heritage is 64%. By 2020 the United States census projects that Hispanics will be the largest minority (Cuéllar, 2000). Increasing numbers of Hispanics will continue to impact the educational system and concerns regarding retention and recruitment in educational institutions and in advanced Spanish courses exist.

Krashen (1999) listed the dropout rate as 5.7% for White non-Hispanics and 14.5% for Hispanics. Warren and Halpern-Manners (2007) found that approximately 50% of Hispanics do not complete high school. The statistic was only slightly higher than this in 1971 (Giroux, 1997). Many Latino males have been held back a grade and 48% are older than their classmates (Nieto, 1999). The Pew Hispanic Center, which was founded in 2001, is a research organization that seeks to understand the Hispanic population in the United States. Many topics are studied by the organization, including education, attitudes and more. In one Pew report, that is based on information gathered from California, New York, Arizona, New Jersey, Florida, Texas and Illinois, it is stated that “Hispanic undergraduates are half as likely as their White peers to finish a bachelor’s degree, a disparity at least as large as the disparity in finishing high school”(Fry, 2005, p. 1). Fry (2005) notes that poor retention and completion rates are evident as well as declining literacy rates between 1992 and 2003.

The Census Bureau compared literacy scores from a 1992 and 2003 survey and found that the literacy levels are significantly different and demonstrate a decline in literacy for Hispanics in 2003 and Doyle (2006) contends that low literacy rates should be factored in as a cause for “divisiveness” in our society because illiterate

citizens are often limited in their participation in social and political settings (p. 32). This fact has important implications regarding the empowerment of minorities.

The average Hispanic family has approximately 26 books in the home and overall, schools with bilingual programs had few books (Krashen, 2000). Krashen (2000) argues that if HLs are not exposed to an academic level of Spanish, they are likely to only use conversational Spanish. This, according to Krashen (2000), leads to students who speak English well, but do not have well developed literacy skills. Krashen (2000) claims that the development of academic skills in the first language transfers to the second language and helps HLs achieve at higher levels. The reported low literacy rates for Hispanics also impacts their academic achievement levels.

The growth of the Hispanic population and the subsequent increase in the use of the Spanish language have implications for educational institutions (Roca, 2003). According to the 2002 National Survey of Latinos by the Pew Hispanic Center found that Spanish was the main language spoken in the home by 53% of the 3000 Hispanics from diverse backgrounds who were included in the interview. The use of Spanish is increasing due to the continuous influx of immigrants in this country and will impact the educational system. The Title III program is designed for addressing the instruction of children who are limited English proficient (LEP). One of the aims of the program is to improve proficiency levels in English of immigrant and Native American students and is part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The program also is designed to encourage outreach to the community, parents, and low-income students.

Poverty is also a factor that should be considered when studying the HL population. Hispanics tend to be less educated and have lower incomes than non-Hispanics (Cuéllar, 2000). Giroux & Giroux (2004) write that 12.2 million children live in poverty and that in 1998, 34 percent of Hispanic children were poor compared to 14 percent of White children. Another researcher blames the lack of knowledge of cultural norms as a reason that students leave higher education before completing a degree (Vásquez, 2003). Lack of access to the knowledge of the dominant class is a reason given for the low numbers of minorities in institutions of higher education by Vásquez (2003). Vásquez (2003) also notes that other than some universities in the Southwest, minorities are unrepresented.

Statistics on HLs indicate a growth in the population that will impact the school system at all levels and the under-representation of HLs in higher education continues to occur. According to Harvey (2007), the number of Hispanic faculty members is low and Hispanics represent only 3% of the undergraduate population in higher education (Hawkins, 2007). A report on the status of minority students in higher education found that the majority of Hispanics are enrolled in two-year institutions and that enrollment numbers have increased over the years, but the report also found that 54.9 percent of the students did not complete a degree (Harvey & Anderson, 2005). Vásquez (2003) argues that, in general, Latinos are not on an equal level socially or economically with non-Hispanics and this is demonstrated by the low percentage of minorities in institutions of higher education.

As noted before, few HLs study advanced Spanish and fewer are taught academic levels of Spanish, which, according to Krashen (2000), may lead to low literacy rates

in English. Valdés et al. (2006) found that very few of the faculty participants in a study on the state of heritage languages in California were Latinos, which again points to the lack of Latino faculty members. In summary, the increasing population of Latinos will have substantial implications on educational institutions.

### Bilingual Education and the Heritage Language Learner

As the population of HLs continues to grow in our country, the implications of this growth on the educational system are and will be important (Cuellar, 2000). An understanding of literature on HLs and their educational domain is necessary in order to provide insight into the HL's experience. A review of the literature regarding education and the HL reveals important connections between bilingual education and the HL. Other themes that were relevant to the HL's experience and that emerged from the researcher's review of the literature include bilingualism, language instruction and choice, controversy surrounding bilingual education, models of instruction, academic preparation, literacy development, recommendations for improving bilingual education, teaching the HL and higher education (Cummins, 2001; Valdés, 2001). Bilingual instruction and English language instruction have potentially influenced the lives of many HLs.

### Bilingual Education

The level of an individual's bilingualism varies and is dependent on many factors, such as environment, age exposed to the second language, the use of the language, and education for example. The use of two languages in one community and in different situations is a reality of many bilingual communities in California and elsewhere in the United States. It is common to see a bilingual speaker go easily

from one language to the other depending on the situation. The speaker will walk into a Mexican bakery and converse in Spanish and step next door to a bank and conduct business in English or vice versa for example. In some areas, all communication is conducted in Spanish. This type of use depending on need, location, and language choice varies widely and is very common.

Romaine (1998) uses a paradigm by Mackey (1967) to describe bilingualism. This paradigm is divided into four sections; degree of language spoken, function or how and when language is used, alternation or how the speaker alternates between the two languages and interference, which looks at how the languages interfere with each other. García (1992) discusses the notion of intra-ethnic communication where a language, such as Spanish, is used within the ethnic group and English is used with everyone else. Another aspect of language choice is related to social perceptions of the language spoken. How society views a language sometimes influences the speakers positively or negatively. Some bilingual speakers are very fluent, while others only comprehend the language and do not speak it. Some are able to use academic levels of the language while others only use the language to socialize informally. The possibilities and levels of bilingualism vary tremendously. However, if a language is valued and needed in a community it has a better chance of being maintained.

Regarding the bilingual language development of children, Hamers and Blanc (1990) state that if the language is valued and exposure to the speech community is constant, the bilingual abilities of the child will develop positively. On the other hand, the development will suffer when the speech form is undervalued, which is

sometimes the case due to negative attitudes surrounding Spanish speakers. Recently, an NPR report on increasing discrimination against illegal immigrants and new English-Only local ordinances in the country concluded that illegal immigrants are being stereotyped as being tied to crimes, drugs, and terrorism (Neary & Luden, 2006). Bilingual education is seen as a threat. One caller during the program tied bilingual education to the destruction of our country. These examples show that negative attitudes have been part of the reality facing HLs and bilingual education today.

### Language Instruction and Education

Bilingual education and English language instruction, or the lack of the aforementioned, affect the lives of HLs and their access to age appropriate curriculum. This is sometimes due to a paucity of teachers with the appropriate skills to teach HLs.

A lack of teachers with appropriate training in English language instruction has been a problem. According to Carrier (2007), a statistic from the year 2000 verifies that very few, 2.5%, of teachers of ELLs (English Language Learners) have training in the field. Milner (2007) lists data from 2003 showing that 84% of public school teachers are White, while only 5.7% were Hispanic. Some scholars, such as Nieto, (1999) see this trend as one form of inequality. The statistics clearly point to a low number of Hispanics completing bachelor degrees and therefore, fewer teachers from diverse backgrounds exist. The HL may have been exposed to any one or many of the models that exist to teach English language learners.

Several models are in place for what Valdés (2001) refers to as teaching and not teaching English in the United States. Recently, a typical goal of many bilingual and English language programs in the United States has been to help the student assimilate into the dominant language (Valdés, 2001). The teacher guides the students in instruction that is designed to enable them to enter classrooms where English is the only language spoken.

Assimilation into the dominant culture is a common outcome when two cultures come together and as mentioned before, a goal of many bilingual programs. A trait of the dominant culture in the United States is that it represents economic strength to the immigrant population. The English language is also prevalent in the media and the main form of communication in many areas. These reasons give HL speakers a strong incentive to learn English.

### Learning English

Learning English is important for many HLs and their parents. Past surveys by The Educational Testing Service and the Center for Equal Opportunity, which are mentioned in an *Atlantic Monthly* article about bilingual education, indicate that parents of HLs want their children to learn English rather than focus on the heritage language in school (Porter, 1998). Another survey conducted by the Office of Vocational and Adult Education in 2000 reports that the demand for English language classes is high and indicates that immigrants are eager to learn English (Peyton, Ranard, & McGinnis., 2001). A preference for English by second and third generation HLs was noted in a seven-year study, but the participants of Mexican descent valued bilingualism at the same time (Suarez, 2007). Malave (2006), who

conducted a study of 12 Hispanic families, found that the parents had a positive attitude towards bilingual education, but also had a desire to learn English along with their children. A recent survey conducted by UCLA (2007) concluded that 98% of the HLs' parents want them to learn the heritage language at the university level.

#### For and Against Bilingual Education

Porter (1998) lists faults with bilingual education, such as isolation of HLs, and lack of higher-level learning as part of the argument used to demonstrate that bilingual education is a failure. However, proponents of bilingual education Valdés et al., (2006), Carriera, (2007), Nieto, (1999), and Krashen, (1996) point out the same problems and still consider bilingual programs to be valuable and offer recommendations for improving the state of ESL (English as a Second Language) and bilingual programs. The trend in the literature shows a positive view towards providing appropriate bilingual education for the HL, but also demonstrates that an improvement in the areas of heritage language, English as a second language, and bilingual education exists.

Bilingual programs are not offered to all heritage language learners due to various reasons including: a lack of funding, lack of teachers with appropriate experience and skills in the second language, and the typical belief that students who are immersed in English will learn the second language within a year. Sweley (2006) sees negative attitudes in this country surrounding the issue of bilingualism in the United States and blames the anti-bilingual laws for making it difficult to develop programs for HLs. For example, due to various propositions, such as the Arizona state proposition 203 which requires English-only instruction, and California's

proposition 227 which mandates that English be used to teach ELLs, bilingual education programs have decreased. Bilingual programs are looked on negatively and there have been several English-Only ordinances that have been passed in several small towns in the U.S in the last year (Neary & Luden, 2007). However, only the federal government has the power to instigate laws such as these, but the fact that the ordinances are passing points out that anti-bilingual sentiment exists in this country. Nieto (1999) sees the lack of programs in the native language as another sign of inequality. However, several models of instruction for teaching HLs exist.

### Models of Instruction for Students Learning English

Programs for English language learners (ELLs) vary substantially in number and design. Currently, bilingual education classes, which are usually designed to help transition students into English, are rare after grade school (Valdés, 2001). Valdés (2001) explains that English language instruction for HLs in middle school and high school varies from focusing entirely on English for one to three periods a day, to English immersion or ESL instruction and the inclusion of special subject matter courses designed for English language learners (ELLs). Some HLs who are learning English spend the school day surrounded by English speakers, while other HLs are often isolated from English speaking students for much of the day (Carriera, 2007; Valdés, 2001). The Superintendent's website for Washington State lists the "pullout" ESL program as the most popular method used even though it is known to be the most ineffective method (2007). The students are isolated from English speaking peers in "pullout" programs, thus minimizing their contact with English. Heritage language learning programs when available are sometimes offered after

school. The heritage language speaking communities often provide these programs, which teach language and culture.

## Academic Preparation

According to Valdés (2001), the state of bilingual education is facing several challenges. For one, the author noted that the English taught is often at levels that do not prepare students to continue college studies. One challenge included the inability of students entering schools in middle school and high school to gain enough proficiency in English to take higher-level courses. They are not able to reach a level of English that is high enough to allow them to succeed in college preparatory classes (Carriera, 2007; Valdés, 2001). Carriera (2007), who lists typical class schedules for HLs in a recent study, demonstrates that the programs are weak in college-preparatory courses. The study shows two typical schedules that include two language development courses, physical education, and low-level math courses. Andalon (2005), conducted a study on the path that Mexican American students follow to prepare to attend college and found that curriculum that is designed to help them prepare for college is essential for their success as well as exposure to appropriate counseling and outreach programs.

Valdés (2001) found that only students with the appropriate ESL skills are allowed into the college preparatory classes and that in some cases, students are turned away when they show an interest in taking upper level course work. Valdés (2001) and Carriera (2007) suggest that upper level classes given in the first language would benefit the student without adequate English skills (2001).

Valdés (2001) also believes that at times, the educational system prevents students from accessing higher levels of learning because of the restrictions put on students who have not passed certain ESL classes. In one case, a student who did not meet the

criteria, but desired the challenge of entering a college preparatory class, transferred to another school in order to attend the college preparatory classes. Valdés (2001) sees the restrictions placed on the students as too strict. Carrieria (2007) argues that in order to narrow the Latino achievement gap, Spanish-English biliteracy and a focus on academic English should be a part of the educational experience of the HL. Cummins (1998; 2001) who has reviewed countless studies on bilingual education, also contends that biliteracy has the potential of improving English academic skills.

The outcome of two federal cases, *Lau v. Nichols* and *Castañeda v. Pickard*, require that non-English speakers receive equal opportunity to learn the same material as their peers (Valdés, 2001). However, this does not always happen. Most bilingual programs use the first language to teach basic concepts and are designed to help the students make a transition into English (Valdés, 2001; Carrieria, 2007). One outcome of this is students who graduate from secondary school without the appropriate level of education. This is especially true for HLs, some of who are recent immigrants entering at the middle school and high school level. There is not enough time for HLs with low-level language ability to gain sufficient skills in English that allow their access into higher levels of education. Carrieria (2007) notes that the focus in English language instruction is limited and does not include academically challenging material.

### Literacy Skills and Bilingual Education

Cummins (1999; 2001) states that programs that promote bilingualism and biliteracy have been found to develop English academic skills of students in general. The concept of building literacy skills in the second language is valuable, but not a

typical reality of the HL experience today. Several scholars Carriera (2007), Cummins (1998), Krashen (2000), and Valdés (2001) have claimed that learning in the first language aids in building literacy skills, but according to Valdés (2001) and Carriera (2007), few students receive instruction that develops the minority language. Furthermore, texts for ESL often focus on a certain skill such as writing or listening, for example, and intellectually challenging material is often lacking.

A brief review of some of the Longman Pearson texts for children reveals that storylines and film supplement some textbooks, but Valdés (2001) states that, in general, ESL texts that teach a select skill are predominant and that the material taught is not at the level of the English speaking peers.

Valdés (2001) found that important factors that are needed to learn a second language, such as teachers who speak the target language and social settings that bring the language learners and speakers of English together, are not often part of the HL's experience. Valdés (2001) observes that a typical objective of ESL instructors includes keeping the children quiet and having them follow the textbook.

The study also reveals that the English used by the instructors was often simplified and that often the teacher's explanations could not be understood by the students who, according to Valdés (2001), are not able to learn the language in one or two years, as many educators believe. Cummins (2001) states that empirical data suggest that immigrant students need approximately five years to catch up with their English speaking peers' academic level of English. However, they may have fluent conversational skills after only two years (Cummins, 2001).

## Recommendations for Teaching English Language Learners

Valdés (2001) concludes the aforementioned study by listing several recommendations for teaching the English language learner (ELL) or HL. Some of the study's recommendations include: not isolating the student, keeping the time that it takes to learn a foreign language in mind, giving the students the opportunity to study the curriculum of their peers while learning English and teaching language learning skills. Several studies point to the exclusive use of English to teach English as a cause for language shock, frustration, and retention problems (Valdés, 2001). Nieto (1999) recommends several strategies that are research based. These strategies include acknowledging the culture and language in order to improve the academic achievement of the student and teaching the students how to succeed in school.

Carriera (2007) recommends providing HLs with a high academic level of study in English and other content areas, incorporating the students' heritage, and teaching the students about the American education system. García-Moya (1981) states that from the purist perspective, the non-standard dialect is seen as inferior when compared to the standard dialect. The author suggests that teachers of bilingual students should be aware of different varieties of Spanish and the value of different dialects. Teachers should learn and be aware of the dialect spoken by their students and incorporate the students' cultural backgrounds and history into the course. In addition, they should be aware of the specific problems that HLs have when learning the standard dialect, current theory and methods for teaching bilingual students.

Fernández (1981) points to the fact that often HLs' speaking ability is good, but spelling and recognizing words is sometimes difficult. Some of the specific teaching

suggestions made by the author include teaching bilinguals spelling skills, the development of oral skills for use in formal situations, and vocabulary building. The Spanish spoken by many HLs is often specific to the home environment and therefore, classes that expand vocabulary and situational uses of the language benefit students in a broader social arena (Fernández, 1981).

Students who study their heritage language for a large amount of the day have not shown deterioration in their English academic language development (Cummins, 2001). In other words, bilingual education that focuses on building skills in both languages, additive bilingualism, has positive affects on the learners' language abilities.

#### Teaching the Heritage Language in School

Other studies mention the positive effects that teaching in the first language and acknowledging the students' backgrounds have on their ability to succeed in school. Positive attitude and improved cognitive skills are some of the effects mentioned in relation to exposing the HL to the native tongue, while teachers' negative attitudes towards language speakers and the HL's lack of literacy skills in the first language are detrimental to academic achievement. Hamers and Blanc (1990) explain that minority children normally enter education with fewer literacy skills than their English-speaking peers due to the level of education most receive in their native country and that their language is sometimes seen as inferior in the educational setting. However, improving literacy skills in the first language and learning in both languages have positive effects on the HL as is evident in the literature.

Hamers and Blanc (1990) mention a study conducted in California that found that bilingual education developed the language skills of children to a greater degree than similar students in an English only program. For example, several scholars have noted that developing the literacy skills of HLs in the first language has been found to improve cognitive skills (Cummins, 1986; Hamers & Blanc, 1990; Krashen, 1999, 2000).

Valdés et al. (2006), who find several faults with ESL programs, points to the need to teach the curriculum in the first language. The review revealed that several scholars mention the advantages of providing language development in the first language to HLs (Anderson & Anderson; 1991, Cummins, 1990; 2001; Krashen, 1991, 1999; Roca, 2000; Valdés et al., 2006). Bilingual students educated in the first language are more successful and it has been found that bilingual education is not detrimental to the student's ability to speak English (Krashen, 1996).

However, Hamer et al. (1990) explain that bilingual education for minority students is often designed to prepare them for education in the second and dominant language and not as functional bilinguals. Wright (2007) in a report on the teaching of English in the era of the No Child Left Behind Act notes that teachers have stopped using the heritage language due to pressures related to the high-stakes testing and administrator's restrictions. Wright (2007) has found that students are doing poorly on high-stakes tests in Arizona since the elimination of bilingual programs.

Therefore, English-Only instruction has not helped the students achieve better scores.

An outcome of Wright's (2007) study indicates that there is a documented and critical need for high-level heritage speakers in our country and that ESL and TESOL provide educational benefits by increasing English and Spanish capabilities.

Hamers and Blanc (1990) contend that understanding the bilingual's ability to develop two languages and the ability to interact appropriately in different social contexts can lead to programs that work towards and not against functional bilingualism. Understanding the educational domains that the HL may have been exposed to and the various philosophies regarding the teaching of English language learners is important for gaining knowledge about how these educational experiences and issues may affect the HL. The educational environments vary greatly as does the extent of bilingualism of the HL.

#### Spanish Instruction in Institutions of Higher Education

Spanish instruction in institutions of higher education has generally followed the traditional literature approach. Potowski (2001) conducted research on the needs of HLs and found that clearer goals and feedback policies are needed in institutions of higher education providing Spanish instruction to HLs. In addition, more HL programs are needed. For instance, Potowski (2001) claims that 68% of higher education institutions do not offer Spanish for HLs. Most institutions of higher education train students in Spanish so that they are able to read and analyze literature in advanced courses. Valdés, González, López García, and Márquez (2003) explain that teaching language is not given much attention by tenured faculty in foreign language departments and that hierarchies exist that may influence the attitudes of Latinos in the United States. For instance, faculty and students who are native

speakers often hold a place of superiority above United States Latinos and this hierarchy is often tied to social class and education (Valdés, et al., 2003). Generally, most departments of language in higher education are composed of a mix of natives and non-natives. Within the hierarchies, different Spanish varieties are considered superior to others with Latino Spanish, which is spoken in the United States, as being the least valued. The researchers also found that English-influenced Spanish of non-native speakers was considered to be more prestigious than the Spanish spoken by the United States Latino (Valdés et al., 2003). The investigators also found that the same low level of prestige was also attached to Spanish spoken by speakers from countries with higher numbers of indigenous peoples and poorer economies and that most of the native and non-native speakers interviewed hold a negative view towards the Spanish used by Latinos in the United States. The researchers also believe that Latinos in the United States face the difficult challenge of learning standard Spanish (Valdés et al., 2003).

These beliefs that exist towards United States Latinos in higher education are important to be aware of when analyzing the data if topics on language choice, higher education, and the influence of professors emerge from the interviews. Several universities offer classes for HLs and there has been a growing interest in the area since 9/11. The University of Illinois at Urbana has recently added a heritage language degree. A survey on the state of heritage language programs in the United States demonstrates that programs are growing at the secondary and college level. One difficulty in addressing the needs of HLs is the varying levels of ability that they have in the Spanish language.

### Attitude and Language

Negative attitudes towards bilingualism exist, however, maintaining a bicultural identity and the heritage language has been tied to increasing the academic ability in the first language. Encouraging the use of the first language leads to a positive self-image and cultural awareness that potentially can enhance the feeling of empowerment in the student. In addition, several studies which were reviewed suggest that the incorporation of the first language and culture into the education of the minority will increase the student's chances for academic success (Cummins, 2001). Therefore, exploring the literature on empowerment and attitude as it relates to the HL is necessary in order to understand the educational environment of this student's population. García (1992) points to the importance of being aware of qualitative research on attitudes of language learners. In addition to providing information on the HL educational domain, issues related to attitude, identity, empowerment, and language learning are presented in more detail in the next section of the literature review.

### Attitude, Identity, and Empowerment

Attitude, identity, and empowerment have been related to educational success and failure in the literature reviewed. This section of the literature review will provide some relevant information on these topics and several scholars who have influenced the field, and findings on attitude, identity, and empowerment as they relate to the HL and the educational domain. Several critical pedagogy scholars such as Freire (1991, 2002), Cummins (2001), Nieto (1999), and Giroux (1989, 1991, 1997) have influenced the field of education and the literature on minorities and education.

Freire (1991; 2002), argued for multi-directional learning, understanding the students' backgrounds, and making information available to students regarding power orientation and believed in the students' ability to illicit change. Of importance in Freire's (2002) framework is the idea that the teacher should understand and value the student's background, and learn from the student. Freire (2002) was adamant that educators be aware of the student's background "the educator must not be ignorant of, underestimate, or reject any of the 'knowledge of living experience' with which the educands (i.e. students) come to school" (p. 58).

Another scholar concerned with the backgrounds of the students is Nieto, a professor of multicultural education. Nieto (1999) has provided insight into inequality, multicultural education, student failure, the affect of teachers' ideologies on students, the relationship between culture and learning, and empowerment. Nieto (1999) explains that in order to maintain their identity, Mexican American minorities will sometimes reject certain behaviors because they see them as representing the White culture. Nieto (1999) states that this positive behavior, which is rejected, is often needed to be successful in an academic setting, however, the author also claims that learning can be influenced when students are empowered to explore the conditions in their life and understand that they can affect change in their world. Ideologies of HLs may affect their educational success. In addition, the educational goals of Latinos can be affected by cultural beliefs.

Canales (2000) points out that the "virginity myth," a myth that continues the belief that Latinas will be taken care of if they remain virgins and marry and the belief that to be a "good mother" means that she will stay home with the children,

prevent some Latinas from becoming educated or completing their education. The aforementioned researcher states that when a counselor points out the benefits of getting an education to the Latinas, the issue is reframed and Latinas may change their perspectives, which were originally based on cultural beliefs, about what a 'good mother' is (Canales, 2000).

Understanding the HL's background is necessary for educators. In addition, educators should explore and reassess stereotypes concerning Latinos. Nieto (1999) suggests that teachers evaluate and change their attitudes towards minority students to help promote connections with students. Teachers who understand the student's backgrounds will be more likely to implement strategies that engage their students.

Milner (2007), who has provided a framework for conducting educational research involving minorities, also suggests the importance of being aware of the cultural background of the participants and representing the participant's narratives in order to understand the lived experience. Asserting the student's history and the self are at the crux of critical pedagogy and the concept of empowerment (Kanpol, 1994). Giroux (2006), in *America on the Edge*, reiterates the notion that the student's experience and history are relevant and that the combination of knowledge and power can promote emancipation for the student.

Giroux (2006), a prolific writer and critical pedagogue, is also a proponent of empowering students by teaching them how to think critically. Giroux (2006) and Nieto (1999) have argued that the connection between language and identity is very strong. Moreover, Cummings (2001) states that a tie exists between Maintaining the heritage and strengthening a child's cultural identity. Language is related to culture,

power, and history (Giroux, 2006). According to Dorian (1999) language links humans to their ethnic identity as an identity marker and carries “extensive cultural content” (p. 31). Languages symbolize the people and the cultures that use them (Fishman, 1999). In an essay on language and ethnicity, Fishman (1999) points to the importance of understanding the intricacies and abstractness of language. A person’s identity is often interwoven with the individual’s relationship with an ethnic group. Of interest as well is the flexibility of ethnic identity as noted by Fishman (1999). An individual will easily exchange one ethnic identity for another ethnic identity under the right circumstances (Fishman, 1999).

The individual may be rewarded for changing in some circumstances. The process of acculturation and change are typical outcomes of two cultures coming together. “Ethnicity and its link to language are always fully engaged in ongoing social change, notwithstanding the continuity and authenticity emphases that both display” (Fishman, 1999, p. 452). A study of Mexican American families in Texas and California, found that the parents viewed the concept of bilingualism positively, but also saw their children’s ability to speak Spanish as an important element of their Latino identity (Suarez, 2007). Another study on acculturation and postsecondary education found a positive correlation between higher levels of acculturation and generational status, and successful academic performance (Hurtado-Ortiz & Gavain, 2007). The same researchers also found a positive influence from parents on HLs’ postsecondary study.

Overall, a trend in the literature demonstrates that associations found between attitude, identity, empowerment and education have important implications on the

education and success of the heritage language learner (Cummins 1998, 2001; Freire, 2002; Giroux & Giroux, 2004; Nieto, 1999; Vásquez, 2003). For instance, Cummins (1998) argues that student underachievement is related to status and power, and suggests that programs should value the student's identity and empower the student in order to address achievement issues. The following quote expresses Cummins (1998) view regarding bilingual education, identity, and empowerment:

I have also argued (e.g., Cummins, 1981a, 1986) [sic] that bilingual education by itself is no panacea. The reasons why some groups of culturally diverse students experience long-term persistent underachievement have much more to do with issues of status and power than with linguistic factors in isolation. Thus, educational interventions that challenge the low status that has been assigned to a linguistic or cultural group are much more likely to be successful than those that reinforce this low status. It follows that a major criterion for judging the likely efficacy of any form of bilingual education or all-English program is the extent to which it generates a sense of empowerment among culturally diverse students and communities by challenging the devaluation of students' identities in the wider society. (¶ 3)

Valuing the language spoken by HLs who need to develop speaking skills in Spanish is important because these students show evidence of feeling intimidated when speaking the language and their language is an important part of their heritage (Potowski, 2001). In addition, empowerment and the student's perceived status in society affect achievement and are closely tied to the identity of the student, which is another important concept. Self-identity is a complex issue tied to language.

Preserving one's identity as it relates to the heritage language has been linked to success in the educational realm. For example, maintenance of the heritage language has been noted as a vehicle for strengthening a student's cultural identity (Baker, 1996; Cummins 2001). This in turn, helps create positive student attitudes.

Regarding attitude, Romaine (1998) conducted a study that provides evidence that negative attitudes of teachers towards bilingualism exist. The author documented instances of teachers encouraging students and parents to speak only English in the home environment. Cummins (2001) reports one instance of a school psychologist blaming the use of a student's heritage language in the home as the reason for the student's academic problems in school. Overall, the literature reviewed reveals that attitude towards language has the potential of having an important impact on the success of the HL and language maintenance. A pattern in the literature reviewed tends to show that a positive attitude towards the heritage culture is related to maintaining the heritage language and culture. Other themes that are tied to academic success included support systems for HLs.

De Souza (2006) conducted a study on academically successful high school students and attributed their success to maintaining the cultural heritage, becoming bi-literate and bilingual, the positive role of the library and family, and improved attitudes that were gained towards schools from being involved in after-school programs. Another scholar found that the family's support and high aspirations for education, maintaining a tie to the Mexican community, and not forgetting the struggles of their ancestors motivated high school students to succeed (Sanchez, 2005).

Another study including high school level students reports that peer influence, knowledge about financial aid, and support from the school had a significant influence on the student's decision to go to college, while the influence of parental support, showed no significant difference (Fondon, 2005). The outcome of a study on 18 families found that the parent's involvement in community-based activities was a way to increase their cultural capital regarding education and that having career goals in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade were predictors of increased preparation for college as well (Mena, 2005). A trend in the studies on high school level Latino students points to important connections between attitudes and cultural identity and student success rate and ability to face challenges.

Romaine (1998) concluded that attitude is an important aspect that needs to be taken into account and suggests that when implementing policy in bilingual education, the attitudes of students, parents and society are important to understand. A review of the literature has revealed that heritage language learners are a growing population in our educational institutions and society. If educational institutions intend to meet the needs of a diverse society and the HL in particular, the experience of the HL must be understood before suggesting changes that will be successful in the educational setting.

Wang and Green (2001) noted that some studies have found that HLs sometimes reflect negative societal views towards their heritage language and have ambivalent feelings towards the heritage language. Therefore, understanding a broader societal view is necessary as well as understanding and valuing the individual HL's dialect

and culture. Several studies reviewed provide some insight into personal and other factors that influence HLs to succeed in institutions of higher education.

Eden (2007) found that Mexican American students' involvement in campus groups relieved isolation and that their academic success was due to a motivation to find employment. Eden (2007) also states that the students demonstrated a desire to give back to their communities. The outcome of another study by Kypuros (2005) points to various factors that are tied to a HL's academic success and also gives insight into the challenges faced by the HL. Some challenges mentioned involved teacher's negative attitudes towards the students and lack of support from family. However, Kypuros (2005) also found that support systems and mentoring were essential for ensuring the success of the students. Ortiz (2006) also found that support systems were important to success. The support of peers and family was most important. In addition, Ortiz (2006) found that the student's ability to maintain cultural ties gave the confidence needed to navigate the two worlds: the university and the Mexican cultural background.

Sanchez-Killian (2005) found that cultural beliefs sometimes influenced whether the low-income mothers of Mexican descent would stay in school. The belief that they were 'bad mothers' was a reason for leaving school. Sanchez-Killian (2005) found that networks established to help the participants explain to the family why staying in college is beneficial helped them stay in school. Most of the studies reviewed did not focus on students studying advanced Spanish however. Only a few studies focused on the HL studying advanced Spanish were found. One was Villa's (2006) study which was based on Latino students in the Southwest.

Villa (2004), a scholar from New Mexico, also discusses the importance of attitude and the variety of language taught to heritage learners (HLs). Villa (2004) teaches at New Mexico State University and has a high number of heritage learners who enroll in advanced Spanish courses. Villa (2004) states that 90% of the students taking Spanish linguistics have had some home and community exposure to Spanish. Typically, HL Spanish language instruction does not inform the student about different dialects or varieties of the language. Teaching Spanish as a second dialect has often focused on teaching the standard dialect (Valdés, 1981).

Valdés (1981) discusses the three main perspectives on approaches for teaching Spanish: eradication, biloquialism and appreciation of dialect differences. The first, eradication, seeks to replace non-prestige dialects with the standard dialect. The second, biloquialism, aims to teach the student about both dialects and cultures. The third, appreciation of dialect differences, fosters an appreciation of the students' dialects while pointing out prejudices that exist against non-prestige dialects (Valdés, 1981). Villa (2004), who was mentioned above, teaches students about their variety of Spanish.

Villa (2004) discusses the importance of valuing the heritage speaker's level and variety of Spanish. He notes that this contributes to the success of the students in the advanced Spanish language classes. It is evident from the article that the students are comfortable and proud to use their heritage language once they leave the university. Villa (2004) points to Freire's work as a guiding force in the program, which includes strategies such as encouraging critical thinking and the interpretation of literary texts.

According to Villa (2004), the variety of Spanish spoken by the HL should be valued. Unlike many professionals who scorn the Spanish spoken by many heritage speakers, Villa (2004) understands the potential of students who come into class with the knowledge of a heritage language. Language loss and other issues directly related to the students' backgrounds are presented in the linguistics classes as they relate directly to the students' language experience. The linguistics course incorporates specific details about the HLs dialect and other language registers. The program is designed to meet the needs of students entering fields other than linguistics (Villa, 2004). The study concludes by noting that considering the HLs' backgrounds when designing the linguistics program has helped strengthen the program.

LaCorte et al. (2005) examined university instructors beliefs and practices in a study regarding HLs in advanced Spanish courses and concluded that some of the instructors and professors who took part in the study exhibited a lack of acceptance of different linguistic varieties of Spanish and that a need exists to be more aware of identity and attitude as they relate to teaching and learning. Some of the observations showed that the instructors were not able to keep the Latino students engaged in class and the Latinos, who often segregated themselves from other students, used a lot of English when working in groups in the advanced Spanish courses. Lacorte et al. (2005) found that the instructors had negative perceptions about the Latino students' level of Spanish and knowledge of certain language related topics. The "ideal" visions that the instructors have about language, culture, and literature may not apply to the actual teaching environment (Lacorte et al., 2005). In another study, HLs were

found to have a negative reaction to the correction of their Spanish because the language they speak has a strong cultural and historical tie for them (Potowski, 2001).

Valdés et al. (2003) conducted a study at a university in California and found that the Latino participants studying in higher education found that one barrier that is difficult to overcome is the struggle to be accepted equally as scholars by native Spanish speakers. In addition, the participants had experienced “prejudice, fear, and pain” (Valdés, et al., 2003, p. 20). The study of ideologies that exist in the department of higher education investigated tend to stress linguistic purity and correctness and the superiority of the monolingual native (Valdés, et al., 2003, p. 24). Valdés, et al. (2003) conclude that this attitude prevents Latinos in the United States from gaining an appreciation for their bilingual abilities. Attitudes of the students and teachers toward the student’s language have the potential of affecting a student’s motivation to study the heritage language.

A National Survey of Latinos published by the Pew Hispanic Center states that Hispanics are concerned that “teachers are unable to bridge the cultural divides in the classroom” (2004, ¶ 1). Nieto (1999) explains that the teacher’s attitude is also influenced by the preconceptions that exist pertaining to the student. As mentioned earlier, certain negative stereotypes, such as an association with crime and drugs, are also attached to Latino students. The well-documented poor retention rates of Hispanics also have the potential of affecting teacher perception. Overall, the literature reviewed reveals that attitude, identity, empowerment, and language have the potential of having an important impact on the academic success, and language maintenance and use of the HL.

## Conclusion

A review of the literature reveals that the population of HLs entering the educational system will have significant implications on our educational institutions, teacher education, and teachers at all levels. In addition, the literature review reveals that there is a need for more teachers who have experience teaching bilingual students. Ideally, more teachers from diverse backgrounds are needed as the population of HLs increases. Currently, many students of Mexican descent leave high school and institutions of higher education before completing their degrees. Several scholars have written about the implications that this population will have on our educational system and the essential need to understand the HL in order to begin to address the needs of these students and school system. The review of the literature indicates that instructors, professors and their students in institutions of higher education would benefit from a deeper understanding of the HL and language needs. In addition, few HLs study the heritage language at advanced levels. Several scholars and studies point to the need to acknowledge the HLs' individual cultural and educational experience as well as a need to value their dialect and language abilities. The following chapter presents the methods used in this study to gain information regarding the HL educated in The United States.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the method used, state the questions that guide the study, and present the research design. This chapter also addresses the role of the researcher, the research setting, participant selection procedures, number of participants, the interview process, data collection procedures, protocols, method used for data analysis, verification, reliability, and the limitations of the study. A qualitative methodology was used to gain insight into the experience of 10 heritage learners studying or who have recently studied advanced Spanish in an institution of higher education.

#### Grand Tour Question

Few students of Mexican descent study advanced Spanish and the reasons for this are not understood well at this time. In order to shed some light on this phenomenon, the following overarching question guides this study:

What can be learned from the past and present experiences of heritage learners (HLs) studying or who have recently studied advanced Spanish that might provide insight into recruiting HLs and retaining HLs in Spanish programs in institutions of higher education?

#### Topic questions

The topic questions were addressed at times when the participants moved toward these topics during the interview. Their purpose is to help guide the researcher to understand the lived experience of the participants. The researcher understands that

no presuppositions should be made and hopes to increase the understanding of the lived experience of the participants without bias through the careful selection and presentation of quotes from the transcriptions.

1. Tier 1. Focused Life History (Seidman, 1998)

What are the life experiences of the participant prior to entering the university? What was it like to be an HL educated in the United States?

2. Tier 2. The Details of Experience (Seidman, 1998)

What present conditions and attitudes are important to the HL who decided to and studies advanced Spanish and who attends an institution of higher education in the United States? What is the experience like for the HL?

3. Tier 3. Reflection on the Meaning (Seidman, 1998)

What is the meaning that the heritage language learner ascribes to the experience when reflecting on the past and present experiences as a result of the interview process?

The researcher situated the responses and focused the responses of the participant when needed during the interview. Several participants asked for and needed some additional questions to engage in the interview process. As suggested by Rossman and Rallis (1997), the researcher used follow-up questions to ‘discover deeper meanings or more concrete examples’ (p. 128). In addition, appropriate probes were employed to extend conversations when necessary as suggested by Gillman (2000). The goal of the researcher was for the participants to share their experiences. The interview questions follow.

## Interview Questions

The interview began with open-ended statements and did not lead the participant towards a specific theme. However, as stated above, the researcher did ask other questions to discover more about some of the topics that the participants addressed during the interview. The questions used for the interviews and adapted from a format suggested by Jenni (2007) follow.

### Tier 1: Past Experiences

I understand that you are a student of Spanish who was exposed to the first language in the home and who has been educated in the United States. I am very interested in this experience. Could you please reconstruct your experience for me? Can you tell me what this experience was like for you as someone from a home where you were exposed to Spanish and also as a student educated in an English-speaking educational setting prior to attending the university?

### Tier 2: Present Experiences (Includes Recent Experiences)

Your experiences as a student who was exposed to Spanish in the home and who has studied advanced Spanish in an institution of higher education are important to this study as well. I am very interested in knowing more about your experience after graduating from high school. How has this experience been for you?

### Tier 3: Reflecting on Past and Present Experiences

I have enjoyed listening to you tell about your experience and I am very interested to learn more. During this interview, I would like you to reflect on the first two interviews and share more information about your lived experience. What comes to

mind as you reflect on the two interviews? What does being enrolled in advanced Spanish courses mean to you as you reflect on your past and present experiences?

### Research Design

The interview method used is based on a qualitative in-depth interview approach suggested by Seidman (1998) and other scholars (Lincoln & Denzin, 1998, Polkinghorne, 1989; Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). The method incorporates some elements from a phenomenological standpoint, but also incorporates other qualitative approaches in the methodology. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews in order to understand and describe the lived experience of the HL. Researching the ‘lived experience’ includes asking questions that explore the meaning of the experience for the heritage learner studying Spanish (Creswell, 1998).

Much of the literature mentions a need for understanding the experience of the heritage students. For instance, the report generated by the Heritage Language Priorities Conference (UCLA, 2000) and recent and past research by Valdés et al. (2006) suggest research questions and identify gaps in the research concerning HLs and specifically mention the importance of understanding past and present experiences of the learners. The interview technique worked well to encourage HLs to share their experiences.

The researcher began each interview with open-ended questions and relevant topics emerged that gave insight into issues related to education. Categories, such as advising and counseling, also surfaced during the interviews. The information gathered from the interviews reveals elements from past and present experiences of

the HL who speaks Spanish and has studied Spanish in an educational setting in the United States.

The researcher used several procedures to collect and synthesize the data. Elements of methods from Seidman (1998) and Richards (2005) for data collection and analysis were used as well as a three-step procedure for phenomenological studies suggested by Polkinghorne (1989). The procedure described by Polkinghorne (1989) involves; a) collecting naïve descriptions from participants who have had the same experience, b) examining the descriptions for common elements that express the experience and c) describing the experience so that the reader knows what it is like for the participant. The researcher presented quotes thematically. This presentation of direct quotes and interpretive summaries gives the reader insight into what the experience was like for the participant. Individual passages were grouped into categories and studied for themes and thematic connections (Seidman, 1998). The quotes presented in Chapter 4 are always identified with the participants' pseudonyms as suggested by Richards (2005). This is essential for tracking the experience of each participant (Richards, 2005).

A qualitative interview approach is appropriate for this study because the intention is to reveal the perceptions and meaning that the HLs ascribe to their experience as well as address the grand tour question for this study. Several specialists in the field of research suggest the use of the in-depth interview approach to collect data about lived experiences in order to describe and understand a lived phenomenon that is worth studying (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Seidman, 1998).

The research method was designed to gather information from the participants and understand and share the essence of their experience. An interpretive research paradigm, such as the one used in this study, seeks to understand the social world from the perspective of the participant's individual experience (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). The intention is to reveal the experiences of the participants in depth by presenting the quotes under the categories and themes that surfaced during the coding process.

The in-depth interview approach fit this study well for reasons related to the concept of empowerment as well. For instance, this study may be valuable to the participant in several ways. A sense of empowerment might emerge when HLs reveal their lived experience or reflected on their personal stories. Scott & Morrison (2006) suggest that participants may generate some self-understanding, self-awareness, and knowledge that may improve their experience in the educational setting. Some of the participants expressed their thanks for having had the opportunity to think about their experiences in the response to the member check and during the interview.

The participants shared their life experiences through in-depth interviews and the Seidman (1998) interviewing approach. This approach succeeded very well in gathering data on the meaning ascribed by and the perceptions of the HLs regarding their past and present life histories. The Seidman (1998) method focused the participant on past and present experiences without using leading questions. Seidman (1998) theorizes that the participant will be able to ascribe meaning to the experience after reflecting on the first two interviews. The researcher found this to be true and was able to gain insight and a new understanding from the meaning that the HLs

ascribed to studying advanced Spanish in institutions of higher education. The researcher employed a modified version of a chronological interview method proposed by Seidman (1998) in order to address the past and present experiences of the students.

Rossman and Rallis (1998) discuss the use of the Seidman (1998) method as acceptable for interviewing as a vehicle for gathering information on the lived experience of the participant. The Seidman (1998) approach employs a three-stage chronological interview. The researcher modified the Seidman (1998) interview approach and time-line. However, the changes align with modifications suggested and used by Seidman (1998, 2007). The modified method is described in detail in the data collection procedures section of this chapter. Seidman (1998, 2007) approves modifications of the approach, such as shortening and combining the first two tiers of the interview.

To summarize, this design encouraged the HL participant to share information regarding life experiences and their perceptions related to studying Spanish in an institution of higher education. According to Scott and Morrison (2006), the advantage of a face-to-face interview includes the ability to get full responses and to be able to clarify responses. Seidman (1998) states that several doctoral students have generated dissertations and published works employing the three-tier method of in-depth interviewing. Several dissertations have employed the Seidman (1998) in-depth interview approach successfully. Two examples are *Tracking; Its Impact on Student Teachers; A Qualitative Study Using In-Depth Interviews*, by O'Donnell, (1990), and *Phenomenological Interviews and Gender Issues Embedded in the*

*Experience of Student Teaching: Being Treated Like a Sex Object* by Miller, (1997). Many more dissertations using the Seidman (1998) approach exist. Various articles published in refereed journals have implemented the Seidman (1998) approach to interviewing as well (Bekeman, 2003; Bacon, 2002; Glanz, 2000; Cleary & Peacock, 1997).

### The Role of the Researcher

The researcher is an HL of Mexican descent who studied advanced Spanish as an undergraduate and graduate student and has been influenced by the work of several authors of scholarly work on critical pedagogy and marginalized groups. Some of the authors include Freire (1992), Giroux (1989; 1991) and Nieto (1999; 2000). The researcher has addressed bias by journaling and writing an epoche. An epoche is a personal description of the researcher's experience as it relates to the question that guides the study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). According to the same authors, this allows for the researcher to evaluate bias and preconceived notions (1999). A brief presentation of the researcher's expectations based on the epoche is presented in chapter 5 of this study. In addition, the investigator kept notes of observations during and after the interview process. The notes were reviewed for bias before and during the interpretation of the data. The researcher was also aware of the importance of asking open-ended questions and allowed the participants to share the experience and meaning personally associated with the topic of the interview questions. The researcher asked a few additional questions at times, but was fully aware of this and did refocus at times to stay true to the methodology. The researcher has taken all of the necessary steps to avoid bias, put all presuppositions aside. The epoche, which

contains the researcher's response to the interview questions, also aided the researcher in addressing bias. Bracketing or putting preconceived ideas aside is important when using a phenomenological approach. The themes and categories were initially identified without addressing the grand tour question.

### The Research Setting

This study was conducted in the northwestern United States at two universities of higher education. One university had 1.69% self-identified Hispanic students in the fall of 2008; another university had 4.9% Hispanic students in the fall of 2008. Two of the interviews were conducted at the first university and eight interviews were conducted at the university with the higher percentage of Hispanics. All of the students except one attended the universities in the northwest. One student attended a university on the east coast, but was living in the western United States. The two males were attending the university with the higher percentage of Hispanics on campus. The interviews were conducted in quiet offices and soundproof study rooms on the campuses.

### Participant Selection Procedures

The researcher identified a gap in the research in several dissertations that address Hispanics in higher education as well as factors that are related to the educational success of Latinos (Andalon, 2005; de Souza, 2006; Duisberg, 2001; Edens, 2007; Fondon, 2005; Kypuros, 2005; Malave, 2006; Mena, 2005; and Shepard, 2006). The current study focuses on HLs in higher education who study Spanish specifically, while the dissertations and studies reviewed focus on HLs studying in other fields.

Thus, the researcher employed purposeful sampling to narrow the participants to HLs who met several criteria. According to Polkinghorne (1989), an important requirement is for the participants to share the experience that is the topic of the study. All of the participants are studying or have recently studied advanced Spanish and were educated entirely or partially in the United States. The sample included ten first generation university HLs of Mexican descent who attended grade school, and/or middle school and high school in the United States. The students learned, heard and/or spoke Spanish in the home. Furthermore, the students were studying or have recently studied advanced courses of Spanish. For this study, advanced Spanish includes undergraduate and graduate courses at the 300, 400, and 500 levels.

The researcher obtained permission for the Internal Review Board at several universities to do the research as well as from Spanish departments. The letter of inquiry for department heads is in Appendix A. The researcher presented the study to several classes and handed out letters of invitation at one university. The letter of invitation is in Appendix B. The face-to-face contact with the students was very successful. Letters, posters, and a school newspaper were used as well, but did not attract any participants. The researcher approached a student at the first university mentioned above about the study. This student suggested the second student who participated in the study and who had recently graduated with a degree in Spanish from a university in the east coast.

#### Number of Participants

Ten participants were interviewed. The reason to interview 10 participants was based on a few factors. First, this number is viable and theory based (Seidman, 1998,

personal communication, Sept. 17, 2007; Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Denzin, 1994). Several sources recommend using a small number of participants for a descriptive study that includes interviewing as the instrument for collecting data. For example, Lincoln and Denzin (1998) suggest interviewing six participants when employing a strategy that employs in-depth conversations. Creswell (1998) cites Dukes and Rieman (1991) who suggest that it is sufficient to include two to ten participants in studies that involve interviews. One peer-reviewed study on teachers employed the Seidman approach to interviewing, included two participants (Bacon, 2002). A dissertation implementing the same method included nine participants (Gonzalez, 2004). Another study included 11 participants (Carriveau, R. 2006). Glanz (2000), who has a study published in a peer-refereed journal, stated that saturation was reached after interviewing a dozen participants. In addition, the researcher discussed the number of participants with Seidman (2007) and the author stated that ten participants should provide sufficient data. Richards and Morse (2007) recommend increasing the sample size if the data is poor. However, the amount of data collected from the interviews was sufficient and additional interviews were not needed. The researcher was able to address the research question by interviewing ten participants. The researcher worked for approximately ninety hours to complete the transcriptions.

The researcher's goal to address the grand tour question and describe the meaning that the participant ascribes to the experience was reachable due to the sufficient amount of data collected from the interviews. Creswell (1998) states that the goal of interview-based studies is to describe the meaning of the experience. The interviews provided a wealth of information about the experience of the participants.

### Data Collection Procedures

Sony and Olympus S-100 digital recorders were used to record the interviews, and field notes were taken as the interview was conducted. A form to record personal observation notes and descriptive data was employed. The same form includes a space for the date and the interviewee code to assure confidentiality. A copy of the form is included in Appendix D. All of the data and recordings were securely stored to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

### The Survey and Interview Process

The participants received and answered a survey to collect information on demographics and family before the interviews. Suarez (2007) states that there are fine differences between HLs and that these should be taken into account and are important for increasing the depth of understanding in studies on this population of students. In the present study, the researcher gathered information on demographics and on details of self-identity to add to each participant's profile from the survey. The completed survey provided information on age, education, the economic status of the family, language use, and a few questions regarding self-identity and is found in Appendix C. According to Marsella and Yamada (2000), the degree that the person identifies with the culture is as important as establishing the ethnicity of the person. This information is included in the participant profiles at the beginning of chapter 4 and is intended to provide the reader with a deeper understanding of the participants' background. The profiles also provide an overall description for the reader to use as a reference source for each participant. Pertinent quotes from the participants' interviews follow the profiles and are listed under each pseudonym and within

categories. Some of the quotes are long, but are included in order to maintain the context and because they tell the story of the experience. The researcher's intent is to take the reader 'deeply into the data' as proposed by Richards (2005, p. 196).

The in-depth interviews were conducted following the chronological procedure suggested by Seidman (1998). Seidman's strategy, which is known as the 'Three-Interview Series', includes three separate interviews. One interview is labeled 'Focused Life History' another is called 'The Details of Experience' and the third is titled the 'Reflection on the Meaning' interview (pp. 11-12). The participants gave information from their past and present history in order to reveal important information regarding their experience as a whole, being HLs educated in the United States, and the study of advanced Spanish. The interview succeeded in encouraging the participants to share what the experience was and is like for them. For instance, the participants were asked to talk about their lives and asked to reconstruct their experience as an HL studying in the United States. The participants were encouraged to give details about the experience, but the researcher's intent was to not specifically ask for opinions or speak about attitudes as suggested by Seidman (1998). According to Rubin and Rubin (1995) a qualitative interview should not impose the world of the researcher on the participant, but find out what the participant thinks and knows. The researcher attempted not to interrupt the flow of the interview, but wrote down interesting comments to explore later or restated interesting comments and sometimes asked the participants to tell more about a topic or explain what something meant. The participants were often asked to tell more about what an experience was like.

This strategy worked very well to encourage the students to share more about their experiences.

Each tier or stage of the interview is designed to allow the participant to reveal information from different periods of time. For example, tier one of the interview is designed to encourage the participants to give information from their past. The researcher sought the same reflective commentary from the participants in regards to the meaning they ascribed to their present life situation (i.e. after graduating from high school and to the present) in the second interview. Finally, during the third tier of the interview, the researcher asked the participants to ‘reflect on the meaning of the experiences’ as they also reflected on the information that they gave during the previous two Tiers of the interview in order to bring the past and present experiences together (Rossman & Rallis, 1997 p. 133). The design was modified following procedures suggested by Seidman (1998, 2007).

For example, Seidman (1998) offers several interview options. One option the author suggests is giving the interview in three separate stages with three days between each interview (1998). However, Seidman (1998, 2007) has also found success in shortening the interview process when necessary. The author, Seidman (1998), explains that other interview options and time frames are acceptable in the excerpt that follows.

There is however, nothing magical or absolute about the time frame. For younger participants, a shorter period may be appropriate. What is important is that the length of time be decided upon before the interview process begins. Doing so

gives unity to each interview; the interview has at least a chronological beginning, middle, and end. (p. 14)

Seidman (1998, 2007) also states that other researchers working on studies have been successful completing all 3 tiers of the interview in one day when a student was only available for one day. When modifying the procedure, Seidman (1998) states that the important fact to keep in mind is that the interview is repeatable and documentable. Seidman (2007) also explains that giving a minimum of two interviews encourages building a connection with the participant and is preferable to giving the three interviews in one sitting. In addition, the time for the participant to reflect on the first two interviews allows for more time to reflect on the meaning of the experience (Seidman, 2007).

For this study, the researcher reduced the first two tiers of the interview to 1 hour each with a five-minute break between each tier. The third tier of the interview was given a day or more later and lasted 1 hour. Three hours total were devoted to interviewing each participant. According to Seidman (1998) this time frame is adequate and reasonable. Seidman (2007) suggests that a break between the tiers encourages the participants to share more information and become more comfortable with the researcher as well. The main interview questions that were employed are repeatable, documentable, and have a chronological format with a beginning, middle, and end as suggested by Seidman (1998). In addition, the researcher followed the time frame outlined above as much as possible and as suggested by Seidman (1998).

## Protocols

The researcher provided a letter of confidentiality to the participant with an overview of the study, an expected time commitment, a confidentiality statement from the researcher, and the protocol for the interview. The researcher presented the confidentiality statement and the interview protocol to the participant before beginning the interview process. The information and consent form is in Appendix E.

## Data Analysis and Reporting Findings

The researcher followed a qualitative approach and used elements derived from a phenomenological methodology to address the research questions. First, the researcher was aware of the concept of bracketing and put preconceived ideas aside as the transcriptions were studied to extract quotes that were representative of several themes. Initially, this was done without addressing the research question. The documentation of how the data was converted or moved into the general description follows, and should enable the reader to determine how the description, categories, and how the topics and themes were derived from the data (Polkinghorne 1989). The researcher began the analysis by reading the personal epoche, notes, and field notes to identify bias or other impressions prior to beginning the transcriptions.

The researcher kept notes of impressions and ideas while the transcriptions were being made and as the interviews were studied for categories and themes. During the coding process, the researcher read the transcriptions and circled categories of interest and made a note of these and possible related themes in the margins of the pages (Seidman, 1998). Some of the initial categories and themes that emerged included language loss, desire to retain the culture, and attitudes, such as feeling intimidated by

native speakers. The researcher identified and narrowed the categories that were relevant to the themes and the project as suggested by Richards (2005). Four study documents with quotes that represented the four categories were created during the coding process. All of the quotes were associated with the participants' pseudonyms during the analysis and presentation of the findings.

A visual Excel chart was made to graph the categories and themes by participant. This aided in further identifying patterns, connections and similarities between the participants. Categories and themes were then compared in the chart and were chosen based on commonality amongst all or most of the participants. These categories and themes are presented in the findings. In addition, a few differences that exist between the participants are discussed as well.

As part of the analytical process, the researcher examined the interview transcripts often to ensure the categories and themes were grounded in the data as suggested by Rubin and Rubin (1995). The researcher employed the concept of grouping themes as suggested by Colaizzi (1978) and Polkinghorne (1989). The themes that emerged during the coding were later reduced with a focus on the predominant themes. The Seidman (1998) method was followed and suggests presenting the data thematically. The description follows,

A more conventional way of presenting and analyzing interview data than crafting profiles is to organize excerpts from the transcripts into categories. The researcher then searches for connecting threads and patterns among the excerpts within those categories and for connections between various categories that might be called themes. In addition to presenting profiles of the individuals, the researcher, as part

of his or her analysis of the material, can then present and comment upon excerpts from the interviews thematically organized. (p. 107)

The quotes were integrated as part of the researcher's argument and are divided into several categories (Richards, 2005). The themes are summarized after the presentation of the quotes. Redundant quotes were not included in the presentation of the findings. The researcher included the quotes to illuminate how the phenomenon was experienced, represent each participant's voice, and maintain necessary context by including longer quotes when necessary. A goal of the researcher was to use as few quotes as necessary to get the point across as well. Therefore, quotes were paired down throughout the writing process to clarify ideas as needed. The researcher requested a member check after the coding process was completed as suggested by Colaizzi (1978). The participants were asked to respond to the categories and themes isolated by the researcher. All of the participants replied. Overall, the participants were in agreement with the themes that emerged. The categories and themes that address the grand tour question and that were referenced by most or all of the participants were isolated and are included in the findings. A summary of each section is included as well. The profiles of participants, which were created by summarizing elements from the demographic and self-identification survey, precede the thematic presentation of the quotes within categories and the summary of the themes.

### Verification

Various techniques to ensure accuracy were implemented in order to provide a study that is verifiable and in order to avoid bias and address accuracy. For example,

the researcher employed a member check of the categories and themes as suggested by Cooper (2007). The researcher checked for and avoided bias as much as possible, referred to the epoche and field notes, and used the information provided on the demographic survey to provide accurate information about the HLs' backgrounds. One use of the field notes was to record the demeanor of the participants during the interview. All of the participants were at ease and relaxed during the interviews. The member check of the categories and themes allowed the participants to verify the information for accuracy.

Participants were approached and asked to verify the themes that were chosen as emerging analytic themes as suggested by Rossman and Rallis (1998). Therefore, the participants reviewed the categories and themes selected by the researcher and had the opportunity to discuss the relevance and accuracy of the themes. This is essential in a qualitative approach because the goal of this study is to ascribe the meaning from the HLs' perspective. The researcher contacted the participants by email and gathered the information. The participants were made aware of this aspect of the study prior to agreeing to the interview. In addition, the researcher asked a professor of HLs to review the themes to check for agreement as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). Dr. Gonzalez, who worked with Dr. Valdés at Stanford University, is currently a professor and specialist in heritage language methodology at Purdue University. Dr. Gonzalez reviewed the categories and themes and stated that they were appropriate. In addition, the use of quotes allows the reader to verify the categories and themes that emerged. Verification depends on how well the findings are supported (Polkinghorne, 1989).

The demographic survey also added valuable information about each participant that can be aligned with the data from the interview. Combining the survey with the interview and the participant feedback also strengthens the study by providing more than one method of gathering information. In addition, the use of quotes throughout the analysis allows the reader to compare much of the raw data with the interpretation. The researcher chose quotes that are relevant to the four categories and associated themes.

The researcher kept a journal of personal notes throughout the study to document beliefs about the project and how those beliefs changed as the research progressed. These notes also served to analyze any bias that might emerge. The personal epoche, which was reviewed by the researcher, is a complete description of the researcher's experience as it relates to the study and research questions (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The epoche allows for the researcher to evaluate bias and preconceived notions Marshall & Rossman (1999). A journal was kept during the search for themes and analysis of the data.

In conclusion, verification of the categories and themes has been ensured by a peer check of the interview questions and themes, a member check, the inclusion of quotes to help support and explain the themes that emerged, the employment of several approaches for gathering information, and the careful documentation and awareness of researcher bias.

### Reliability

A standardized interview process that was consistent and equal in length for all participants was used in this study. Sony and Olympus digital recorders were used

and the transcription was put into a word document. The source of data is extensive and accurate. In addition, the data and analysis procedures were carefully documented. Furthermore, the researcher's role and bias are clearly described. Any possible bias that emerged during the interviews and interpretation of the data was considered. The researcher understood the importance of analyzing the data accurately and carefully reviewed and read the original transcription many times to ensure that all of the themes of interest were identified in the transcript accurately. The researcher also studied the document containing the quotes that were extracted from the coding process carefully.

A pilot of the interview and the demographic survey was conducted to ensure the accuracy of the proposed instrument. The pilot interview was conducted with a Mexican American student who had studied advanced Spanish at the university level and met most of the criteria outlined for the participants. This provided an opportunity to practice the interview and determine whether or not the time frame and design were appropriate. The consistency of the study has been ensured by employing a pilot interview, comparing themes with a peer, employing a standardized interview technique, using a digital recorder and complete transcript, keeping careful documentation of bias, and carefully reviewing of the categories, themes, and data.

### Limitations

Generalizability is not an issue in a study that employs a qualitative in-depth interview approach based on a phenomenological premise. Tier one of the interview specifically asks the participant to recall experiences from childhood. Some of the results are based on childhood memories, which are not always accurate. Finally, the

researcher is a heritage learner and may share some of the experiences with the participants.

#### Methods Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a description of the methods employed in this study. The method used for interviewing and processing the data have also been described along with a foundation for their use by authorities in the field of research methodology. The following chapter presents the findings through quotes from the in-depth interviews.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS FROM THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to attempt to gain insight about retaining and recruiting HLs by learning about the past and present experiences of HLs who were or had recently studied advanced level Spanish courses in institutions of higher education. This is addressed through the presentation of quotes under categories and summaries of the predominant topics and themes that emerged. The findings are presented thematically under categories with supporting quotes in this chapter.

The first section includes participant profiles based on a summary of the demographic and self-identification survey. The second section presents quotes from the interviews under the categories, topics, as well as summaries for each section. The categories, topics, and themes chosen emerged from all or most of the interviews. A general summary follows the presentation of the quotes for each category as well. The purpose of this approach is to allow the context, or sense of the whole, to be revealed through the presentation of the profiles, quotes, and the general summaries as well of the summaries of the topics and themes (Hychner, 1985).

#### Participant Profiles

The participant profiles are based on the demographic and self-identification surveys completed prior to the interview.

#### Participant Profiles

##### **Participant one: Female**

**Pseudonym:** Malina

**Age:** 22

**Birthplace:** The United States

**Parents' birthplace:** The United States and Mexico. Both are of Mexican Descent

**Reading:** Her parents did not read in Spanish to her as a child. Books in Spanish were not available in the home as she was growing up.

**Grades Attended in The United States:** K-12 in the Midwest

**ESL and Bilingual Education Classes:** None

**Classes for Heritage Speakers:** No

**Identity and Summary:** Malina defines her ethnicity as Mexican/Mexican American. She liked having teachers who spoke only Spanish because she did not usually hear Spanish in the school setting. At home the family would sing the Mexican birthday song, *Las Mañanitas*, in Spanish and watch *telenovelas*, or soap operas, in Spanish. She was also exposed to music in Spanish. Malina lived in an area with a high percentage of Latinos and was exposed to the Spanish language in her community. Her parents spoke Spanish in the home at times. Malina specifies that English was the dominant language spoken in home. She spoke some Spanish in the home as well. English is the language that she uses with her friends. She prefers to listen to music in Spanish and prefers English language television programs.

**Participant Two: Female**

**Pseudonym:** Victoria

**Age:** 23

**Birthplace:** The United States

**Parents' Birthplace:** Mexico and The United States

**Reading:** Her parents did not read to her in Spanish.

**Grades Attended in The United States:** K-12 and higher education

**ESL and Bilingual Education Classes:** None

**Classes for Heritage Speakers:** None.

**Classes for Native Speakers:** Two in high school (Information from the interview)

**Identity and Summary:** Victoria identifies herself as a Mexican American/Chicana. She describes her language ability as advanced, fairly fluent and conversational. One frustration that she has had in studying Spanish at the university level is that no advanced grammar and writing courses were available. If she could improve her Spanish, she would improve her use of the formal commands and the subjunctive tense. English is used most of the time in the home and Spanish is used on occasion for commands and objects. She speaks mostly English with her friends and prefers to listen to radio programs, television, and movies in English. She spoke mostly English as a child.

**Participant Three: Female**

**Pseudonym:** Estela

**Age:** 22

**Birthplace:** Mexico

**Parents' Birthplace:** Mexico

**Reading:** Estela read in Spanish as a child and her parents read to her in Spanish as well.

**Grades Attended in The United States:** 7-12 and higher education

**Grades Attended in Mexico:** k-7

**ESL and Bilingual Education Classes:** 4 years

**Classes for Heritage Speakers:** No

**Identity and Summary:** Estela identifies herself as Mexican. Her parents completed the sixth grade and did not study afterwards. She feels that classmates think that she is “not really studying or learning” because she already knows the language. She considers herself as fully fluent in the Spanish language. She enjoys learning about Spanish and Latin American literature, film, and cultures. She speaks more Spanish than English in the home and thinks in both languages. She usually will only speak Spanish to native speakers. She tends to speak English to non-native speakers. She prefers to listen to movies, radio, and television programs in English.

**Participant Four: Female**

**Pseudonym:** Ana

**Age:** 27

**Birthplace:** The United States

**Parents' Birthplace:** Mexico and The United States

**Reading:** She did not read in Spanish. Her parents did not read to her in Spanish.

**Grades Attended in The United States:** Preschool- University level

**ESL and Bilingual Education Classes:** None

**Classes for Heritage Speakers:** None

**Identity and Summary:** Ana identifies herself as Mexican and Native American. She is currently a graduate student in Spanish and has a great desire to succeed. She spoke Spanish and English with her mother, but only English with her father. She usually thinks in English and speaks it with her friends. She watches television in

Spanish and English. If she could improve her Spanish, she would work on her grammar and speaking abilities. She considers her level of Spanish to be good. She has faced several challenges in her quest to obtain her master's degree in Spanish.

**Participant Five: Female**

**Pseudonym:** Elena

**Age:** 20

**Birthplace:** The United States

**Parents' Birthplace:** The United States and Mexico

**Reading:** Her parents did not read to her in Spanish and she did not read books in Spanish as a child.

**Grades Attended in The United States:** pre-school through college

**ESL and Bilingual Education Classes:** None

**Classes for Heritage Speakers:** None

**Identity and Summary:** Elena identifies herself as Mexican American. She spoke mostly English in the home. Sometimes they would speak Spanglish in the home. She states that she can converse fairly well in the Spanish language, but that she needs to learn many words and that she would like to be able to respond more quickly. She is very encouraged when she meets people who have the same desire to learn the language. She reads in English about 90% of the time. She was fluent in English and Spanish until she was 4 years old. She usually uses English with all of her friends. She watches television and movies in English and Spanish. She usually thinks in the Spanish language.

**Participant Six: Female**

**Pseudonym:** Madison

**Age:** 18

**Birthplace:** The United States

**Parents' Birthplace:** The United States

**Reading:** She read some books that were designed to teach Spanish to children and her mother read some books to her in Spanish.

**Grades Attended in The United States:** k-college level

**ESL and Bilingual Education Classes:** None

**Classes for Heritage Speakers:** None

**Identity and Summary:** Madison identifies herself as Mexican and German. She states that she has difficulty speaking the Spanish language. The Spanish that was and is spoken in the home includes commands, phrases, and isolated words. She has also been exposed to Spanish. For example, she is exposed when her father speaks in Spanish on the phone and to the neighbors. She uses English to speak to friends and listens to most media in English. She thinks in English and used English as a child.

**Participant Seven: Female**

**Pseudonym:** Marcela

**Age:** 22

**Birthplace:** Mexico

**Parents' Birthplace:** Mexico

**Reading:** She read few books in Spanish as a child.

**Grades Attended in The United States:** K-12 and college

**ESL and Bilingual Education Classes:** None

**Classes for Heritage Speakers:** None

**Identity and Summary:** Marcela identifies herself as a Mexican. She states that she speaks, reads, and writes fluently in Spanish. She always used Spanish in the home and would sometimes use English with her siblings. She uses mostly English at school, thinks in Spanish and English, speaks English and Spanish with her friends, and watches soap operas in Spanish. She listens to radio in Spanish, and enjoys watching comedy central in English. She also finds it entertaining when Hispanics mix Spanish and English together. She enjoys learning about the language differences in Spanish in Latin American countries.

**Participant Eight: Female**

**Pseudonym:** Neve

**Age:** 27

**Birthplace:** The United States

**Parents' Birthplace:** The United States

**Reading:** Her parents did not read to her and she did not read in Spanish as a child.

**Grades Attended in The United States:** K-12 and college

**ESL and Bilingual Education Classes:** She was not sure, but thinks she may have in grade school

**Classes for Heritage Speakers:** None

**Identity and Summary:** Neve identifies herself as Hispanic. She places herself at an intermediate level of ability. She would like to be able to speak fluently. She speaks English in the home and thinks in both English and Spanish. She speaks English with

her friends and listens to the radio in English. She spoke English as a child and watches some movies in Spanish and French.

**Participant Nine: Male**

**Pseudonym:** Daniel

**Age:** 21

**Birthplace:** Mexico on the border

**Parents' Birthplaces:** Mexico and Spain

**Reading:** He read in Spanish as a child and his parents read to him as a child as well.

**Grades Attended in The United States:** 7- university level

**ESL and Bilingual Education Classes:** 1 year

**Classes for Heritage Speakers:** None

**Identity and Summary:** Daniel defines his identity as Mexican. He speaks Spanish in the home and uses English to describe “the outside, what is different.” He thinks in Spanish and sometimes in English. He listens to radio and watches programs in Spanish. He speaks with his friends in Spanish, but also in English. If he could improve his Spanish, he would improve his grammar and writing skills.

**Participant Ten: Male**

**Pseudonym:** Nomar

**Age:** 19

**Birthplace:** Mexico

**Parents' Birthplace:** Mexico

**Reading:** He did not read in Spanish as a child and his parents did not read to him in Spanish.

**Grades Attended in The United States:** K-12 and university level

**ESL and Bilingual Education Classes:** 2 years

**Classes for Heritage Speakers:** He took a class for native Spanish speakers and an advanced Spanish grammar class for heritage learners in high school.

**Identity and Summary:** Nomar identifies his ethnicity as Hispanic and spoke Spanish in the home when his mother was ‘around’. He describes his Spanish speaking ability as very fluent. He says he speaks mostly English in the home now, but spoke Spanish in the home as a child. He usually thinks in English and uses English with his friends. He watches all media in English. A positive experience for him that is related to studying advanced Spanish at the university level is that he is relearning vocabulary and is able to speak with his mother in Spanish.

Table 1. Participant Profile Chart

Status at time of interview. Some	Senior	Senior Graduated	Senior Graduated	Junior/Senior	Senior	Master's Program	Freshman	Sophomore	Senior Graduated	Had already completed a degree.
Name	Estela	Daniel	Marcela	Neve	Elena	Ana	Madison	Nomar	Malina	Victoria
Age	22	21	22	27	24	27	18	19	22	23
Language used most often in the home: S: Spanish E: English	S	S	S	E	E	E	E	S E	E	E
Student born in Mexico: X F: Father M: Mother	X F&M	X M	X F&M			M		X F&M	F	F
Books in Spanish in the home	Few	Few	Few	None	None	None	Few	None	None	None
Economic Status	Low Middle	Low Middle	Low	Unsure	Middle	Low Middle	Middle	Low Middle	Low	Low
Began studies in The United States	Middle	Middle	K-12	K-12	K-12	K-12	K-12	K-12	K-12	K-12
Parents' level of education HS: high school	F 6th M 6th	F HS M HS		F? M HS	F HS M HS	F HS M Home	F HS M HS	F HS M HS F&M GED	F 4th M HS	F GS M HS
Status at time of interview. Some	Senior	Senior Graduated	Senior Graduated	Junior/Senior	Senior	Master's Program	Freshman	Sophomore	Senior Graduated	Had already completed a degree.

## Categories, Research Question, and Themes

### Categories

Three main categories emerged from the interviews; education, language, and identity. Several topics emerged within each category. The focus in the discussion on categories, topics, and themes will be on the most common patterns and similarities that emerged from the analysis. The predominant topics and themes that are discussed under each category also address and are related to the grand tour question for this study.

### The Grand Tour Question

Few students of Mexican descent study advanced Spanish and the reasons for this are not understood well at this time. In order to shed some light on this phenomenon, the following research question was pursued:

What can be learned from the past and present experiences of heritage learners (HLs) studying or who have recently studied advanced Spanish that might provide insight about recruiting HLs and retaining HLs in Spanish programs in institutions of higher education?

### Topics and Themes

Advising, which emerged from the education category, is a topic that was referenced by the participants. Two themes that emerged across the participants were feelings of insecurity and unawareness about which courses to take and what the courses entail. The topic of language perceptions emerged from the language category. The participants addressed self-perception of language ability, Spanglish, a desire to learn the language, and language loss. All of these topics are discussed

under the language category. Themes that stood out in the language category include a strong desire to learn the language, an awareness of language loss and gain, low confidence of language ability, and an inability to judge their level of language. The category on identity includes several topics that emerged from most of the interviews as well. These include cultural connection, connections with other Spanish speakers, and defining identity. These topics are included in the discussion under the category of identity. The themes of desire for cultural connections and an uncertainty as it relates to the participants confusion about identity stood out in this category.

Categories and Themes

Table 2: Categories, Topics, and Themes

<b>Education</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Identity</b>
<b>Advising</b>	<b>Language Perceptions</b>	<b>Connections Defining Identity</b>
Insecurity  Unawareness	Desire Low Confidence Levels Feelings Associated with Language Loss and Improvement of Language Ability	Desire for Cultural Connection  Uncertainty

Education Category

Advising

A clear theme emerged in the education category regarding advising and insecurity, confusion, and unawareness. The participants gave specific examples in reference to their placement and the decision making process involved in choosing classes at the university. They also reflected on the confusion they faced when choosing the appropriate level of Spanish classes and experienced difficulties finding

appropriate level classes in high school as well. They also mentioned not knowing what the Spanish program or courses involved.

#### MALINA

Malina studied Spanish one for two years in high school and reflected on the experience of finding the appropriate classes.

...in that first school year, I took Spanish and my teacher spoke Spanish, but she was American and I tried to do independent study, but they wouldn't let me because I was just a freshman. ...but it was too easy so I didn't really learn anything that year. And that was always the case, everything was too easy 'cause I know basic Spanish, but because I always said, 'I don't really know Spanish', they wouldn't put me into higher levels. ...I ended up taking Spanish for two years because I didn't really know what level I belonged in and they were always like, well, it is always good to redo the remedial courses. ... So, I took Spanish one in high school and that was just pretty easy.

Malina attended a 200 level class in college. The following quote indicates that she did not know what to expect before entering the class. Malina described her experience in the class.

I started to take it, I think I was there for a week, and I was actually in it and I heard other people's levels of Spanish. I was like, my Spanish isn't that bad and my Spanish doesn't suck. And, yeah, I may not speak it like my sister, I may not be fluent in it, like her, but, it is okay and I am definitely at a different level than these people. So, I decided to, well I'll just study on my own, I don't have to take a

class, I don't want to overwhelm myself. And it was freshman year and I was like okay, I'm not going to take Spanish this semester.

She reflected on some comments made by one of her professors during an office visit.

'There aren't a lot of people like you on this campus,' she said. 'Go to California or go, you know to Arizona and there's lots of people who are like you.' 'They have a Spanish background and they are at a different level speaking-wise, but you know they have certain things, certain quirks that they have to work out, but we don't have a class for people like that here.' 'We don't have a class for native speakers.' And I'm trying to explain, Well, I'm not a native speaker, I just speak Spanish a little better than some people. And she was like, 'Yeah, but that's the same thing,' and I was like, okay. So, I didn't know what class to take. So I guess I just didn't take any more classes. And I always intended to, but I didn't. I guess that is kind of where it ends.

## VICTORIA

Victoria faced some challenges trying to decide which Spanish class to take in high school. She reflected on her experience in college and the advising she received from her advisors and professors.

So when I entered college, I took the test, I forget what it was called, yeah like the assessment test, placement test and I tested into the 400 level. I was once again, I was really good at Spanish and I took it and I did well. And I was talking to my advisor and I was like I cannot go into a 400 level class. I am not a native speaker. I still don't think I am a fluent speaker, five years later. So I went to talk to my

advisor and my advisor said, he talked to the Spanish department and he said, they think you're good enough based on the results of your test, you're good enough to go into a 300 or 400 level. And I said I know I'm not.

She continued,

I know, that I lack the grammar and so then I went to talk to the two full time Spanish professors. And so I talked to the head and I talked to the, he is not a native speaker, but his Spanish is amazing because he is the head of the Spanish department. So, he called in another professor and she is from Spain, so she is a native Spanish speaker and they were talking to me and they spoke to me in Spanish and I understood and spoke to them in Spanish, but it was mostly in Spanish, and I threw some English in and that is how our conversation went. And I guess I had to convince them. I said I took two years in middle school and two years in high school, but they weren't any good, the two years in high school and I said I don't have the grammar. I don't know how to write a paper, I said, I know the present tense. It is all I know. The grammar I don't know, yeah I can hold a conversation, yeah I can understand you and so I guess from that they assumed I was a native speaker.

She described what it was like to be in the 200 level class the first semester.

And so when I took a Spanish class, it was a different professor and I guess it was awhile before she realized that I wasn't a native speaker and I guess the other students they all thought I was a native speaker because I could just talk. And I was the best in the class and the first semester was easy. I didn't have to do homework, because I knew it all. It was the basic Spanish that I knew.

## ESTELA

Estela demonstrated that she had confidence in her language ability and placed herself in advanced classes.

I am a Spanish speaker, native speaker. I didn't have to take the lower level classes. I started with the 300 level and usually people have to take three seminars, but I want to take three and if I have enough time, I would like to take a graduate course and that's also because I want to learn more about Spanish literature, Spanish and Latin American literature um, and how that connects to my women's studies.

She explained her decision to take Spanish.

Well, it was my second year here, my sophomore year that I decided to take a Spanish class. I don't remember why, uh, um I think I had to take Spanish as a foreign language or I had to take a foreign language so I decided to take Spanish and I really liked the class and I was like, well I could do women's studies as a major and Spanish as a minor so that was the plan and then it changed. So now I am doing the Spanish major and I added the criminal justice minor, um, yeah and since I started taking Spanish classes, I was like oh, this is good.

## ANA

Ana faced some challenges in classes that were difficult for her, but at times was counseled and encouraged by professors to continue. In other instances, she was not able to meet the expectations of the professors in courses and was required to improve her abilities before being allowed to continue her studies. She reflected on some of the advising that she received from one professor.

I think I felt like it was completely different because it was, at the lower levels it's easy and when you go to the higher levels it's everything. You have to learn everything, review everything from the beginning and then you have to learn new rules and that was kind of hard for me and you had the opportunity to take literature and I didn't really know how to read well and I didn't really understand symbolism or any of those things so I would come out with a C in class and my professor sat me down one day and said don't worry, it takes time, I didn't know everything at your level. So I took that in consideration and I kept going.

She entered graduate level classes and received a letter stating that she had to improve her skills in order to continue. Ana was required to go abroad to improve the level of her Spanish.

I remember receiving a letter saying that, um, well basically saying I got kicked out of this program because I, my linguistic level wasn't at the level of a master's program, so they told me I had to be abroad ... and I think it makes you really sad. I was crying all the time because I tried so hard to speak Spanish every day of my life and then I come here and I don't know anything.

She continued and reflected on feeling better about the situation, "Yeah, actually they told me I had a year to be abroad to get better linguistically because I'll have practice in a native country and I would have to prove myself to come back. So I did, I worked really hard."

MADISON

Madison spoke of her university experience as she reflected on the placement process.

I didn't know what Spanish class I should be in, so I contacted the head of the Spanish department before I signed up for the classes and I told her, I have studied five years of Spanish, two of them AP courses, I spent some time in Mexico hearing a lot of Spanish and, what should I be in? And she goes, 'Take Spanish 306.' Okay, so I sign up for that and it's actually a perfect fit except for the fact that I have trouble answering my professor when he asks me questions in Spanish..., ...and then I mumble out some broken Spanish, um, but when it comes to the reading and writing, which I have done all throughout high school and junior high, it's pretty much at my level.

She continued and spoke about her experience with a general advisor.

I said that I wanted to take a Spanish class and he goes, 'Well, it's uh, recommended', he had no idea, he was actually the biology advisor, 'you're supposed to take 204', ... and I asked my sister and she goes, 'Yup, they stuck me in that class when I was a freshman, I felt like I was in second year Spanish again.' She goes, 'I didn't learn anything because it was too easy.' So that's why I had to contact the department head. So I'm glad I did that because it is actually a good fit. It is exactly what a good class should be, a little challenging, uh, but manageable.

She was made aware of the extra credits she could receive from completing the three hundred level course after enrolling, but not before.

After I enrolled in the three hundred class ...I was just like, I want to continue Spanish, I guess I'll do a minor, um, 'cause I wanted to continue Spanish, but then when he told me that I could get extra credit, ...I was like, yeah, this is like the best idea ever.

## MARCELA

Marcela states that she did not take Spanish in high school and explained why.

No I didn't because I think the only time where they had any Spanish classes was in high school... I was at a more advanced level, because some of my friends didn't know how to read, write, and some of them had even some trouble speaking Spanish correctly or whatever... ...they did have some Spanish classes, but they were more of the 101 kind of thing. And I knew that I was at a level, maybe a little above that, and they did have this one class where it was like a, for native speakers I think, but uh, I never did take that class... Like I said, I'm not really sure how they worked. I think one of the reasons I didn't take it was because people always talked about it like it was an easy 'A' class.

She decided to take Spanish at the university and describes the decision process.

I wasn't even thinking of taking any Spanish classes here... ...like I'd always wanted to take a class... ...last year was going to be my last year, and um, I was like oh, I'll take one Spanish class. ...

She made the decision to accept a scholarship and finish a degree in Spanish.

So I looked at a couple of degrees that I could take in that one year and there was like an English Rhetoric, the one that is like the least time and there was Spanish and just some other options, and Spanish was one of the one's that would be easier for me to finish in one year.

She stated why she did not feel she needed to take Spanish courses.

I think at first the reason I didn't feel the need to take them was, well I thought, well I can read, I can read it, for the most part I can write it, and I can speak it so I

don't really need it, there isn't much more that I need in Spanish and now that I have taken it, well I know that I can improve a lot in it.

She spoke of other reasons for not taking Spanish earlier, "I forgot to mention this but at times with this, one of the reasons to, like when I was looking at the classes, that were offered, I guess whenever I thought about Spanish classes, I always thought of the 101, 102 thing."

She continued,

I didn't think well, there's all this literature, culture, all this other stuff to it, and so once I saw like the classes that were offered... ...I'm like okay, I know I needed this because even though my parents were always there for us, there's a lot of the culture part, literature part that we never got, at all.

NEVE

She reflected on an interaction with one of her professors, I do remember in one of my summer classes, one of my professors, 'cause I would constantly make good grades on my test and so my instructor came up to me and was like '...you should check out teaching, are you interested in teaching, have you thought about that?' I was like, 'I'm thinking about that', at the time I wasn't thinking about that because I didn't know what I wanted to do. I just knew I wanted to learn Spanish and be able to speak right, but it was really a good feeling that he came up to me. ...he's just nice overall, a really great professor,... ...I don't know, I just felt good after that.

Her comment speaks to the value of informal advising and positive feedback.

## DANIEL

He reflected on the process of choosing a major.

...I was talking to some people from the Spanish department that used to go to the Latino center and they were like yeah, 'definitely just go there, you can get certified, you'll be graduating this year', you know 'this year and if you can get all the classes done, since you already know the language, they will put you in the higher classes and you can get everything done there.' And so I started to look into the program and I was like, wow this is really interesting and you know it's literature, history, and it was all the stuff I was deprived of when I was trying to soak in all this new stuff when I was younger. So that really helped me to, to choose a major. All the stuff they were talking about like literature, history, uh, contemporary issues, the research that the faculty are doing and now that I'm looking at different universities, now, I'm more convinced that I'm on the right track because I look at what professors are doing research on and I'm like, well I want to be involved in that, I want to do research, it's kind of interesting. And so, yeah, by talking to people and um, checking out the program.

He reflected on a meeting with his advisor.

I met with my advisor, she's from Puerto Rico... ...I was like, wow, I wish I had an office like this and have this be like my home base and teach in all the classrooms and everything and I know people who have gone through the McNair program here at the university and so I was like, that's pretty cool. There was this guy that got his master's and he's going to teach at a university near here. ....I'm going to a McNair program now and applying to different graduate schools, so I

think like talking to different people in the department too, yeah, it helps you feel like calm and concentrated.

NOMAR

He described his experience choosing a class.

Like Thanksgiving break first semester, and then Christmas break, I realized, I was losing it. And if I didn't do anything about it I would eventually come home less and less, and eventually gotten worse with it, cause that definitely wouldn't work in my hometown. So I didn't want to lose that. I wanted to be able to talk to my mom all my life and I want to eventually have my kids know Spanish too so they can talk to their granma. And so I decided to take Spanish and I had to go through this whole like, because obviously I wouldn't start in like Spanish101, so I went to this interview process. I talked to like the president of the Spanish department and he decided I could go into 306.

#### Summary of the Education Category

The participants represent a varied group of HLs who have been exposed to Spanish in the home. Their abilities differ to some extent, which is common. The educational issues that were referenced by the participants in this category and which are related to the grand tour question include several topics. These include placement testing, advising, choosing courses, and placement issues.

In some instances, the students were unable to judge their language ability in relation to choosing the appropriate level Spanish class. Some mentioned advise and compliments that they received from professors. Several mentioned taking Spanish

courses that did not meet their language needs. Overall, there was a theme of insecurity and unawareness that stood out across most of the participants.

For instance, Nomar and Victoria mentioned taking courses for native speakers in high school. Victoria's experience was varied. In one course the material was too challenging, but the other course was appropriate for her. Nomar had a similar experience in high school. One course was helpful, while the other one was not. Daniel, Malina, and Estela indicated that their high school courses were too easy. Malina also encountered classes that were not challenging in high school. Marcela and Neve did not take Spanish classes in high school. Ana and Elena did not reference frustration in regards to courses that they took in middle school or high school. Elena did show a preference for teachers who were native speakers however. Ana faced difficulties in the master's program after enrolling in classes that were too challenging and had to go abroad before attempting the classes again.

Malina expressed frustration several times with the courses available at the university level, but most of the other students had positive experiences in their university level courses. One difference that emerged is that Malina did not have a positive advising experience. Madison looked to her sister for suggestions after she was told to take a 200 level course. Madison's general advisor suggested she take the 200 level class, but her sister, who had taken the same class, told her that it would be too easy. Therefore, she sought advise from a professor in the Spanish department. Madison and Nomar received good advising from Spanish professors in their department and stated that the suggested courses were appropriate to a certain extent.

One faced problems with speaking in class and the other mentioned having to learn writing and grammar skills. They both began their studies at the 300 level.

Estela, Daniel, and Marcela placed themselves in advanced courses and expressed confidence in their ability to speak the language and to succeed in the upper division courses. None of the participants mentioned that courses for heritage students were available at their universities and this aligns with the literature reviewed. According to Potowski (2001), more classes for HLs are needed in institutions of higher education.

The participants alluded to the fact that they did not know what the classes or Spanish program involved. Marcela and Daniel learned about the Spanish program from students in the Hispanic club. Malina clearly demonstrated her confusion about which class would be appropriate for her. Madison, Victoria, and Nomar needed to talk to counselors to determine which class would be appropriate. Marcela and Daniel clearly spoke to not knowing about the topics such as literature and culture that are presented in upper division Spanish courses.

The participants were insecure about placing themselves into Spanish classes and except for Estela and Daniel, who studied in Mexico through middle school, did not have a strong background in the heritage language. The fact that most HLs do not have a strong background in the first language is supported by the literature as well. Valdés (2001) states that most English language programs typically have the goal of transitioning ELLs into mainstream classrooms. Krashen (2000) and Fernandez (1981) also note that most of the HLs entering the school system in The United States have poorly developed literacy skills in the first language. In addition, the Spanish

spoken by HLs is not valued as highly as Spanish spoken by native speakers (Valdés, 2001). Hamers and Blanc (1990) believe that development of a language is hindered when a language is undervalued. Except for Estela and Daniel, the participants in this study did not have well developed literacy skills in their language and this might have contributed to the difficulties that they faced in finding appropriate level classes. The ideologies of Spanish departments, which tend to devalue the Spanish spoken by HLs in The United States may contribute to difficulties faced by these students when they seek advising as well.

This seems to point to the need for professors in institutions serving HLs to gain some empathy for the HL who faces challenges in the areas that emerged in the education category. As HL numbers grow in institutions of education, a need to understand issues such as language placement, advising, information on Spanish programs, and the development of heritage language courses will grow as well.

#### Themes: Education Category

The themes that surfaced under this category include a feeling of insecurity about which courses to take and an unawareness of what Spanish courses and programs involve. Frustration was often experienced when they were faced with courses that did not meet their needs or were too easy. Often classes that were mentioned as being too easy were the 100 and 200 level classes. The participants who said that the classes were too easy had basic speaking skills in Spanish. Fernández (1981) found that it is common for HLs to have spelling and vocabulary problems, but speech levels that are specific to the home environment. Because of feeling insecure, some of the students placed themselves in courses that were too easy. Most of the

participants said that they needed to develop writing and grammar skills. The participants explained that they did not know about the content of Spanish classes and thus were generally unaware of what the study of Spanish involved. The insecurity that they felt about which courses to take stood out in the findings. Their questions regarding placement were often answered by Spanish faculty, peers, or family members.

### Language Category

Many quotes were identified that referenced language perceptions. The participants addressed their perceived language ability, Spanglish, a desire to learn the language, and they spoke of language loss.

#### Language Perceptions: Language Ability

MALINA

Malina described her language ability in high school, “I always felt like on a weird in between level because, I mean, I definitely spoke Spanish better than people who were learning it, but I didn’t speak it at, like a fluent native speaker.”

She described her level of ability as she reflected on a 200 level class that she dropped at the university. Malina talked to the professor and then decided to drop, So after a week I talked to her about it. I’m like, ‘I’m not really sure this class is for me, ‘cause we were doing, you know, every class starts with a review.’ But, we were still doing reviews after a week. I guess I was impatient, I was like, I’ve already had four years of this. Spanish is too easy. I don’t want any more of this. ... So, I mean I talked to her about it and she was like ‘well you know we’re

gonna', 'cause I told her what I needed, I said well, I know the areas of grammar where I am weak. I know where I'm supposed to practice subjunctive.

## VICTORIA

Victoria described her language ability in eleventh grade.

I went to my junior year, in eleventh grade, I went to another school in the suburbs again, and it was the same experience again. I was really good at Spanish. I didn't have a class that was at my level because vocabulary wise I was ahead, but grammar wise I was behind, so the first half of the year I took a class and it was kind of boring. I learned a little bit of grammar but not really anything.

She discussed her senior year of Spanish.

So then I got to my senior year in high school and I only had a year and one half of Spanish that I had taken and you need at least two years to get into college. So, I took a Spanish class and again they did not have a Spanish class for my level. So I had to take one for native speakers, but I wasn't a native speaker and it was once again, it was more, it was a better class because the book was better. We actually had a book and it was geared toward, like a regular literature class, except for Spanish speakers instead of English speakers. And, so, it was interesting because I knew everything they were talking about. I understood the teacher just fine. I understood the other students. I understood their answers, but reading I could read, but I didn't know what I was saying 'cause I knew how it was supposed to sound, I knew how to say it, but as far as comprehension, I had, my vocab, it was, on occasion I could get the gist of it, but for the most part reading actual short stories, I couldn't. There was just so much vocabulary. It was just so beyond.

She discussed her level of ability with the professors when she first entered the university. They advised her to go into a four hundred or 300 level class. However, she placed herself into a 200 level class.

My first year in college, I took a 200 level class. It was a composition and conversation one and two. ... I know I finished my Spanish degree my first two semesters of college. I majored in Spanish, I have my bachelor's in Spanish.

This indicates an advanced level of Spanish.

#### ESTELA

Estela is a native speaker and referenced language ability as she addressed her role teaching at the university.

Well, I am actually teaching two classes this semester, two conversation classes, Spanish 305 and 405... And now well, my, the classes that I have are really small because they are conversation classes and people have to have the opportunity to talk I guess, um and that has been really refreshing.

She addressed the topic of other students' perceptions of her language ability,

Well, I guess, one of the things that I get from people when I tell them I'm learning, getting a second major in Spanish, they usually think that I am taking the easy way, and, 'It's Spanish, you know Spanish, why are you taking Spanish?'

And, I'm like it's like you getting an English degree, because I'm not learning the language, I mean, I'm taking literature classes and film classes, theater and it's not only learning [Spanish].

ANA

Ana took a trip to Spain with several friends after high school and described herself as a non-native speaker, “It was only six weeks though, but I think it changed my life. Me and my friends, they were non-native Spanish speakers too. We all became majors afterwards.” She spoke about her experience with one professor and her writing level at the university level.

He taught me how to become a better writer. And uh, the funny thing is, in my home state, they don’t teach you well how to write in English, or essays or anything. I learned how to write in Spanish basically, research papers, anything. I learned them in Spanish at the university. It’s sad.

Ana shares how she felt in her current master’s program about being corrected in class, “When I was here two years ago, I didn’t know how to say things so I would always ask or they would correct my verb conjugation or anything, so I was always getting corrected, and little by little you don’t want to speak and that is how I felt.”

ELENA

Elena referenced her ability as she discussed her use of English with her boyfriend.

So for me my culture is important so I took on the learning process and it has its’ kind of little ups and downs as far as the pressure. Like right now I feel it a little more because my boyfriend he’s from South America, so is his mom and he speaks it, but when we talk together, it’s easier to speak in English. Because I’m not at that high of a level, so, there’s just constantly that pressure.

Elena spoke about her accent,

Because I don't have a defined accent, that makes me feel less Mexican because people think I'm Asian or they assume that I'm a different, just of a different ethnicity. So language plays a huge role in that because if you speak that language long enough, you have that accent and those phonetics and for me, I can pronounce very well in Spanish, but I don't have that accent which also shows you how often I speak Spanish.

She provided some insight into her level of Spanish from a professor's point of view when she reflected on a class she was taking the semester the interview was conducted.

Um, I actually had something happen to me just the other day in my upper level Spanish class where um the professor separated the native speakers to go outside to do this activity and the non-native speakers inside and he put me with the native speakers. So for me that was uh, kind of a compliment 'cause it makes me feel like okay, he feels that I am at a high enough level to do that, but at the same time it kind of shocked me cause I'm like wait a second I'm not a native speaker.

## MADISON

Madison started studying Spanish in eighth grade. She compared her skills to her classmates' skills.

So the first year I could really tell the difference between me and the other students just with a little bit of Spanish, I had been hearing all my life, um, I knew, 'cause in first year Spanish you learn the colors and the numbers and I already knew all that. I already knew simple phrases and responses um, so that was like, it was really cool. Um, I also noticed that when learning Spanish, I mean it equaled out in a

couple of years, me and my classmates became the same level of getting more advanced into the language, um, but what I noticed that when speaking it, since I've heard it in the house and stuff, and when I was little, I was able, I had really good pronunciation compared to the rest of the classmates. They couldn't roll their r's. They couldn't say it correctly. They still say it with a really American accent and I had no trouble pronouncing the words how they should be.

As she reflected on the university class she was taking at the time of the interview, she gave another example of her Spanish speaking ability.

I think the thing that helped me the most was speaking with my classmates, just, uh, who were at the same level as me.... I think that helped the most... ...you're at the same level so there's no, you know apprehension. You both suck so, yeah, and that is the same thing with my conversational class I'm in, is that we're all pretty bad. So there is no embarrassment to me. Whereas in the other class, some students are very good at Spanish in that class...

#### MARCELA

Marcela responded to what it meant to her to get a five, which is the best score, on the Advanced Placement (AP) exam. In her reply she gave an indication of her ability in writing at the time.

...since it seemed really easy, it didn't seem to have that much of a meaning to me, it was just like, you got the credit. Because it, like that the accent marks weren't there because back then I didn't know anything about the, you know, I didn't know where to place them.

She reflected on what studying Spanish has been like.

I have learned a lot (laughs). Sometimes when I tell people who aren't Hispanics and who were born here... ...when I first told people that I was taking Spanish and that it was going to be my new degree as well, they'd be like, but isn't that like cheating because you already know Spanish. I started off with grammar 308. ...I was like, well actually, I am learning a lot. A lot of the terms, I didn't even know what they... ...and just a lot of it, the grammar part still sometimes gets to me and um, like all the accent marks, actually I know some of the rules now, I can pretty much do quite a few of them,... ...but, it wasn't cheating or trying to get an easy 'A.'

NEVE

She told about her 101 Spanish course in community college,

The kids that were in that class already knew Spanish so I was the one who had to actually learn it, which sucked and I think they probably thought I knew it. Well no, my friends, there were a couple of my friends, were in that class, so they knew that I didn't actually know it, but it was a little easier for them.

DANIEL

He took Spanish his sophomore and junior years in high school and described the experience.

A lot of people who took it, they always said that it was,... ...because they were natives, really easy, so I fell into that category, but I always learned something. Something new in that class, but sometimes ...I was like okay, I already know that so why am I taking it, but I'll take it because I want to graduate. I don't want to

[only] be a high school graduate or whatever, and so I just, I went to the course and I got an 'A' in both of the classes.

He spoke about his first class and other university classes.

I took Spanish 305, conversation, it was really basic and I felt like I was in high school, like taking the Spanish classes, but and then I took 325, which is intermediate grammar, I felt really basic again, and so, they moved me up to 408 and that was like grammatical syntax and that was more interesting. That was like the advanced Spanish class so, that was pretty interesting.

NOMAR

Nomar spoke about his level of ability as he reflected on his experience studying Spanish prior to entering the university.

Well, I remember the only reason that I ever had and still do, struggle with Spanish is because ... ..as far as like grammar goes, ... ..I really struggle with like you know accents and just general grammar and that's the only reason like I got like a B in eighth grade in Spanish, because I could speak it fluently and write it pretty much fluently, but the accents and all that is where it got me mixed up and I'd be the one in class that everyone would hate because if no one knew the answer I would be like, it's this and that type of thing. And I just remember I learned a lot in Spanish as far as like general Spanish goes and our teacher was from Spain so I learned that whole side of it, you know the *vosotros* and that type of thing.

Summary: Language Ability

The participants represent various levels of ability and different language backgrounds. Some exhibited more confidence than others. However, several

expressed a lack of confidence in their ability. Estela and Daniel were educated in Mexico through middle school and are fluent Spanish speakers. They arrived with literacy skills in Spanish, are native speakers, and, as expected, expressed confidence in their language skills. Marcela was raised surrounded by Spanish speakers. Her parents spoke Spanish to her in the home as well. She also seemed very confident in her ability, but did mention having to learn grammar rules and how to write correctly. Nomar also expressed confidence in his speaking ability and also mentioned having to learn grammar and writing skills. Nomar spoke Spanish to his mother in the home, but started speaking English to his father and siblings during the middle school years.

Neve, Malina, Victoria, Ana, Elena, and Madison showed a lack of confidence in their speaking abilities. None of them used Spanish exclusively in the home. Neve began studying at the 100 level. Malina, and Victoria mentioned taking classes that were too easy for them at the university level. Due to a lack of confidence, Victoria placed herself in a 200 level course after being advised to take a 300 or 400 level course. She found the class to be too easy. Malina dropped a 200 level course for the same reason. According to the survey that the participants filled out before the interview, none of them had many books in Spanish in the home. Most of the participants did not have many opportunities to build their literacy skills in the first language in the school setting either before entering the university and this may be tied to their lack of confidence.

The fact that most of the participants did not have books in the home has been found to be common. For instance, Krashen (2000) confirms that it is typical for Hispanics to have few books in the heritage language available in the home. A few of

the participants did read in the first language, but not to a great extent. Estela and Daniel had the advantage of being educated in Spanish through middle school, but did not have many books in Spanish in the home after moving to The United States. The participants who had high literacy skills in the first language have had success in the English speaking school system. The positive effect of transferring literacy skills from one language to another also aligns with the literature. Carriera (2007), Cummins (1998), Krashen (2000), and Valdés (2001) claim that learning literacy skills in the first language has positive effects on literacy skills in the second language. Estela and Daniel, who developed good literacy skills in Spanish before coming to The United States are an example of HLs who have had success in our educational system even though they began learning English in middle school.

#### Self-perception: Spanglish

The participants referenced the theme of Spanglish. Spanglish is a term used to describe Spanish that is mixed with English. This is often the result when two languages are in close contact and speakers code-switch while speaking.

#### MALINA

Malina referenced the topic of Spanglish when she described a conversation table that she started at the university.

And we had some native speakers and the native speakers felt like a little left out because the native speakers, straight from Ecuador and friend from Mexico and a friend from Chile, I mean the native speakers felt, they were like, I'm not a dictionary and we're like sorry, we're just asking and there are four or five of us, we speak Spanish with our parents, but you know its just, its Spanglish. That's

what they always say, we speak Spanglish, not Spanish and I can see that. I mean you're going and going in Spanish and there is always a point where you use an English word or you say, yeah, *¿cómo se dice piano?*, or I mean you get to that point and so it's Spanglish.

ESTELA

Estela expressed her frustration towards the use of Spanglish.

Yeah, I guess the first times that I started hearing Spanglish, I was like, I don't like it. I don't know, it felt like the language was being a little not destroyed, but a little, I was like okay, I don't speak perfect Spanish, but, that combination of words or yeah, I didn't like it.

ANA

Ana spoke of Spanglish as she reflected on her study abroad experience in Mexico, "The incorporation of Spanglish in the United States, Spanglish is very important, everybody talks Spanglish and there, it is just Spanish."

She also referenced Spanglish as something she would bring to class in her teaching, "I think I would use like, Spanglish words, I would say things in Spanglish, sometimes something would slip, bad things or good things, but something might slip."

ELENA

Elena spoke of the use of Spanglish and her mother's Spanish ability.

I think it goes back to kind of the same thing of being ashamed. Sometimes maybe at that particular time of having an accent or speaking Spanish or maybe it was considered taboo at the time or I'm not quite sure, but as far as she goes, her father,

I believe, is from Mexico and her mom is from Texas and both her parents speak Spanish fluently. She grew up with her mom and she speaks it, Spanish you know fluently, but in, the south, on the border, you speak Spanglish, so every, you know, you answer English words here and there so she never, I don't think was exposed to it continually all fluent Spanish.

She explained further,

The only thing I can think of is like I said, coming from a state on the Mexican border, you speak a lot of Spanglish. You don't speak, you know proper, you put slang words in there, it's broken up, you know between English and Spanish so perhaps because of that it's not proper and if you're speaking with someone who's not from, we call it the Tejana culture, maybe it makes you sound less educated perhaps, or again, you know, less of a Mexican because you don't speak it properly.

#### MARCELA

Marcela referenced Spanglish while reflecting on the use of Spanish in school before entering the university.

But um, as to like with the Spanish language, I don't think there was that much, I mean like in school, we talked English and stuff and, but sometimes among the Hispanic school we would talk in Spanish or a mix of, 'cause a lot of us do that where we do a mix.

Marcela spoke of using Spanglish and how her sister uses it,

Um, I guess yeah, you know, quite a bit of Spanglish, but with my parents she's like, just Spanish, but... ..it's almost like, uh, some people who aren't native

speakers who are taking the classes at, the way they use the words, sometimes she'll do that or she'll try to put like a non-Hispanic ending to a word or something.

#### NEVE

Neve spoke of Spanglish as she reflected on her parents not speaking Spanish to her.

Only every now and then my mom would say, like, pass me your purse, she'd say it in Spanish but she said, they didn't want us to hear them argue. So that's why they didn't teach us. ... just the words I would hear every now and then, I just kind of caught on I guess, but there were some words my mom always said that I just kind of thought were just English words, and she would speak both English or Spanish, not Spanglish or whatever. So, I didn't know how to differentiate between Spanish and English when I was a kid, seven years old, seven or eight, so, there were just a few words like that...

#### DANIEL

Daniel spoke of the use of Spanglish in middle school.

But even in the classroom, we would often speak Spanglish or some Spanish, but it was mostly English, but we would help each other in that manner.

#### NOMAR

Nomar mentioned Spanglish as he reflected on the small Hispanic population on his campus and in the context of his experience in the Hispanic orientation camp, ...the camp program was you know, where everyone was Hispanic and so we had a class once a week where it was kind of nice stepping back into kind of like almost like home. It's basically the reason like why I didn't get so homesick, was like you

know where Spanglish was spoken and Spanish every once in awhile too, and like the type of sense of humor you wouldn't get anywhere else, you know like cultural references and that type of thing.

### Summary: Spanglish

Elena and Estela both referenced Spanglish in a negative context. Elena stated that it was not a proper way to speak, while Estela said that she did not like the use of Spanglish. However, Elena also stated that the use of Spanglish was accepted by speakers in her home state. Malina accepted the use of Spanglish as natural, but told of a time where native speakers criticized those who relied on Spanglish or who mixed English with Spanish. Ana, Daniel, Nomar, and Marcela spoke of Spanglish as a normal and accepted use of the language. However, Ana did show some concern about her sister's use of Spanglish during the interview as well. Spanglish has been used by the participants and is a common result when different languages are contact. The findings indicate that Spanglish is a reality of most of the participants.

### Desire to Learn Spanish

The desire to learn the language stood out in the findings as a motivator for deciding to study advanced Spanish.

### MALINA

Malina reflected on school and her desire to speak the language.

One time there was a girl who came from Mexico and she wasn't in my grade, she was in a younger grade and she only spoke Spanish and she was actually in the grade with one of my younger sisters. ...there were two girls and they both ended up in a grade with two of my younger sisters. ...I started noticing that after that

year like I was in fourth grade and she was in third grade with my other sister and one of them was in first grade, that after that I noticed more and more Spanish speakers coming. Like I would run into them more and more maybe it was just that I was just getting more involved, it was that the population was growing maybe both... But like I felt at that point that I didn't know Spanish that well and I was like okay, well I've got to learn it and both of my younger sister's Spanish was getting better and I was like well I've got to learn it too.

As she reflected on high school she mentioned wanting to 'know' Spanish.

I mean it was just always there, but I never really think about it. You don't look at it because it is always there. You always, you get someone who goes to the door who speaks Spanish and you have to be able to say the basic right. Just like, *pues un momento* or *¿Qué puedo hacer para ti?* But those are just basic phrases; you couldn't really hold a full conversation. So, I knew I wanted to know Spanish.

Her desire to learn the language is also reflected in her choice to study abroad in Chile in high school.

One of my sisters had gone away to do study abroad in Venezuela, and ...I don't remember what year she did that, but she had done it and she was in high school and she was older than me and so now that I was in high school. Well, I'll do a study abroad too. I went to Chile for a summer after tenth grade and that was really fun and that is when I learned, when I really learned Spanish.

She described her summer job and her efforts to be exposed to Spanish during the summer.

When I went back in the summers that's when I was like okay there is a Spanish speaking population here, I'm going to practice and so, ... I got a job where there were other Mexicans.

Malina completed two 300 level Spanish classes at the university, but looked for opportunities to practice Spanish outside of class. She spoke about a Spanish-speaking table she started with others to practice Spanish, "We wanted to be able to use our Spanish speaking skills to force each other, because we all wanted to practice Spanish, we wanted to force each other to use it and we wanted to just improve our Spanish without taking a Spanish class."

#### VICTORIA

Several examples that referenced Victoria's desire to learn the language emerged from the interview. She explained her desire to speak Spanish at the restaurant where she worked when she was seventeen and eighteen years old, "It was a turning point because I was really exposed to Spanish there and I wanted to talk to anyone that worked there, it was going to be in Spanish. At least half didn't speak any English." She expressed her desire to learn the language,

I mean I know it is something that I really want to learn. I want to go to a Spanish speaking country preferably Mexico first, but I am not limited to that just because I want to know more about the language I want to be able to speak. I guess my goal is to speak like a native speaker, so that a native speaker like couldn't tell for at least for the first couple of conversations.

#### ESTELA

Estela's interview did not have examples of the desire to learn the language. She is a fluent speaker.

ANA

Ana spoke about her experience in high school and desire to learn the language.

We always talked in class, we always practiced. So, every time I would force myself to, because I really wanted to learn. I would read dialogue out loud every day. And I would answer questions and everything and then I would ask my mom, and we would practice. I would always practice so when I got into the university it was easy for me to understand.

She continued and reflected on her high school experience and learning Spanish, "My experience is I guess a pleasant one because I really wanted to learn."

Reflecting on this, she mentions her parents again, "It was a desire and my father, you know, he didn't want us to learn. Even though he spoke Spanish to my mother, he would never speak to us." She shared information about how she felt about the language at the time of the interview, "I think I'm better with it. I've been abroad for a year and a half to try to perfect it.. I just, I know it's a part of me and that's how I feel about Spanish, like it's always going to be with me every single day of my life."

She spoke about what it means to be in the master's program, "That I improved, coming back in the master's and passing. I had to pass an exam and I had to show my grades for my whole year abroad and knowing that I got accepted and passing the exam meant the world to me I think because I proved that I could do it."

She also told about her goal with the language.

I just think my goal is to try to know as much Spanish as I can, learn as much as I can, it means to me a lot because I want to learn everything I can about Spanish. It's like English, you don't know everything, but you want to know everything and I think Spanish that's what I want to do, know as much as I can I think it is never ending, learning Spanish.

She offered another reason for wanting to learn the language, "One reason too was because I wanted to talk to my grandma on my mother's side she didn't speak any English and I would always say 'hi grandma' she wouldn't remember who I am unless I spoke Spanish. To this day she is the same. That was a big motivator."

ELENA

Elena chose to take Spanish in middle school and high school, "Once I started middle school, I decided to take Spanish again because it's important to be able to communicate with my family and it's a huge part of my culture being Mexican." She demonstrated a desire to learn the language when reflecting on her experience in higher education.

So, um, in community college you know I took more Spanish classes and I just started to build it back up again. Um, it was a little bit easier because no one really ridiculed me. Then, I had more people to practice with and once I hit the university level, I still wanted to continue it so I continued taking Spanish classes.

She reflected on her goals for learning the language.

My ultimate goal would be to be as fluent as possible because in the career field that I choose, which is broadcast production, with communication as the umbrella, I want to be able to work in both fields and if I know the language fluently enough,

all I have to know is the terminology for that specific job. So that is my ultimate goal, to be fluent enough to where I cannot only communicate well with my family members, but so that I could possibly even expand my job opportunities as well.

## MADISON

Madison addressed her desire to study Spanish as she reflected on school and family.

When we started taking foreign languages in eight grade, I didn't want to take Spanish. I didn't, as much as I loved the culture and the fact that I'm Mexican and that, I mean, I didn't really want to learn the language. I wanted to learn German, but I had to, my parents made me. They said I had to take it all throughout high school, but knowing that I had Mexican family, some of whom can't speak English, um it kind of just drove me to keep on, you know, wanting to learn the language. ...  
...And I actually had a reason to learn Spanish because I am Mexican and I do have Spanish-speaking relatives. I mean, I have, I've never had a real conversation with my grandmother because she doesn't speak English, so.

She spoke of how she transitioned from not wanting to take or learn Spanish to a desire to learn and study the language.

Ah, all the way through tenth I knew that I needed to learn it, ... knowing that I have a motive to speak to my family, I'm Mexican. I knew that I needed to learn it and that's what made me do good and also my parents and you know, pushing their children, um a combination of that. But I was still like, I guess I have to, you know, take another year of Spanish, whoop dee doo, this is so fun, I am thoroughly enjoying myself [sarcastic tone].

She spoke of a trip to Mexico that changed her attitude towards studying Spanish.

...me and my aunt, traveled throughout Mexico ... it was such an amazing vacation experience and I picked up on a lot. I was still, I still am not really confident in my Spanish so I am really apprehensive to speak it, but I heard a lot of it, in going, and visiting houses and people and this and that, just traveling throughout Mexico for a month. Um, and I 'member coming back the next year for my twelfth grade, my last year of Spanish in high school, and all of a sudden everything was easy. It was actually fun for the first time to learn Spanish. I actually like enjoyed it.

She continued,

And I think that is what happened when I went down to Mexico for the month. I came back as a senior and it was so much easier, I could think easier in Spanish, that transition when I go into the classroom and I immerse myself in Spanish so easy you know.

She also made a reference to using Spanish in the work environment.

What really appeals to me are volunteer organizations. Doctors without borders, ... working in different, and around the world and in the field. So, knowing a different language, really helps. ... French would benefit me more, but still I mean there's plenty of you know Spanish-speaking countries that I would be sent to, especially in South America.

MARCELA

Marcela did not reference a desire to learn the language. She is a fluent speaker.

NEVE

Neve reflected on a course in college that made her want to study Spanish.

I understand that Spanish is like a huge, I mean it's like we have Spanish all over the place, it's all over. It's a lot larger than a lot of these tiny tribes that are aboriginal tribes... they're a lot smaller so they are going extinct pretty much or the language is going to die. So I was just thinking well, Spanish is pretty well known, but it's nice to know my own language and then that kind of, that's one of the things that kind a pushed me was that culture course. ..it was pretty much that course and me trying to decide what to do as far as school and what I want to do after school and part of uh my learning I guess. I was just thinking of my grandmother and the course. I think that's pretty much what it was and I guess I could say it would be nice to converse with my dad. 'Cause he speaks English, but he speaks mostly Spanish... ... I can tell he wants to speak to me in Spanish... It'd be nice... ...and it would be stupid of me not to learn my own language (laughs).

Neve referenced her desire to become fluent as she spoke of the improvement in the level of her Spanish.

My advisor is like, 'You never took Spanish in high school?', I'm like 'no', well I took it, but I never finished it... ...it didn't show up on my transcript when I came here and took college courses. But it just kind of helped me as far as pronouncing words, it just comes easier for me when I listen you know, the only hard part is actually speaking it and that's why I want to study abroad so I can just be immersed with people who speak nothing but Spanish so hopefully I'll become fluent, because that's my goal to become fluent...

DANIEL

Daniel did not mention the desire to learn the language. He is a fluent speaker.

## NOMAR

Nomar identifies himself as a native speaker on the survey. He discussed the concept of what it is to be fluent and his reason for learning Spanish.

...I wanted to at least minor in Spanish because not only because in the long term it would help me out and would look good on my resume and transcript, you know, just the ability to be fluent and to honestly say I am fluent, and not, I grew up speaking Spanish there's a difference.

He continued, "Just being around Spanish again is nice and I, I don't know, I feel like it's important to me to be in Spanish class, you know, as I explained earlier I think I should be able to say that I am fluent, you know, be able to write it, um read it, speak it, all of that."

He also mentioned speaking with his mother,

I realized that once I came to college, um because usually I'd be at home you know every day after school, and at dinner at least, I'd talk to my mom, but once I got here, I was just, you know a bad son when I got to college 'cause I hardly ever called. Like first and second semester I called like once a week maybe and so it turned from you know, five to twenty minutes a day to five minutes, ten, twenty minutes a month, which is a huge difference. And I realized when I went home for breaks, that I had like lost a huge amount of my Spanish, I'd stumble over words I would have to ask how do you say this in Spanish when I was trying to talk to my mom.

### Summary: Desire to Learn Spanish

The participants gave several reasons for wanting to study the language. Several topics were mentioned including work, family, heritage, attitude, and desire to communicate with other Spanish speakers. Marcela, Daniel, and Estela did not reference the desire to learn the language. They are very fluent and comfortable with their language ability. However, Ana, Nomar, Neve, Malina, Victoria, Elena, and Madison all referenced a desire to learn the language. Some of the reasons included the desire to be fluent, to be able to put the skill on a resume, use it in the work environment, and to speak to relatives. The fact that it was seen as ‘a part’ of them or their heritage was also a reason that was given for wanting to learn the language. In addition, the desire to learn was also mentioned in reference to being able to speak to other Spanish speakers.

Ana and Elena mentioned wanting to learn as it relates to having a positive attitude towards the learning process and environment. Elena spoke of not being ridiculed in her classes at the community college as she spoke of deciding to continue her study of the language. Ana explained that the experience of learning Spanish was ‘pleasant.’

Malina, Victoria, Elena, Nomar, and Madison referred to using Spanish in the work environment as a goal. Malina, Veronica, and Elena spoke of the desire to be able to communicate with other Spanish speakers. The desire to speak with family members was also a typical theme that emerged. Malina, Victoria, Ana, Elena, Neve, Madison, and Nomar all gave examples of wanting to learn the language to communicate with family members. Several of the participants mentioned that they were encouraged to learn Spanish and according to a UCLA survey (2007) and

Malave (2006) parents have a positive attitude towards the idea of their children learning the heritage language. Their desire to learn the language in some cases was supported by their parents even though several of the parents stopped using Spanish in the home. Ultimately, the desire for them to learn the language was motivated from within and was a strong personal goal.

### Language Loss

All of the participants gave specific examples in their interview related to the theme of awareness of language loss and of improvement of the Spanish language from studying the heritage language.

#### MALINA

Malina referenced language loss while she reflected on a university experience with the Hispanic club.

Because I got really involved in the international community and we did an international festival that year, and, and there were lots of Latinos coming from, you know from the group and I met them and we talked. But they were like me and their English was better than their Spanish and I mean, we had a lot of culture shock... Like, when I have a friend, I talk to them in English because I want to be able to express myself. ...it is very important to me that I express myself to the best of my ability and I do it best in English. And so, unless I am really forced to, I won't do it in another language. Not that I can't do it in another language, it's just unless I am forced to, you know, I'm kind of lazy and I won't take the work to do it. So, so I didn't really speak Spanish outside of class and I didn't take the class

that semester and I was like, oh, I wish I had taken something because now I'm starting to forget.

Malina decided to study Japanese instead of Spanish in college. She addressed language loss.

And so, I stuck in that class. And so I took that one that first semester, but I noticed that as I studied Japanese more and more and more I was forgetting my Spanish. Not that it was ever the best level, but I was forgetting basic stuff. I couldn't, I don't know, I was just forgetting stuff.

She referenced language loss when she reflected on a conversation with a friend as well.

She actually said the same thing to me. She's like, I'm forgetting my Spanish. I've been here for what six, seven years? Me too, help me out, let's help each other out. ...she's fluent, and so, she was a lot better and she would help me. So I learned a little bit from her, ...I tried to talk to my brother in Spanish, but it was just awkward. Because there are certain sisters or siblings that you can talk to in Spanish and English and it just flows with them. And you've heard them speaking it and it's kind of cool and it just works.

#### VICTORIA

Victoria referenced the concept of avoiding the loss of language as she referred to her niece in the following quote, "I could have been bilingual, and I guess it is a regret I have, even though I had no control over the language they spoke to me, but I guess my desire is so strong to become bilingual that I mean I don't want her to have that same experience."

Victoria speaks in Spanish to her niece to maintain the heritage language in the family, “I mean so, I only speak to her in Spanish and I know for a while during this past year, she is six. She wouldn’t talk to me. I’d say, you have to talk to me in Spanish, and she wouldn’t.”

#### ESTELA

Estela referenced language loss in relation to Spanglish and other speakers. In addition, she spoke about how it made her feel as well.

I’m not sure how it made me feel, but I, maybe I was a little frustrated because nobody spoke like me, even if I was speaking Spanish. The last time I was mentioning my ESL teacher, she was from Spain and I feel like she was the only person that I could actually talk to in proper Spanish because with other students, I couldn’t really communicate... .. but that’s because I had never heard Spanglish before and now I mean it is understandable. I think about it, and it’s like of course if your parents speak Spanish and you grew up in an English speaking country it is sometimes, you can’t really help it and I’ve seen myself doing it.

#### ANA

Ana explained the use of Spanish in the household.

My parents, mainly my father, wanted me to assimilate into the culture because my father faced a lot of discrimination during his time. He lived here during the depression and the 50’s and 60’s. And that was the reason why our generation was kind of lacking in that area, but my mother, because she’s from Mexico, doesn’t speak much English and she wanted us to learn.

She shared some of her father’s experience with the language and school.

When he was in grade school, his first language was Spanish. Him and his brothers, there was thirteen of them, they were teased a lot, he's from California and this was in California, they were teased a lot at the time and made fun of because of their names, their first names and last names and you know. He didn't know how to read and write and they put him in a class in English and he had to face certain discriminations so that was the reason why he didn't want us to learn Spanish.

She remembers knowing the language and using it in Mexico, losing it and gaining it back again during her study abroad experience,

When I was five years old and I just remember that I was playing with the kids normal, I had no problem moving around, and she told me because you were speaking Spanish, that is the reason why you were able to do that, you picked it up again. I learned it, the first words I said and then I stopped because my father wanted me to change just to assimilate to the culture, but once I went back to Mexico, it came back.

## ELENA

Elena reflected on her language ability as a child and the loss of language. I was brought up bilingual because I am actually from the central southern U.S., so we would have family half in Mexico and every other weekend we'd go visit. So when I was little I was brought up speaking both languages, English and Spanish equally and my father joined the military and we moved a lot and we moved to Europe for a little while and I ended up losing a lot of my Spanish. My personal thought on that is probably because I think my dad became ashamed perhaps and

stopped teaching us because we were being taught and all of a sudden probably when I was in second, maybe third grade, he just stopped and we didn't speak it too much in the home anymore. So I lost a lot of it for about four years and came back to the U.S. and I had so much trouble communicating with my family because I lost the language.

She spoke of regaining the language, "So, I started taking it probably about ninth, eighth or ninth grade and it's interesting to go from having had the language fluently to losing a lot of it. So it's almost like re-learning it all over again." She told of taking it through high school, "I just kept taking it and I didn't really become fluent I could converse, um, enough to get around, but not fluent enough to where I was back to being bilingual, how I was before."

She mentioned her Spanish in middle school as she reflected on language.

When I lost my Spanish and when I tried to speak it again, let's say in elementary school, teasing is what gives you that, um, I guess stigma, so for me it would be kids where, you know, they just tease you so after awhile you're like okay, so if I speak Spanish, I'm going to be made fun of or they're going to ridicule me, so then you get that fear, I guess.

## MADISON

Madison referenced language loss when she spoke of her grandmother's language background.

I just think that it's really beneficial, the fact that I learned Spanish in the home because it gives you that drive, you have that background, you have that little extra that the other students don't have to relate to. I always thought it was really cool

that I had that extra little bit in my background, in my life, it makes you want to learn it more. ...my grandmother always regrets not knowing German, because her father, my great grand father immigrated here from Germany. He was fluent, she never became, she was like me, little words and phrases, forgot all of it by the time she was an adult because she never studied it and she always regretted not knowing it because with that exposure in the house she really wanted to, like it made her want to learn German, like I want to learn Spanish.

She also described her father's use of Spanish.

He's fifty so he's been speaking and living in America longer than he had in Mexico, so, we don't really think to practice it now, because his first instinct is to speak English. I mean his Spanish is still fine and he still even has a thick accent, but he thinks in English... ...people thought I had the upper hand in school because my father spoke Spanish, and in Spanish classes, but that really wasn't the case because we didn't practice it that much except for saying simple phrases.

#### MARCELA

Marcela spoke of her concern with her sister's loss of the language as she reflected on the first two interviews. She describes her attempt to convince her sister to take Spanish in high school in the following quote.

Hm, well I guess with just my experience overall, now that I realized how important it is, and that I don't know for what reason, I feel like my sister, my younger sister, she's six? years younger than me, it doesn't seem like she got as much as the Spanish down as my brother and I. I think she can read it and her writing is probably not that great... ... I was like, so, see what level the Spanish

classes are and see, you know, if you need to take them, so you know, seeing how helpful they are and stuff. I was trying to encourage her since she was born here and you know, when we went to Mexico she was like a year old so she doesn't really have much of that and with her friends I think she speaks predominantly English and stuff. ...like her friends at school mostly speak English where like my friends it's like Spanish and stuff and I guess like I didn't want her to lose more of that.

NEVE

Neve gave an example of language loss while reflecting on a culture class that she attended at the university.

Well, my first semester here, I wasn't sure what I wanted to major in, I just knew that I wanted to continue in school, so that was my thing and then after taking that culture course, it was kind of like a bunch of things together. 'Cause when my grandmother passed away, that didn't like really hit me, but after I took the culture course I was thinking of my grandmother and how she would try to teach us Spanish.

She continued,

And there is this older lady just talking in her language, tongue, and she would talk about how she tries to tell stories to her kids and pass the stories down to their families and hoping they'll keep their culture alive and their language alive and I thought of my granma. And I was like ohhhhh, yeah, it's like she's so cute... ...I kind of understood where they were coming from.

DANIEL

Daniel is a fluent Spanish speaker and mentioned the use of English by some in an attempt to assimilate. This speaks to heritage language loss.

I think, well I think that people don't want to stick out you know and be like different, because like then the belief in this country is like you're white or black, so there's like, very hard lines. So if you're like oh, this person is different, people don't want to be associated with that and people don't want to be seen like they stick out and don't belong. So that's why I think it's like people are like, no it's cool, like I don't really, um, I speak English or whatever, let's go do this or like do this, so like sticking out is like a major thing that they don't want to do.

NOMAR

After going home he felt he was losing his Spanish and decided to take a class.

He described this experience.

Like Thanksgiving break first semester, and then Christmas break, like I realized, I was losing it. And if I didn't do anything about it I would eventually come home less and less, and eventually gotten worse with it, cause that definitely wouldn't work in my hometown. So I didn't want to lose that I wanted to be able to talk to my mom all my life and I want to eventually have my kids know Spanish too so they can talk to their granma.

#### Summary: Language Loss

The participants revealed awareness of the topic of language loss. Nomar, Ana, Elena, and Malina gave examples of forgetting the language. Estela spoke of Spanglish and mentioned that she sometimes used English words as she explained the use of Spanglish by Spanish speakers raised in The United States. Daniel, Ana,

Madison, and Elena mentioned their fathers and language loss. Neve referenced her desire to not lose her language as she reflected on a class where the concept of language extinction was presented. Common themes surfaced reflecting the participants' strong desire and actions taken to avoid language loss. The most common action taken was the decision to study Spanish. In addition, the participants revealed an awareness of their own as well as their family members' language loss. The desire to maintain the language to communicate with family was common. The participants explained that they were re-learning their language and mentioned noticing improvement of their abilities in the heritage language.

#### Themes: Language Category

The themes that were common across all of the participants included a strong desire to learn the language, an inability to judge their level of language ability, an awareness and frustration of language loss and pleasure with the improvement of the heritage language after studying Spanish. Except for Estela, they also referenced low confidence when judging their language abilities.

#### Identity Category

The participants gave examples that referenced the topics of cultural connection and the connections that they felt with other Spanish speakers. All of the participants spoke to the topic of defining identity.

#### Cultural Connection

##### MALINA

Malina discussed the process of choosing a college.

I remember one of the things that I wanted, but I didn't really realize it until I got here was that I wanted a college or university that had some kind of Latino population, that had some type of group or focus on it. That was just me, that was just who I was and that's always going to be a part of me.

She spoke of a desire to retain her culture, "I was an anthropology major, and I just loved being around cultures, but I wanted at the same time [to] maintain my Spanish, maintain my identity, so I was like okay, I can be involved in other cultures, but I have to maintain mine, too."

She mentions more about identity as it relates to her parents, who are both of Mexican descent.

And so, with, I guess specifically with me, wanting to choose Spanish and, or wanting to learn Spanish, I felt like I was always choosing my identity. I was always saying, yes I am going to keep the Latino alive in me. Yes I am going to learn about my father's history, my mother's history. Yes, I am going to make that a part of my life and so because of that I felt like I put forth a lot of effort like then it doesn't even feel like effort.

## VICTORIA

She reflected on a classmate and the concept of being Mexican.

I am definitely conversational and I can get by in a Spanish speaking country, but it's, but I'm not a native speaker, I'm so not. But I mean, I guess going back to college (the subject) there was one other girl and she was Mexican. She came to the U.S. when she was three or four so she called herself Mexican American. Um, and it was funny. I guess this is cultural, because I always wanted to be more

Mexican. I would kind of emphasize that side, like, I'm Mexican and downplay the American side and she would do the opposite. She would try to be more American, but I guess despite that I'm so much more American than she is and she's so much more Mexican, just because both of her parents are from Mexico where only my father is from Mexico.

She spoke about going to college and being more aware of being Mexican American.

I'm Mexican American and I know for awhile, I try to compartmentalize things, my value for family well that's Mexican and my I don't know, something else was American and something else was Mexican and then I was talking to one of my friends and she was like, 'why do you do that?' And she's like 'it is really weird,' she said.

She continued,

Like I mean I could talk to her about it and like we could both sit back and look at American culture, her much more so than I could. I noticed actually all my friends in college, I guess I'm drawn to international students, because two of my really good friends were one's from India and one is from Trinidad Tobago and everyone shares different jokes with me because I am Mexican American. I'm not really American.

ANA

She spoke of searching for her identity during her study abroad experience in Mexico and mentioned that she identifies herself as 'Mexican,' "I think, well I was trying to find my identity while I was in Mexico and I think identity is what you

believe and who you are and even though I'm not a native speaker, I live with it, I feel you know, like I'm Mexican."

Ana reflected on what it means to her to incorporate her culture in her teaching,

I think because it's a part of me, my life, after my parents, when I learned it in the high school years, five years later, I didn't mention it and now my family, plus my father is dead, so now we do celebrate the day of the dead. So, it's like me and my family, even the other sides of my family, now recognize that holiday. So it means everything because now I actually practice it. So first hand, I live it every day.

She spoke about a connection between culture and speaking Spanish while she reflected on speaking Spanish with her uncle.

And you know he would talk to me in English, I would just answer back in Spanish and then afterwards he would switch and talk to me only in Spanish so, it kind of made me happy because I feel like I improved, like you know you opened a new door. Like I was saying about that student you opened that connection with your family and now they are recognizing you know that I speak Spanish, there is a connection, maybe I understand the culture now.

ELENA

Elena reflected on why she started studying Spanish, "Once I started middle school, I decided to take Spanish again because it's important to be able to communicate with my family and it's a huge part of my culture, being Mexican."

She shared what it was like to take Spanish from a native speaker as a junior in high school.

I was re-connecting back, my memory files were being opened up and it helped me with my pronunciation and that's important because it's uh, it's kind of like your accent and how you sound and if you are Mexican you have a certain expectation. People automatically assume that you speak Spanish, so if you don't and you sound, I guess you can say Americanized. I don't know it makes you feel less Mexican, it is, the best way to put it.

She mentioned why she is learning the language again as it relates to culture, "So for me my culture is important so I took on the learning process and it has its kind of little ups and downs as far as the pressure."

She shared more about losing her culture.

Then when we moved away and you tried to talk to people and you lost your language, you're losing part of the culture, you're losing, you know, passing on stories. You learn a lot um through language just like you do in English. You learn fairy tales, you know people tell you all these things, so for me um, not knowing songs, I couldn't decipher songs or anything, that's losing part of your culture.

She mentioned retaining her culture in relation to learning the language as she reflected on her family.

They know I have lost my Spanish. They were excited, like oh you're learning, that shows them too, like I don't want to lose my culture and I do want to keep that line of communication and I do want to make it stronger so for them, they are very encouraging.

MADISON

Madison spoke about her connection with the culture.

Well, um I've grown up in the Pacific Northwest and it's a whole different culture here than in Mexico, even from when I was really little I just fell in love with the culture, the people and music and the food. So I really connect with it on a deeper level and um, I mean people connect with cultures even if they aren't you know, like Indian or Russian, or they really love that culture and I really love Mexican culture and I was able to connect with it way more because I was Mexican.

She reflected on becoming aware of the term 'multicultural.'

When you are in junior high you start grasping the idea that there are different cultures and heritage and ethnicities, um the whole you know, the whole campaign like multicultural diversity, it's everywhere in the public school system, so you become very aware of it and I became aware that I was multicultural.

Madison continued,

I noticed it a lot, in junior high I said it was, it became apparent to us, and in high school to this day I still think it's you know, a good thing and I'm proud that I'm Mexican and I am glad that I am, but in high school they took a kind of a different approach as in celebrate your multicultural self and diversity.

**MARCELA**

Marcela did not reference identity much in her interviews. She did make a connection with studying Spanish and learning about her heritage when reflecting on the past and present experiences.

Well I guess in part, it's a way of getting to know more about my actual heritage, I mean through, because as I mentioned before you get all the history, culture, like all this mixed in and at one point.

She continued,

‘Cause yeah my mom taught us to read and write it and stuff, but we never really talked about all that part, you know the history the culture ‘cause, yeah I lived in a Hispanic home, but I didn’t, you know, I got some of the culture, but I didn’t get like the whole setting of it or more of a broad range of it and with um, the classes here, I’m getting some of that that I didn’t get at home. And which I think is important, my being Mexican and stuff so, yeah.

NEVE

Neve reflected on culture during the interview, “I also thought about connecting about the Spanish culture with uh, my family, well as far as what I grew up with and like the dinners we used to eat and stuff like that and like prayer.” Neve continued, “Spanish has always been in the family so I want to keep it that way and I am Hispanic and you know, um I think um, it’s part of who I am pretty much.”

She continued,

I was born here, so I’m American, but my dad, like he knows Spanish and he never taught me and I feel like it’s part of me. I feel like, I guess that, that’s what I grew up with and I was around it and just um not the whole culture, ‘cause we lived in the south, but we had it going on. And I mean we would eat Mexican food all the time and uh, we would listen to Spanish music with my dad in the car, he’d listen to his music from Mexico on the AM station and my mom would listen to mostly English, but I just feel it’s basically from childhood that’ where I feel, you know, uh, it’s my language.

She reflected more on being exposed to Spanish, “My dad is from Mexico, but I can relate and he speaks Spanish and I just feel like it’s part of me I really don’t, I can’t explain it, that’s just what I grew up with pretty much.”

DANIEL

Daniel mentioned a connection he feels to the Spanish language as he reflected on his studies.

And so, the language of course also brings you closer to people, I mean here we are four percent, but with the language I think, fifteen percent multicultural so it really helps you. It helps you to open doors and it helped me I think studying what I’m studying right now. Like there is some connection that I just can’t describe sometimes and I feel when I’m studying multicult[ural], all the history, contemporary issues, um the language, literature. When I talk about that, there is a connection, a home connection something that reminds me back when I was little and it just moves me, gets me through a day and something that I don’t mind spending time studying.

He spoke of his culture,

I think that by learning and reassuring myself that my culture is rich, interesting, uh, really deep, uh that I could do something with it, like I can study the construct of my culture.

Daniel referenced culture as he reflected on his past and present experiences as an HL educated in the United States.

At the end of the day now, I know after learning, going to the high school, the middle school system, I know that I want to get everything, you know my culture,

not back, but I want to learn all like about literature, you know from my country and everything like that. And you know learning English is important because I'm in the United States but it's not everything. You know, a lot of people it's like you just gotta acculturate and be like everybody else here, but yeah I think that's important too, you have to like participate in a new country and everything, but at the same time, I'm not gonna just drop everything else, because my culture is really important to me. It is who I am, and family is the number one thing for me.

He reflected on the importance of his roots.

I tend to think that people should hold up their values, like their heritage, like hold it up and also, like what they learned, when they moved to a new country and like just have those be equal and when it comes to, if we had to choose, I think it is better to choose our roots you know where we grew up and to um than to actually just totally obliterate our roots and just hold something that is not our roots up, but, I mean by saying that you know what that says about respect, you know family, like equality, not just because I'm Mexican.

NOMAR

Nomar gave an example of culture while he reflected on the experience at the camp for Hispanics he attended the first year at the university, "I realize how important it is to you know not to be just someone, but to belong to you know that culture or whatever and so it was really good for me." He referenced the importance of culture when he spoke of losing the language, "So I didn't want to lose that. I wanted to be able to talk to my mom all my life and I want to eventually have my

kids know Spanish too so they can talk to their granma and so I decided to take Spanish.”

### Summary: Cultural Connection

The importance of retaining a cultural connection was referenced by most of the participants. In addition, most of the participants revealed that they think of themselves as Mexican. Several correlated culture with speaking Spanish.

Daniel, Neve, Marcela, Madison, Victoria, Ana, and Elena stated that they are Mexican. Malina, Daniel, Neve, Elena, Marcela, Madison, Nomar, and Ana all spoke to maintaining the culture or heritage in reference to maintaining the language.

Daniel mentioned a 'home connection' when he spoke of learning literature and his studies. Elena, Ana, and Neve made connections between music, stories, and traditions when reflecting on maintaining the heritage language. Nomar, Elena, Ana, and Madison spoke to the concept of learning Spanish to keep connected to their Spanish-speaking relatives. The connection between culture and speaking the language is reality for most of the HLs interviewed for this study. Suarez (2007) found that parents see an important connection between speaking Spanish and the Latino identity. The same sentiment was revealed in the participants' discussions and is supported by Dorian (1999) and Fishman (1999) who also discuss the strong connections that exist between culture and language. The theme of desire to maintain connections between culture and language stood out in the findings and may have implications on course design for HLs.

#### Connections with Spanish Speakers

The participants referenced the topic regarding connections with other Spanish speakers. Some of them felt a connection, while others referred to feeling disconnected.

## MALINA

Malina grew up in a neighborhood that has a large Mexican population. Her father was also involved with the community. She described how she felt about her classmates in two different schools.

I went to a private school for two years and then I went to a public one for a year and that school was, a school in a large city in the Midwest. So it was mostly, majority African Americans and so it was a completely different culture for me. I was totally shocked when I went there and I hadn't realized that like living in a part of the city populated by mostly Mexicans. I had always gone to school like near home, so, living in a Mexican community, living around other people who at least were exposed to Latino culture like I never really realized that that created a kind of neighborhood and culture where you were used to everything and when I went there it was, I was, I felt like it was double culture shock cause not only was I being exposed to black culture. I was always being exposed to mainstream American culture and I wasn't ready for that at all.

She discussed some experiences she had while she was in Spanish One in high school.

I guess at that point I always felt the Mexicans were more accepting and that is why I hung out with them. Because they were like it's okay that you don't speak Spanish. It's okay, it's like, you know enough, it's good that you speak English and they would try to learn English. Whereas like the Americans or the people who didn't speak Spanish were like 'Why don't you speak it?' And 'You should speak it.' Yeah, you always felt pressured.

She discussed the culture shock she felt in the town in the west where she attended the university.

So when I got here, it was definitely culture shock and I didn't realize why or what, because I mean, I had been to other places in the United States. I visited my brother and I had gone to other schools outside of my city, but when I got here, but I never lived, lived like twenty-four hours in an American culture before.

She mentioned Chile as well, "I think Chile, that was more similar to my culture at home and how I lived at home than living here in the west where everything was very different to me."

She referenced the connections she made through the Hispanic club.

So I met four or five other, I don't know what you call them, I mean they are not all, I mean only one is Mexican American like me, but the others are all part Latino something and part American or at least they grew up in America. So I guess they are all Latino American like me and we were really able to relate to each other and so that was really, really nice.

## VICTORIA

Victoria referenced connections as she described her experience in sixth and seventh grade.

The school was predominantly Mexican. It was I don't know, it was some kind of crazy percentage. And there I did, well they were like, you're Mexican, but you don't speak Spanish and so, that was weird, and so, like for the ones who were from Mexico and did speak Spanish they were like oh, you're not really Mexican.

She described the same feeling about high school, “Um, in high school the same thing there were Mexicans from Mexico or Puerto Ricans from Puerto Rico and I wasn’t, I was from the U.S. city, I was born there. Yeah, it was just weird, I didn’t speak Spanish so, I wasn’t really Mexican.”

She attended different schools and describes the difference. “So, I knew I was very Mexican there and I, yeah, I was very Mexican because no one there was Mexican and I went back to a school in my neighborhood that was predominantly Hispanic and went back to being not Mexican again and they didn’t have a Spanish class.”

Victoria described the connections that she had with her friends.

I noticed actually all my friends in college, I guess I’m drawn to international students, because two of my really good friends were one’s from India and one is from Trinidad Tobago and everyone shares different jokes with me because I am Mexican American I’m not really American. And then even my roommates were Japanese and the other one was Chinese American.

#### ESTELA

Estela responded that she did not really relate to other Spanish speakers in school. There were a couple of other students, they were also from New Mexico or they had Mexican families, but I never really felt like we had anything in common. So, even though there were other Spanish speakers at school, I never felt, like I could ever be friends with them. They were good classmates, but we never really had a friendship.

She reflected on the experience with professors in the Spanish department and referenced a sense of connection with them.

I guess that is also one of the things that I found as sort of an escape when I started taking Spanish courses that I was not different. All the faculty members are from different backgrounds, I mean there is a professor from Chile, a professor from Mexico, a professor from Puerto Rico, Cuba, all those are from the Spanish department.

She reflected on a study abroad experience in Europe and comfort level.

I felt like I was, where I had been looking for a long time. I felt so comfortable with myself. I was never aware that I was, um, a person of color and a person who didn't speak English as a first language, and my classes, there was also a lot of diversity in my classes. My classes were in English, but again different accents. So it was nothing weird, nothing, um, it was really normal and I feel like I learned a lot from the people around me, but I also learned a lot from myself.

She explained more about her connection with Mexican Americans.

I think it's, it has to do with the fact that they were either born in the U.S. or they grew up in the U.S. so they are more American than Mexican maybe and I didn't feel any connection and now that I think about it, it is almost a little weird that I have maybe more connection with actual Americans than for example Mexican Americans or, um Chicanos. I don't really know why that is, but I started noticing that in high school with all these other students, um, and still now.

She spoke of the club for Hispanics at her university, "When I first arrived here, I got a letter from the club and uh, I went, but I really didn't feel connected to what they had there."

Estela explained further,

Mexican Americans um, since they have been in the U.S. for longer period of time, maybe they have more traditional uh, view of Mexico from when they were in Mexico and I feel like a lot of times they kind of combine that, traditional ways of living with the American way of living and I don't feel like I'm very traditional maybe or like, I don't feel like my parents are very traditional. Um, because it's been recent since I moved out of Mexico. Um, uh one of the things that I noticed most Mexican Americans celebrate *quinceañera* and I remember a couple of people would ask me if I had that party when I turned fifteen and I was like, no I didn't really want a party a *quinceañera* and they would look at me like what?

ANA

Ana talked about relating to the culture in her home state where there is diversity in the population, "All of us are different, we're all mixed. That's one thing too." She also explained that she did not feel a connection with the Mexican Americans who lived on a base nearby, "I think it was sad because I'm Mexican, there're Mexican, but we don't have anything in common because they're military kids, they travel, they are from different states and coming to my home state, they're probably in shock."

She has never attended the Hispanic club at her current university, but did get involved in the Hispanic club in her home state and she described the members, "It was diverse, we had half native speakers and they are from all over Bolivia, Spain, Puerto Rico a few from Mexico, my cousin was in there, too. Um, and then there was local kids, people from different states." She spoke of her experience with the members, "I think every day we, you know because you take classes with everyone

else and we have the same common goal, you understand because you love Spanish or you hear Spanish or you want to know more about Spanish and you would enter I think it was a positive experience.”

She also expressed a feeling of acceptance when she was abroad in Mexico. She compared the experience to her experience at the university in the northwest.

I think when I was in Mexico I had a class with Mexicans and you know, just being in that setting and they were friendly and you’re just trying to do your best and there wasn’t a feeling where anyone is against you. Because honestly two years ago, the program was very separated too, there was a lot of negative influence and then being in a positive environment changes your outlook on everything.

ELENA

When asked if she could share more about the Hispanic club, Elena responded with the following:

Well, once I heard about the Hispanic club, I was excited because I’m like, well maybe I’ll meet some people that I can connect with, that I can relate with and that’s really important when you’re far away from home. So I went there and I met just a great group of students really nice, really welcoming. And just like meeting one, it’s just like a domino effect through them you meet more people and more people. And I’ve met all of my best friends through the center and they’ve taught me so much about my culture that I didn’t know or that I missed out on because they are from Mexico or have been around you know Spanish speaking their whole life.

She explained that she has a common background and relates to the students in the Hispanic club.

So you just have a mutual understanding and that's important to connect so you don't feel like so much of an outsider as I did before, so it kind of brings me into the group and I felt like okay this is my culture and I felt like I belong more and I feel like I understand more now than I did before.

#### MADISON

Madison spoke of her connections with her classmates.

In grade school I didn't really identify with my Mexican background as much.

Um, I went to a very predominantly white elementary school, it was a private Christian school, um I mean, I was just like every, I am half white so I don't look extremely Mexican, um so I was very, extremely Americanized and was just like every other kid.

She described how she felt when students tried to recruit her into the Hispanic club.

I don't really relate to that type of, 'cause I notice that a lot of those students who like that type of thing were very exposed to Spanish, and the culture as a child, probably spoke only Spanish as a young child until they had to go into the schools, the English speaking schools, and they have, feel a lot more comfortable and wanting to be a part of that work and part of those programs and I don't really find an interest in those type of programs only because I wasn't exposed as much as them, as a child.

She discussed students involved in the Hispanic clubs, “I mean I like being Mexican of course and identify myself as such, but um because I am so Americanized, I don’t identify with it as strongly as some other students who might have.”

#### MARCELA

Marcela did not reference connections in her interview, but had attended a social at the Hispanic club the day of the first interview session.

#### NEVE

Neve reflected on her connection with Spanish speaking classmates prior to entering the university.

I don’t know, oh, growing up though, like going to classrooms and stuff like that, other students would speak Spanish so I’d feel kind of left out and I kinda, at first, ...I guess you say outcast or something, I don’t really know, um, ‘cause I wasn’t part of their group or anything else. I was kind of, even you know, I was Hispanic, I just didn’t speak Spanish, they wouldn’t include me in their groups because they only spoke Spanish and I didn’t.

She referenced connections when she spoke of her classmates and experiences at the university.

Now that I know a little bit, a few more students than before, I might see them outside of class, you know we have fun, we say oh, *¿cómo estás?*, *hola*, *¿cómo te va?*, blah blah, what are you doing and then, uh, um, the, like I go across, I live across the street from a bar, so every once in awhile I go in there. And there’s always like a Mexican guy in there and he comes up to me because I look Hispanic. You know like, I look like I speak Spanish. So he starts speaking to me in Spanish

and I'm like, I don't speak Spanish, not fluently, I'm learning now, so he's over here trying to speak to me in Spanish which is really cool because I think if I were to go back to my home state in the south that borders with Mexico, it would be like the opposite, like, 'Why don't you know it by now?'

DANIEL

Daniel spoke about how he felt when he left the ESL class and became a mainstream student in middle school.

It definitely helped me to get to, to improve the language, but at the same time to get to know more of the system and the real structure of the school. Not you know, I was anymore over here, I'd like to get to this area, it was like, part of the whole system, I go to the library from here. I don't have to go all the way around you know and everything and I guess it made me feel more of a sense of belonging to the school and to the community there.

Daniel mentioned identity and connections as he reflected on his high school years.

I feel like from all my years in high school, I feel really isolated because well, as far as joining sports and being active and cause I know my junior year I wanted to be active in Mecha and they had a Mecha in high school. Like I was talking to my mom and she was like, 'don't get, you know, just watch out what you say, don't get into trouble, you don't want to cause somebody to feel like a certain, uh, negative feeling towards you' and so, I felt disconnected. Like I didn't know as far as identity outside of the home, I didn't know who I was. I looked in the mirror and I was like, I don't look like the stereotypical Latino you know or anything like that you know, so now I've learned that there's like a mixture of the like Spanish,

Indian, Black and even Chinese so people are not always going to look the same, but back then I was just like, I didn't have the sense, outside of the home you know, I didn't have the sense of identity in high school so I felt disconnected. And so even though there is a large Hispanic population I never really talked to a lot of people until I came here and started to learn more about it.

Daniel shared information on his involvement with the Hispanic club at the university.

When I came here back in August 2005, it was just pretty much to just go there, socialize, meet people, because it's hard to like identify with, you know the white majority here. I couldn't fit in, as soon as I started talking like I would behave differently. I would see that and so and I wouldn't click, but once I started going there I started socializing more and um I started to get into the social aspect, into Mecha.

NOMAR

Nomar speaks of his involvement in high school.

I attribute my success and my eventual success into, like when I started getting involved into like, more like leadership type positions. Because um, like I said, I even in high school, I didn't notice at all the differences between me or like Mexicans and White people besides the like really distinct differences between the ones that were like, you know, in the gangs and roaming the halls in packs and all that. So, because I played football and I played tennis so I you know, just mingled with everyone.

When asked if he has been involved with the Hispanic club on campus he offers the following information, "I don't, like I've been offered it a lot of times and I just I just like I feel for some reason like my time is important for some reason and I think that doing that is not important to me at all for some reason."

He continued,

Well, um, because I think the, what those do, for people who really need like other people in their same culture to, in order to bond and make friends and I think I'm beyond. I think it should just be a, a you know, there should only be like a multicultural center because I feel like it's great to go back to your own culture and do whatever in that sense, but to be like exclusive to that and you know to want just that is just weird.

Nomar spoke about his decision to join the Greek system after attending a social function at a fraternity with a friend.

Like the first night I was there, I met my friend, and like five times more people I had met in the other semester, I met in one night. And I kept back on going over there, over and over again and then I said, I, you know, basically, because of my personality, the Greek system was set up like perfectly for me, as far as like leadership goes, as far as social function as far as making friends and just connections in general. It was like perfect for me and so I decided I wanted to do that.

He continued,

So I think that as far as like me has shaped me a lot, not just like the people I'm around but just like general attitude about college and so that is like a big part of

why I don't feel a need to become part of the like I guess subculture, the Mexican culture here at the university. Because in the Greek system, I guess you can call that culture too, but there's you know a wide range of people but not so much really. There's not much, not many Hispanics in the Greek system but just like the school, pretty much the same percentage and I don't mind that at all and so and I don't know what that says about me or if that's important at all.

#### Summary: Connections with Spanish Speakers

The participants referenced connections to others during the interviews, and their involvement in Hispanic clubs at their universities. Ana enjoyed the diverse group of students in the Hispanic club in her home state, but was not involved in the Hispanic club at her current university. Daniel, Elena, Ana, and Malina referenced their participation in the Hispanic clubs as a positive experience.

Daniel spoke of feeling disconnected in ESL classes in middle school. He also felt disconnected in high school. He also mentioned feeling disconnected from the White majority at the university, but expressed a sense of connection with members of the Hispanic club. Malina spoke of her connection with the diverse group of students in the Hispanic club and the culture shock she felt in the university town. She spoke of reaching out by being involved in the Hispanic club. Elena also spoke of her connection to the members of the Hispanic club. She described it as a place where she could talk to others about the Mexican culture and where she learned more about her culture.

Nomar, and Madison spoke of not being involved in the Hispanic club. Madison mentioned that she was 'Americanized' and did not feel a need to belong to the club.

Nomar explained that he is comfortable around a diverse group of students. He mentioned that he was very involved in groups in high school. Madison and Nomar gave the impression that they connected with students of diverse backgrounds as they were growing up. Malina, on the other hand, was more comfortable surrounded by Latinos. She grew up in a large Hispanic community.

Estela, Neve, Victoria, and Ana referenced feeling disconnected from other Spanish speakers. Estela specifically mentioned feeling disconnected from Mexican Americans raised in the United States. Victoria and Neve mentioned not being accepted by Spanish speakers who spoke the language more fluently than they did. Estela and Daniel, who came to The United States during the middle school years, expressed feeling comfortable in the Spanish department. The feeling that emerged regarding connections to others were often tied to individual backgrounds. Some of the students were raised around other Hispanics, while others were not. Estela, Daniel, and Marcela are fluent speakers and have a high level of ability in the Spanish language. The other participants are not as confident in their language skills. Some were involved in school activities, while others were not. Some did not mention being involved in extra-curricular activities before entering the university.

The sense of being connected or disconnected to others, including Spanish speakers was expressed by most of the participants. Language ability, involvement in extracurricular activities, community culture, feelings of belonging or not, and attitude were referenced in relation to the topic regarding sense of connection.

## Defining Identity

The participants addressed the issue of defining their identity. Some expressed acceptance of assimilating to the majority culture, while others expressed conflict with this concept. Others demonstrated an acceptance of the idea of being multicultural. They all shared some confusion and conflict regarding the topic of identity.

### MALINA

Malina went to several schools and mentioned that she ‘switched schools’ more than her brothers and sisters. She attended several different schools, including four high schools. She referenced not being sure of her identity in the following quote.

I was always one of the Latino girls. Sometimes I was the only Latino there. So that was always weird, because I wasn’t used to that in those first few years of grade school. Or I guess I never noticed it before. So, when I went into high school it was like that definitely and I guess people weren’t sure what to make of me and because of that. I wasn’t sure what to make of me either.

She explained the conflict she felt in choosing to study in Japan,

I said, I’m going to go to Mexico because I always expected to go to Mexico first.

I’m gonna, you know, perfect my Spanish there and then I was starting Japanese and then I got a opportunity to go to Japan first and that was just a really big dilemma for me. I was like am I giving up my identity as a Latina.

She spoke about being identified as a Latina in class. “Um, in classes I always kind of feel pressured to represent myself as a Latina. Like teachers, if you are reading a

book by a Spanish-speaking author, then teachers will always single you out and ask you, what's your opinion?"

She explained how she felt about her identity and culture.

I feel like people who do have one culture, one language, they don't have this simultaneous, I don't know, like you're listening through both ears at the same time and have two different messages. It's just really weird and sometimes you feel uncomfortable with it and other times you just accept the fact that you are hearing two things at once and you are understanding them both. So, I don't know, just the idea of being bilingual and understanding more than one language is just, really symbolizes the identity for me because you understand two words at once and they both have meaning for you.

She spoke of her thoughts on self-identity as she reflected on a conversation with a colleague at work.

Um, and someone asked me if I was Mexican and I said, well, what do you mean? I guess I was a teenager and I didn't know what to call myself. And she was Mexican too. And she said, 'Are you Mexican or are you?' Or maybe she just said, 'What are you?' And I said, oh yeah, um, I think I said *Chicana* because I had recently learned the term. Some teacher had told me and she was like oh, well 'Are you *Chicana*?' 'Well are you Mexican then or are you not?' And I was like, well, what do you mean? And she had explained to me her definition, but I thought about it a lot and everyone has different definitions. And she was like well, Mexicans if you are from Mexico and then Mexican American is just people who don't know what they are and she said, '*Chicanos* are people.' I don't even

remember what she said, I just, I don't even remember what she said, but I just remember it was so confusing 'cause there are so many different terms.

She continued,

There is Hispanic, there is Latino, there is Mexican, there is Mexican American, Chicano and then you don't fit into any of those either. So, I'm like I have American habits, but I have Mexican habits too and I mean you still figure out stuff like, do I do that because I'm American or do I do that because I am Mexican? And I don't even know.

She spoke about how she identifies herself to others now.

So I guess it is just easier, I just call myself now, I just say yeah... my family is Mexican, because then I don't have to put myself in a certain category. 'Cause I haven't figured it out yet, but it is easy if I identify with my family and I know what to call them, then I hope it clears up things for people, but, but yeah that just reflects still the ambivalence that is around what do you even call yourself?

VICTORIA

Victoria reflected on her thoughts about identity.

I guess I wasn't really aware of, I guess my identity so much or my ethnic identity until I went to college because before then, I guess it was pretty black and white. I went to school in my neighborhood, I was American. I went to school outside of my neighborhood and I was Mexican. And I guess, my mom loves this one line from the movie *Selena* and it really, it is an appropriate description of like you're neither nor an American or a Mexican and at the same time you're both and I don't

know, I guess that's how it is for any American born first generation second generation.

She talked about her tendency to think of herself as Mexican.

I don't know if it makes me feel unique or yeah, like I am a unique American, but I don't really know too much about Mexico I guess. So I don't really know if that makes me a unique Mexican? Like I feel I have enough influence to make me Mexican, just enough to make me different, but not enough to really belong and I know I wasn't really aware of this until I went to college because I was completely transplanted. And so I remember during orientation, just looking for anyone brown just because I mean I was in the southeastern part of the United States and there is not a whole lot of diversity there.

She described a discussion about the subject of identity with her Chinese American roommate.

So, I talked to her about that and for her, she told me it was interesting because she said its such a, so pervasive this Mexican American thing and I said yeah I know for me it is, I said, but for you it's not being Chinese American. So that was always interesting. I don't know, I know for a while I struggled with it, like which one am I? Am I more this or am I more this? I know especially my first two years, but I know by the end and even at this point, I'm okay, I'm both.

ESTELA

Estela reflected on the difficulty she had adjusting to the culture in The United States.

The first year in an American school and a completely different culture was really hard. First of all the language is completely different. Um, the culture in general is different and um, and it was really frustrating when, yeah, the first year was absolutely frustrating, the second year got better and better and uh, and since the town in the Northwest where we moved is a really small town, there is rarely any diversity.

She continued,

So, it was a little bit weird that all of a sudden I was really aware that I was Mexican and that more identities started coming out. Because when I was in Mexico it was just like, I'm a female and I moved to the U.S. and all of a sudden I was a Mexican, female, non-English speaker and also one of the things that I noticed and that I had never thought about before was that all of a sudden, I was a person of color and I had never thought of myself as a person of color.

She reflected on a ten-month study abroad trip to Europe.

...a lot of people are like oh you have an accent, where are you from? Like all the time and that has been a challenge I guess. I have to really overcome that and focus on something else. I was actually studying in Europe, I did a study abroad, and the city where I studied is so diverse, there were not only international students from all over the world, but there is also a lot of immigration from Indonesia, Turkey and Morocco, so, all of a sudden I felt like I was just like everyone else.

Estela reflected on the use of the term 'person of color.'

I remember getting like letters in the mail specifically for students of color on campus and I always felt like, what is going on here? I would much rather think

that we are all human beings and we are all, we all breath, we all talk, we all, um, why do we have to separate? Like, you're a person of color, you're a white person and um, I don't know a lot of times it seems normal for many people it seems, but for me it's still not normal.

She continued, "I don't mind being a person of color, I know that my skin color is not white, but uh, I don't think there is a reason for it to be one of the most important identities. Um, I don't know, I feel like my most important identity would be being a female."

She shared how being interviewed made her reflect on her experience here.

I don't think I had really thought about how I felt when I came to the U.S. or I had never really talked to anybody about um, how frustrating it was at the beginning and how frustrating it sometimes, it is now because I feel like I can communicate, but still not being white, not having the American accent I guess.

ANA

As she reflected on her past and present experiences she spoke of Spanish as being 'a part' of her, "I became stronger and Spanish now I'm not going to hate it, I'm going to always love it and like I said it is a part of me and I think it started not from high school, but when I was little. I don't think I'll ever quit."

She described how she identifies now.

I'm thinking about my family, I think it sums it up like trying to find out who you are and at the end the day. You know, I did find out who I am, and how I identify myself, and I identify myself as a hybrid. Like being from both cultures, like being American and Mexican American, I think, like that's how life is now, like

everything is multicultural, so now I fit in, like before I didn't feel like I fit in, in both countries, and now I know I do.

ELENA

Elena described what it is like to speak a certain way and be identified by others because of the way she speaks and looks.

It makes me feel less Mexican, a great example is I always tell people I love accents. So whenever I hear somebody speak in an accent, an accent is a great indication marker of their culture and where they come from and what language they speak. So, because I don't really have a Hispanic accent here, I definitely don't, when I go back it's kind of weird because it starts to come back a little.

Because I don't have a defined accent, that makes me feel less Mexican, because people think I'm Asian or they assume that I'm a different, just of a different ethnicity.

She continued, "People always guess that I am something way different than Mexican so I'm like It makes me feel less than, and now, not only do I not have the language, they don't even think that I look like I am."

MADISON

Madison reflected on the term 'of color' and services for Hispanic students.

I am very, um, appreciative when they give me scholarships because of my, I have a scholarship that is from this university that is called 'the future mascots of color' scholarship that I just got. The only prerequisite was that I had to be a minority and I know, I am completely appreciative of their, you know efforts and, but um, I don't, I don't know how to say this, I don't feel like I need extra support because I

am Mexican. Like I need help, like I need another support system, I feel like I'm just like every other student.

She addressed her identity, "Well I think um, I don't identify myself as a heritage student because of the amount I was exposed in the home. I was born and raised in a very predominantly white Americanized community, um I think that had a lot to do with it."

NEVE

Neve mentioned a course that made her think about language loss and tied this to the idea of identity.

Class, I just remember the language portion, I remember people losing their identity and they are forced to learn English and they weren't allowed to speak their language and then I was thinking wow, you know those people went through a whole lot and look at me I turned away my Spanish because of being stubborn you know, at that time I was interested in Spanish, but that made me more interested in learning.

DANIEL

Daniel spoke of his identity in reflecting on the contact of cultures.

I just know that I mentioned the, you know, how I felt robbed, you know by the, like what I carry, my heritage, you know it's like a burden. And that's what I was thinking about yesterday and it comes to me because there's a belief that you know like everything that comes from the United States is superior. So you know like we have this inferior feeling, like we're inferior, like present myself with this culture in

fear, well I don't think that that's true, but I think that's what is portrayed by people.

As he reflected on being a Spanish speaker educated in an English speaking environment he mentioned an impression he has about speaking Spanish.

I hadn't really thought about it until you asked this, because a lot of the times it seems like having the language, people who speak it mostly outside of the home or more even more in school, they think it is some sort of pest, like oh, I have to deal with this or there are terms, I mean street terms, like 'Oh, you're so Mexican' or something like that.

He reflected on history and identities.

And history has a lot of stories to tell so we like we read stories to like create the identity. So I think if we can retell the story or like the different stories of our history, and like with a new perspective and things like that, we can create a, the identity that we are different, but we are not inferior to this other country that is right next to us, that borders us. And so I think that's something that I want to explore more, not identity that we feel like, we feel like we're really proud, like Latinos, Mexicans you know, people in the United States because that also changes. Once I was in Mexico I was Mexican, but then I came over here and now I'm Latino, Hispanic, um, Latin American. So it's just like, and it happens I guess to a lot of people that come from El Salvador, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and everything, you sort of like get, you have to go to like a narrow door where all your stuff gets left behind and now you're part of like this group.

He discussed his identity further,

I haven't gone back now but um I think, sometimes I do identify myself as Latino and everything 'cause I, I mean Mexicans, there is a large majority and everything, but when you identify yourself as Latino you are part of a bigger group. So there's like a bigger support and so um but at the end of the day like I have been called Mexican and I'll say I'll identify myself as Mexican.

Daniel, who is of fair complexion, mentioned identity and skin color.

I guess I pass, with like skin color, I definitely do feel like I carry privilege and even in our culture, basically like um, when new babies are born, like 'oh look at how light he is, he's really cute or whatever', and when he is a little bit like brown or a little bit more than brown, they are like 'yeahhh'. So it's then the indigenous too it's like, 'no seas Indio' (*don't be an Indian*). And so I mean as far as stereotypes I mean there is only one time that uh, I saw a girl that had like a soccer jersey that said Spain and I asked her about Spain and she like turned around and she said, I don't speak Mexican and I'm like, well, the language is Spanish, how could you not speak Mexican?

NOMAR

Nomar reflected on his thoughts in grade school after being interviewed on a radio show for being a good student and was asked about being Hispanic by the reporter.

I think when she asked me that, it just made me realize that to a lot of people it is unusual for a Hispanic or just like a minority in general to be succeeding over anyone else, like over white people, and I don't know, that is just really strange to me because at that point when I was a little kid, but you know, I you know, I saw that I was doing better than most people grades-wise.

He reflected more on being aware of being aware of his background as he told about his parents and school.

When I really, really saw it and it wasn't so much the, you know it wasn't so much the language barrier, but the, the culture barrier, because my parents are from Mexico um, my mom went to, up to like tenth grade in high school and my dad finished, but after that you know, nothing.

Nomar spoke of his university experience and the minority population.

I realize like all day in the plaza, we call that in the plaza, I saw like, or maybe it was like bad timing on my part or not being very observant, but I just say like one or two in the whole plaza, from high school like I, my high school was around fifty percent Hispanic so to jump from that to me, to less than one percent Hispanic, was like weird, like you know, I didn't think I would notice it, but it was pretty weird.

#### Summary: Defining Identity

The topic of defining identity was mentioned as the participants reflected on topics that included terms used for defining heritage, acceptance, being multicultural, identity as it is assigned to them by others, and a desire to be identified with the cultural heritage. A sense of conflict of identity emerged from the interviews as well.

Victoria, Ana, and Madison accept the concept of being multicultural. They explained that they are 'both' Mexican and American. Ana described herself as a 'hybrid'. Malina and Victoria struggled with coming to terms with their identities. Malina, and Daniel spoke about the many labels used to describe Spanish speakers in this country. Malina demonstrated confusion about the many terms for defining identity. Daniel saw the use of Latino as encompassing a larger population of

Spanish speakers, but defines himself as Mexican as well. At times the participants clearly define themselves as Mexican and at other times they define themselves as multicultural.

Nomar gave an example of when he became aware that he was different in grade school when he was interviewed because as a 'Hispanic student', he was doing well in school. Estela and Madison both made references to the concept of 'color'. They had not considered themselves 'of color' before entering the university. Estela explained her frustration of having identities imposed on her. She expressed being most comfortable in situations where there is more diversity. Elena connected the concept of knowing the language to her identity. She stated that she was 'less Mexican' because she did not have the appropriate accent.

One of the participants in this study expressed feeling positive when asked to share her knowledge of the Spanish language with the class in grade school, but overall, the participants did not refer to the acknowledgement of their cultural heritage in the school setting prior to entering the university. According to the literature acknowledging the cultural background and language of the students is important and may allow minority students to develop a sense of self. In addition, the first language was not part of the curriculum for most of the students prior to entering the university either and this could have been a factor in the participants confusion about their self-identity. Baker (1996) and Cummings (2001) state that speaking the first language helps students reinforce their identity. The questions surrounding identity face by the participants may have stemmed from the fact that most of the HLS did not have the

opportunity to strengthen their first language or have their culture acknowledged in the educational setting.

#### Themes: Identity Category

The theme of uncertainty as it relates to self-identification and connections to other Spanish speakers is evident. The participants also expressed frustration in regards to stereotypes and terms for identification that were imposed on them by others. A strong desire to connect with the culture was seen as well.

#### Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the participant profiles, a thematic presentation of quotes within categories, and summaries at the end of each section. As suggested by Richards (2005), the topics and themes explored are relevant to the categories that emerged, the study, and the research question, and provide a deeper understanding of the HL experience. The following chapter presents the conclusions and implications based on the findings as well as recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present conclusions, implications regarding recruitment and retention, a brief discussion of the researcher's epoche, questions raised by the study, and recommendations for further research. The information gathered from the participants of this study has provided some insight into the phenomenon of what it is like to be an HL educated in The United States who was currently studying or had recently studied advanced Spanish in an institution of higher education. The significance of this study is that it provides some insight into the educational experience of the HL and addresses the topics of retention and recruitment of HLs as they relate to the predominant categories, topics, and themes that emerged from the data.

The researcher read the transcripts many times and worked with the data to isolate categories, topics, and themes before addressing the research question for this study. Many topics, themes and several categories emerged. After the process of isolating topics was completed, the researcher chose categories, topics, and themes that were referenced by most of the participants and which addressed the grand tour question. Some unique experiences are also mentioned briefly in the discussions. Three categories were chosen and include education, language, and Identity. The conclusions are based on the study of the categories and the predominant topics and themes that emerged. The topics include advising, language perceptions, connections, and defining identity.

Table 3: Categories, Topics, and Themes

<b>Education</b> <b>Advising</b>	<b>Language</b> <b>Language Perceptions</b>	<b>Identity</b> <b>Connections</b> <b>Defining Identity</b>
Insecurity  Unawareness	Desire Low Confidence Levels Feelings Associated with Language Loss and Improvement of Language Ability	Desire for Cultural Connection  Uncertainty

Grand Tour Question

According to Richards (2005), the categories should be relevant to the project and the research questions. The grand tour question for this study precedes the discussion of the findings.

Few students of Mexican descent study advanced Spanish and the reasons for this are not understood well at this time. In order to shed some light on this phenomenon, the following overarching question guides this study:

What can be learned from the past and present experiences of heritage learners (HLs) studying or who have recently studied advanced Spanish that might provide insight into recruiting HLs and retaining HLs in Spanish programs in institutions of higher education?

Conclusions and Implications

The researcher addresses retention and/or recruitment of HLs in the implications that follow and are based on the conclusions of the findings. The researcher's intent

is that the thematic presentation of the quotes and summaries in chapter 4 as well as the conclusions will aid the reader in understanding some aspects of participants' experiences from their perspective.

### Education Category

#### Education: Advising

Discussions addressing Spanish courses and entering Spanish programs stood out in the findings. Some of the participants indicated that the decision that they made to take Spanish was based on having received information about the courses from family and/or friends. Several indicated that they had not considered studying Spanish until the idea of studying Spanish was suggested to them by other students who had studied Spanish at the institution. In addition, several were following in the footsteps of their siblings.

Not having knowledge of the content of the Spanish courses was another factor that stood out in the findings. For example, Marcela was not aware that the classes included topics such as literature and culture. Her impression of Spanish classes was that they were all similar to beginning 100 level Spanish grammar courses. Daniel also spoke about not knowing what the classes involved. This might point to a need to make more information available for HLs regarding the content the Spanish classes and programs.

Several mentioned that they received positive advising and advice from professors in the Spanish department. In two cases, the inability to advise students successfully was evident. One of the students did not receive the guidance needed and gave up on her plan to minor in Spanish. Malina's experience with professors gave some insight

into the possible need to provide resources regarding the language backgrounds, needs, and abilities of HLs for professors and advisors. Helpful resources might include refereed journal articles on heritage learners, a list of relevant books, and web links to online resources such as the Heritage Language Journal and the National Heritage Language Resource Center. In addition, information for advisors on placement could be provided. Madison also explained that her general advisor did not suggest an appropriate level Spanish class. She was encouraged to take a 300 level class by the advice of her sister and a Spanish professor. None of the participants mentioned that classes specifically for HLs in higher education were available for them. The literature supports the need for more classes for HLs in institutions of higher education. Potowski (2001) found that more HL programs are needed in universities. Heritage learner courses for Spanish speakers focus on improving writing, and grammar skills. They also sometimes include stories in Spanish by HLs. Increasing vocabulary and making the HLs aware of different registers is also a goal of these courses.

#### Implications Recruitment and Retention: Advising

The fact that Spanish department program and course descriptions were not reaching the students was evident in the findings. The best advising regarding Spanish classes, in most cases, was received from professors in the Spanish department. In other cases, students learned about Spanish programs from members of the Hispanic club or from their siblings. Several participants did not know what Spanish programs or courses offered. Considering this, recruitment efforts might include providing students in high school and institutions of higher education more

resources describing Spanish programs and courses. These could include informative pamphlets, web sites on campus web pages, and/or videos of Spanish professors and/or students describing Spanish courses and programs. The information provided could be created with the HL's varied educational needs in mind as well. In addition, visits to high schools by other HLs studying Spanish or providing programs that encourage HLs to visit Spanish departments on campuses might provide the advising and information to motivate HLs to enroll in Spanish classes.

The recruitment of HLs might be improved if Spanish programs target heritage students in high schools and at the university. Current HLs, such as Daniel, who demonstrate a high level of interest, could also be recruited to visit high schools and share their college experiences and answer questions. Brecht and Ingold (2002) describe the HL as an untapped resource in our country. The HL has the advantage of having some background in the language and the need for bilingual teachers will grow as the HL population increases.

Except for in one instance, the findings indicate that HLs received appropriate advising from professors within the Spanish department. Most of the students mentioned that the placement advice they received from professors in the language department was very helpful. One student provided evidence to indicate that not all professors of Spanish are aware of HLs' needs and another student mentioned that her general advisor suggested a class that was not appropriate. This is understandable considering the different levels of language abilities and backgrounds of HLs.

Therefore, the retention of HLs might be addressed by providing informative web sites for professors and advisors that provide information describing the needs of

HLs, tips for advising HLs, and the varied HL language profiles. The findings clearly indicate a need for providing information about Spanish programs to HLs as well a need for resources for professors and advisors of HLs. HLs interested in studying Spanish might benefit from having advisors who have some knowledge of Spanish and the HL speaker's background and needs.

### Language Category

#### Language Perceptions: Ability, Spanglish, Desire, and Loss

The researcher found that discussions addressing the language category topics were prevalent. The findings provide insight into the HLs' perspective on the language they speak, some of the reasons why they study Spanish, and attitudes regarding language. Most of the participants referenced the topic of self-perception in regards to language ability, Spanglish, language loss, and the desire to study the language.

#### Language Background and Ability

The participants represent different language backgrounds and abilities. Daniel, Estela, and Marcela spoke Spanish in the home with both parents. Daniel and Estela are native speakers, while Marcela, who considers herself a native speaker, was raised and educated in an English-speaking environment. She has a native level of speaking ability in Spanish. They did not express a lack of confidence in their language abilities and speak the language fluently.

Nomar spoke Spanish in the home with his mother and he considers himself to be a native speaker, but also mentioned becoming aware of losing the language. He also mentioned that he realized that he had to learn more when he compared his ability

with other students in his Spanish classes. He remembered that he probably began to speak English with his father when he was in middle school and says he prefers to speak English to his father now. Madison, Ana, Elena, Neve, Malina, and Victoria spoke mostly English in the home and also expressed having the lowest confidence level in their language skills. Victoria, and Malina both placed themselves in 200 level Spanish classes and found that the classes were below their language ability level. The reason they placed themselves in the 200 level courses was due to their lack of confidence in their language ability.

Victoria was advised to go into a higher level, but did not have the confidence to enter a 300 level class. Malina stated that her Spanish was not ‘that bad’ when she heard the other students in her 200 level class speak Spanish. Both stated that the 200 level classes were easy for them. Neve and Elena began studying at the beginning level of Spanish, while Madison, Nomar, Estela, Daniel, and Marcela began at the 300 level in the university. All of the participants had to learn writing skills except for Estela and Daniel. Madison, Ana, Elena, Malina, Neve, and Victoria mentioned struggling to learn and/or improve speaking skills as well.

The findings indicate that participants were very aware of and able to describe their language ability at the time of the interview, but most needed and asked for placement advising when entering college. A need for placement advising stood out in the findings. Only one of the participants mentioned taking a placement exam in college. Several expressed uncertainty when reflecting on choosing Spanish courses.

The HLs explained that they needed to learn writing, speaking, and/or reading skills and were not exposed to books in Spanish before graduating from high school

and lacked literacy skills. As Krashen (2000) noted, not many books in the first language are available in the home or at school for Hispanic children. The participants were not confident in their speaking abilities. Estela and Daniel expressed being comfortable with their academic skills in Spanish. The abilities varied, but the findings indicate that the opportunities for the participants raised entirely in The United States were very limited. This is especially true for grade school and middle school.

### Spanglish

All of the participants referenced Spanglish during the interviews. The findings indicate that the exposure to Spanglish is a reality of most of the students interviewed. Three referenced improper use of the language in relation to Spanglish, but at the same time mentioned Spanglish as a language that they used with friends, family, or acquaintances. The idea that Spanglish is improper was also expressed. Estela mentioned finding herself using English words mixed with Spanish occasionally, but does not use Spanglish and speaks English with non-native heritage speakers. As expected, the findings indicate that Spanglish is a reality of most of the participants. Spanglish is a result of the two languages in contact. In general, the Spanglish speaker code-switches and inserts English words while speaking Spanish.

### Desire and Loss

In their discussion, participants referenced their desire to learn the language. The participants' desire was often tied to a desire to maintain the language for family, to speak to others, maintain the Mexican culture, and to use the language in the

workplace. The findings indicate that the desire to learn is a strong motivator for learning the heritage language.

The findings also indicate that the concept of language loss was acknowledged by most of the participants. Nomar stated that he was aware of losing his Spanish after being in college for a while and not using the language. He mentioned this as one reason for deciding to study Spanish at the university. He also explained that he wanted to use the language with his family, including future children, and in the workplace. Victoria and Malina both mentioned purposely working in Spanish-speaking environments in order to maintain the language. Both said that this helped them maintain the language. Ana, Neve, and Elena also brought up the subject of losing and re-gaining the language. This concept was connected to a strong desire to maintain and learn the language. The three spoke of knowing the language as children, losing the language and then re-learning the language from taking Spanish. Daniel and Marcela both mentioned learning new vocabulary and at the same time mentioned learning about cultural and historical facts that they had not learned about in the home. All of the participants who referenced language loss and/or gain felt a strong connection to the language. Several participants valued the concept of not forgetting the heritage language in their discussions.

#### Implications Recruitment: Language

The findings indicate a need for placement testing for HLs as well as additional resources targeting HLs to supplement the material in Spanish classes. The students represent varying levels of ability in the language and have needs that students who begin their studies at the beginning level do not have. For example, Marcela and

Nomar are fluent speakers, but mentioned that they lacked writing skills. Both of them began studying Spanish at the 300 level. Krashen (2000) explained that bilingual students have developed conversational skills, but often do not have the opportunity to develop literacy skills. None of the participants were in bilingual programs as children and Marcela did not study Spanish formally until her last year at the university.

To conclude, participants expressed a strong desire to learn the language and prevent language loss. Perhaps recruitment efforts could include providing information or video interviews with HLs on language gain as an outcome of studying the heritage language on university web sites. This might aid in the recruitment of HLs into Spanish programs considering that the findings indicated a significant motivators for the HLs in this study included the strong desire to learn the language and prevent language loss.

#### Implications Retention: Language

The findings reveal that HLs' abilities vary, they face challenges with the language, and some have low confidence levels regarding their language skills. At the same time, the findings indicate that the desire and motivation to learn the heritage language are strong. Classes specifically for HLs were not available for any of these students at the university level. The students who studied Spanish in high school or had a strong ability in conversation skills indicated that 200 level courses were easy. Students who studied in Mexico through middle school easily placed into 300 level courses. The participants educated entirely in the United States mentioned that they lacked the writing, grammar, and/or speaking skills.

Fernandez (1981) mentioned that a lack of writing skills is a common occurrence with some HLs. Therefore, supplemental resources might address the language learning needs of HLs and improve retention. Perhaps a resource for HLs addressing specific grammatical and writing issues would aid in encouraging HLs to continue their study of Spanish. This could be provided through web based class-specific supplements or general supplements directed towards HLs. The resources could also include informative articles for professors of HLs describing the different language needs of this population of learners. A one credit class for HLs might also address the needs of these students. The class could provide instruction in writing, information on different registers of Spanish, as well as information on the HLs' varied cultural and language backgrounds. Kanpol (1994) and Freire (2002) suggest that acknowledging the backgrounds of minority students increases confidence levels and leads to improved attitudes. HLs value the language that they speak as an important part of their heritage and it should be valued (Potowski, 2001; Villa, 2004). Addressing the bilingual abilities of Latinos raised in this country could help address the prejudice against these students that Valdés, et al (2003) found in their study of ideologies that exist in Spanish departments.

### Identity Category

#### Identity: Connections and Defining Identity

The findings reveal that a strong desire for a cultural connection with Mexico exists. This desire seemed to be a motivator for studying the heritage language as well. Also, the connection between knowing the Spanish language as a way to

maintain the culture, and connections with other Spanish speakers were both tied to defining the participants' identity.

#### Connection: Culture

The findings reveal a strong connection to the Mexican culture which is associated with studying the language and to maintaining the culture. Some mentioned that Spanish and the culture were a 'part' of them. Several spoke of feeling a connection in regards to music, and food as well. Daniel spoke of a 'home connection' that he felt by studying in the Spanish program. Neve referred to Spanish as 'my language' as she reflected on her cultural connection to Mexico. Elena, Victoria, and Nomar valued the concept of teaching their children how to speak Spanish. The connection that the participants expressed between learning the language and maintaining a cultural connection stood out in the findings.

#### Connection: Spanish Speakers and Others

The participants described varying comfort levels regarding their connection to other Spanish speakers in their discussions. A number of perspectives were found regarding Hispanic clubs as well. While belonging to Hispanic clubs seemed to play an important role for some, there were aspects of these clubs that did not appeal to several participants. Nomar, Estela, and Madison stated that they did not feel a connection to the Spanish speakers at the Hispanic club or a desire to be involved in activities at the Hispanic club. Madison stated that she did not have as much exposure to Spanish or to the Mexican culture growing up as HLs who participate in the Hispanic club. She mentioned not feeling connected to the other students in the Hispanic club and said that this was because she is 'so Americanized.'

Nomar was involved in several extracurricular activities in high school and mentioned wanting to be involved in activities that most Hispanics were not typically involved in. At the time of the interview he was a member of a fraternity. Estela mentioned not feeling a connection with Mexican Americans who were not native Spanish speakers. Daniel and she expressed a feeling of connection with the Spanish professors in their department however. Daniel, unlike Estela, was politically active in the Hispanic club.

In addition, several participants mentioned that they felt comfortable around international students and several had friends of diverse backgrounds. Several of the students mentioned feeling different than the American culture that surrounded them and some mentioned feeling disconnected from the white majority at their universities. The findings indicate that some HLs value the opportunity to belong to Hispanic clubs, while a few mentioned that they would prefer a less exclusive and multicultural club. Overall, these students stated that they did not feel a sense of belonging.

The HLs, who were not confident with their speaking abilities, mentioned feeling uncomfortable when speaking with native speakers. Daniel mentioned that English was spoken more at the Hispanic club. The discussions regarding HLs and their discomfort around native speakers stood out in the findings. HLs who did participate in Hispanic clubs valued the opportunity to connect with other HLs on a cultural level. They spoke enthusiastically about their participation in university Hispanic clubs and the friends that they made there.

## Defining Identity

Several perspectives related to defining identity emerged from the data. These involved a connection between experiences, background, language maintenance, and defining identities. Several participants experienced a conflict or confusion when referencing identity. As issues related to identity were reflected upon, preferences and insecurities surrounding terms used for self-identification arose.

For example, several HLs expressed a frustration and/or struggles when they referred to defining identity or the definitions used for identifying HLs of Mexican descent. Elena and Madison explained that they had not considered themselves to be students 'of color' before coming to the university. Malina struggled with all of the varied terms to describe people of Mexican descent. Victoria and Ana see themselves as both American and Mexican. Victoria struggled with defining different aspects of her Mexican and American identity. Elena has struggled with her desire to identify as Mexican and the idea that her language abilities make her 'less Mexican.' Daniel defined his identity as Mexican, but also said that he uses the term Latino because it represents all of the Spanish speakers in The United States.

Expectations or views regarding identity were sometimes imposed on the participants. Malina mentioned a desire to maintain Spanish and her identity, but at the same time she spoke of feeling pressured by family and other Latinos to maintain her Spanish because it was part of her culture. She also expressed confusion and ambivalence when trying to decide which of the following terms to identify with: Chicana, Mexican, Latina, American, or Hispanic.

Veronica's identity, before graduating from high school, was tied to the community of Hispanics who surrounded her and sometimes fluctuated depending on her surroundings. She felt more Mexican when she was the minority, but less Mexican around native speakers. She identifies herself as 'Mexican American' and 'not really American.' She also mentioned that she 'struggled' with the concept of trying to decide if she was Mexican or American in college.

Estela also struggled with identity. She did not connect with Hispanics raised in the United States. She felt that their cultural traditions were different from hers and did not feel comfortable speaking Spanglish. She also spoke of not fitting in with the majority in her university environment.

Estela and Madison spoke of the use of the term 'color' as it was used to describe them. Both felt uncomfortable with the term. Estela had never been identified with the term before coming to the United States and Madison did not feel like she needed extra support because she was Mexican and identified as 'of color,' by the university. Estela mentioned that she felt comfortable with herself while she was on the study abroad program in Europe and forgot that she was 'of color,' but as soon as she returned to the small university town, she was again labeled as a 'person of color'.

Ana stated that, she 'feels like she is Mexican' even though she does not consider herself to be a native speaker. Ana and Madison expressed that they consider themselves to be Mexican and multicultural. Ana stated that she feels that she fits in now and identifies herself as 'a hybrid, like being from both cultures, like being American and Mexican American.' Daniel identifies himself as Mexican and also Latino because he feels that the Latino group includes other Spanish speakers and

represents a larger support group. Nomar identifies himself as Hispanic, but made a point of saying that he is ‘comfortable around anyone’ and is very involved in the Greek system. The issue of identity is unresolved for Malina. She mentioned that she was unsure about her identity again in her response to the member check. She wrote that she is ‘still trying to answer’ the question of identity for herself.

Several scholars have studied the connection that exists between the maintenance of the heritage language and its ability to strengthen the concept of identity (Giroux; 2006, Nieto; 1999, & Cummings; 2001). Several of the HLs, who did not have a strong background in the heritage language, struggled with the concept of identity, and identified themselves as Mexican or Hispanic during the interviews. However, the two students who came to the United States during middle school and who had a good foundation in all of the skills in Spanish also referenced struggling with defining their identity. The findings indicate that thoughts regarding defining identity are prevalent in the discussions and are relevant to most of the participants.

#### Implications: Recruitment

A strong desire to connect to Mexican culture was referenced by participants. Considering this, designing courses that address Mexican culture and the HL experience might encourage HLs of Mexican descent to enroll in Spanish courses and programs. Most of the HLs spoke to struggling with defining their identity. A Spanish language literature or poetry course that addresses the theme of cultural identity might also be of interest to HLs. The importance of the connection that exists between language and culture for HLs and/or minority students is also supported by the literature (Potowski, 2001; Fishman, 1999; Dorian, 1999; Giroux, 2006).

Increasing the HLs' cross-cultural understanding by providing opportunities for them to interact in the target language with community members of Mexican descent would provide opportunities to teach culture through the target language and build skills in critical cultural competence (Kramsch, 1995).

#### Implications: Retention

The participants were divided in their enthusiasm regarding Hispanic clubs. However, the students who did participate in the clubs were enthusiastic when describing the connections that they made with other HLs. A few of the participants did not feel a connection with the club, but mentioned that a multicultural club might be of more interest to them. They felt that the Hispanic club was too exclusive or another form of pointing to the fact that they were different. However, Hispanic clubs were valued by several of the participants. The current study found that the participants who did value and belong to the Hispanic clubs appreciated being provided with a place to meet friends, identify with other HLs, be politically active, and share cultural experiences. This concludes the section on implications. The researcher's epoche follows and includes a brief description of some of the differences and similarities between the experience of the researcher and the participants. Some of the findings were different than the researcher's expected outcomes.

#### The Researcher's Epoche and Expectations

Some of the researcher's responses to the research questions aligned with those of the participants while others did not. First, the researcher noted the lack of attention and acknowledgement of the heritage culture in the school setting, which was similar

to the researcher's educational experience. The participants did not read in the heritage language in school and for the most part did not study or learn about their cultural backgrounds in the school setting. A difference was noted in the participants' lack of information regarding professors.

The researcher was surprised that the participants did not make more references about their attitudes towards professors of Spanish or the attitudes of their professors towards them. This may be due to a reluctance to question authority in the presence of a researcher, who they might have associated as a figure of authority. The researcher was tempted to address this topic with the participants, but did not because one goal of the study was not to ask leading questions or impose ideas on the HLs. The researcher and the participants shared the past experience of being educated in The United States, being of Mexican descent, and studying advanced Spanish in an institution of higher education.

In light of this, the researcher felt empathy with the participants and related to their overall experiences. The similarities between the experiences were evident to the researcher. For instance, the researcher also experienced uncertainty and insecurity regarding placement into Spanish courses and an inability to judge language ability. In addition, the researcher has also felt confusion and uncertainty regarding identity issues. The concept of identities as imposed or denied by others has also been something the researcher has lived with.

A strong desire to maintain the language and culture is also a reality of the researcher. The awareness of language loss and improvement are also part of the researcher's lived experience. The researcher's epoche also touched on the subjects

involving the difficulties with adapting to the majority culture, lack of reading materials in the heritage language, lack of support for the heritage culture and language from the white majority, and enjoying the benefits of speaking the heritage language. Regarding language loss and family, the researcher's siblings have all lost most of their ability in the heritage language and the second generation speak English as a first language. Some of the participants mentioned that some of their siblings did not speak the heritage language well, while some are fluent. Overall, many similarities between the researcher's and the participants experiences were noted.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this research indicate that HLs were not always aware of what is taught in Spanish courses or what the Spanish programs involved at the university level. Some only took Spanish courses after communicating with peers or siblings about the courses. Advising received from professors of Spanish was often the best option, but not in every case. Perhaps a study exploring the state of advising available for HLs might be informative.

In addition, several participants in this study indicated that they were not sure how to describe their skill level in Spanish and were often confused about which level of Spanish to take at the high school and upon entering the university. There were also problems encountered with the Spanish classes that were offered to students at the high school level and university level. A research study based on assessing the varied language placement and language needs of these students with the goal of proposing

ideas for developing placement exams and texts for HLs that could be used as a supplement for these students in Spanish classes might be worth undertaking.

A study that focuses on more students like Malina, who took two 300 level courses, but dropped out of several Spanish classes, could be investigated as well. This would help researchers gain a deeper understanding of HLs who enter and then drop out of Spanish classes or programs at the university level.

Qualitative and quantitative studies of HL seniors in high schools who do not plan to attend institutions of higher education might also give valuable insight into the reasons why many HLs do not continue their education after high school. More females than males enter institutions of higher education (Fry, 2002) and therefore, a study of high school male heritage students of Mexican descent might help researchers gain more insight into the phenomenon regarding retention of Mexican American male students as well.

#### Questions Raised by The Research

In light of the fact that some of the HLs demonstrated low confidence levels in their language abilities and they sometimes placed themselves in courses that were too easy for them, how should the discrepancy between their self-perception and actual proficiency be dealt with? Is it possible to address this issue with the advising process of placement of HLs and placement exams?

If information on the content of Spanish classes were provided to HLs graduating from high school and entering college, would more students enroll in Spanish courses?

If HLs with a lower level of skills in the heritage language were exposed to an academic level of instruction in Spanish in grade school and high school, would this decrease the conflict of identity issues that are faced by HLs like Malina who struggles with identity issues and the desire to become fluent in the Spanish language?

The participants expressed a strong desire to connect with their Mexican culture. What is the best approach for incorporating culture in the HL curriculum? Would addressing the individual's unique culture and interacting with community members of Mexican descent might be an approach worth considering?

#### Summary

This chapter has presented the findings based on the information gained from the search of and identification of patterns, categories, topics, and themes as suggested by several authorities in the field including Polkinghorne (1989) and Seidman (1998). The researcher's interpretation is directed towards those involved and interested in HL education in the hopes that some of the findings will provide insight into the past and present experiences of HLs as well as aid in understanding their educational experiences.

As suggested by Seidman (1998), the researcher also has considered new personal understandings and inspiration that have been gained by this research. The researcher has gained a deeper understanding of the plight of HLs who struggle with the Spanish language due to the influence of and contact with the English language, and lack of opportunities prior to graduating from high school to develop academic skills in the heritage language and the impact of this on these students. It is obvious that the

students in this study have a strong desire and longing to be fluent in the Spanish language.

The study has also inspired the researcher to continue investigating and addressing the needs of curriculum development for HLs. In regards to target language support for HLs, resources providing academic vocabulary, the use of accents, a contrast between spelling in English and Spanish, and a list of false cognates that are not part of standard Spanish might be beneficial to HLs. Elliot (1999) states that developing a curriculum for the Hispanic population in The United States is challenging and that researchers are not in agreement about what the overall needs of this population are. Overall, Elliot (1999) creates a curriculum in his text for HLs that expands on the HLs' pre-existing knowledge of the Spanish language. The researcher found that the HL's culture and language was rarely acknowledged in K-12 educational settings and believes that a need for including instruction and readings, for example, in the heritage language at a young age as part of the regular curriculum exists.

Several scholars have noted that maintenance of the heritage language has been tied to strengthening the student's cultural identity (Baker, 1996; Cummins 2001). The desire expressed by the participants to connect to their heritage language and culture is strong. Kramsch (1995) points to the importance of teaching about culture through the language and the emerging cultural experience of the students. An approach that considers the individual HL cultural identity, the culture of Spanish-speakers in the community, and world Spanish cultures would be beneficial for addressing the HLs' reality in comparison to other cultural realities. The development of resources for HLs in higher education might include incorporating

themes on the culture of the HL raised in The United States, providing opportunities to meet community members of Mexican descent, and the exploring the topic of identity through literature, film, and poetry in Spanish language classes. Stories written by HLs and other works that address the immigrant populations would be valuable for discussing the subject of identity and current political issues.

In sum, the researcher has gained insight into the importance that the HLs feel in regards to a connection between the concept of language and culture. In addition, the HLs' perspectives on identity have also inspired the researcher to consider the importance of incorporating HLs' cultural backgrounds and themes regarding identity in Spanish courses. The researcher is impressed by the strong desire that the participants expressed to explore their cultural heritage and retain the Spanish language and hopes to contribute to the field and create an educational environment that is more empathic towards the heritage learner of Mexican descent.

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## Appendix A

### Letter of Inquiry For Department Heads

\_\_\_\_\_, 200\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Greetings! My name is Alicia Gignoux and I am a doctoral student of Curriculum and Instruction at The University of Montana.

I am looking for participants that meet the criteria for my doctoral dissertation study.

I am seeking students of Mexican descent who learned Spanish in the home, are currently studying advanced Spanish in higher education, and studied in the U.S. in grade school, middle school and/or high school. I have obtained IRB approval for this study from your institution. See the copies of the attached IRB forms. I need your help to identify students for my study. Please give the attached letters to members of your Spanish department to give to students that might meet the criteria. OR I would like to contact your faculty to ask for permission to do a 5 minute presentation of the study to some of the classes to find participants or I would like to post an announcement for this study in your department to recruit students.

The students' participation is voluntary and will require a commitment to complete a 2 page demographic survey, participate in one 2-hour, a one-hour interview, and a review of the data interpretation. The interviews will not interfere with class time and are given at times that are convenient for the students. The interviews will take place individually in a study room in the library or other quiet room on campus.

Your help will be greatly appreciated, and this study intends to contribute useful information about students of Mexican descent educated in the United States and what this experience is like to the knowledge base in the area of heritage language students and education. If you would like to participate, please send an email to [alicia.gignoux@gmail.com](mailto:alicia.gignoux@gmail.com)

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Alicia Gignoux  
Email  
Phone Number

## Appendix B

Letter of Invitation

Letter of Invitation

Date

Dear Student/Possible Participant,

Greetings! My name is Alicia Gignoux and I am a doctoral student of Curriculum and Instruction at The University of Montana.

I am seeking students of Mexican descent who learned Spanish in the home, are currently studying or have studied advanced Spanish in higher education, and who have studied in the U.S. in grade school, middle school and/or high school. You do not have to speak a certain level of Spanish. The interviews are conducted in English. The only important factor is that you were exposed to Spanish in the home. The interviews and the study will be conducted in English.

Your participation is voluntary and will require a commitment to complete a 2 page demographic survey, participate in one 2-hour and a one-hour interview. The interviews will be given one day apart. In addition, you will be asked to read the researcher's summary of your interview to provide feedback on the interpretation of your experience. This should only require an hour or less of your time. The summary will be sent by email or U.S. mail. The researcher will then talk to you by phone for about thirty minutes or less about your thoughts regarding your interview or you can send your comments by email. The interviews will take place individually in a study room in the library or other quiet room on campus or will be conducted by phone. The most convenient method for you will be used. I will be on your campus for five days from date until date. It would be wonderful to be able to complete or set up interviews this week.

Your participation in this study, if you decide to participate, will be greatly appreciated and help contribute useful information about students studying Spanish and educated in the United States. If more students than are needed volunteer to participate, 8 students will be selected randomly from the pool of volunteers.

I look forward to hearing from you soon and appreciate your time very much.  
Sincerely,

Alicia Gignoux  
ABD Curriculum and Instruction  
MCLL Department  
University of Montana  
Missoula, MT. 59802  
email  
Phone Number: Please contact me, if you are interested.

Appendix C

Survey: Demographic and Self-Identification

**Demographic Survey and Language Use and Preference Survey**

Please Fill Out This Form Prior to the Interview and mail it to the researcher in the SASE provided. You also have the option of completing the survey online. All of this information will be locked in a secure cabinet and destroyed once the dissertation is defended to ensure confidentiality. Thank you.

**Demographic Survey**

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_
2. Preferred Pseudonym (False Name to be used in dissertation)

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Preferred Pseudonym (False Name to be used in dissertation)

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Major \_\_\_\_\_

5. Minor \_\_\_\_\_

6. Date you moved to the United States from Mexico \_\_\_\_\_

(if applicable)

7. Your place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

8. Parent's place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

9. How many years have you been in the US? \_\_\_\_\_

10. How many years have your parents been in the US? \_\_\_\_\_

11. Your age \_\_\_\_\_

12. Grades you attended in school in Mexico

\_\_\_\_\_ (if applicable)

13. Grades you attended in school in the US \_\_\_\_\_

14. Where did you attend grade school and high school?

\_\_\_\_\_

15. What were your favorite subjects in school? \_\_\_\_\_

16. Did you participate in ESL or bilingual education classes in grade school or high school? \_\_\_\_\_ How many years did you stay in these classes?

\_\_\_\_\_

17. Did you read books or other materials in Spanish as a child? \_\_\_\_\_

18. Describe the materials that you would read, briefly.

Spanish Language \_\_\_\_\_

English Language \_\_\_\_\_

19. Did you have access to a computer in the home?

\_\_\_\_\_

If applicable, when and for how long did you have access to a computer?

\_\_\_\_\_

20. Did your parents read to you in Spanish as a child?

21. Briefly describe your use of Spanish and/or English in the home.

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22. How do you define your ethnicity?

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23. Briefly describe your language abilities in Spanish

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24. If you could improve an aspect of your Spanish language ability, what would it be?

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If you could improve an aspect of your English language ability, what would it be?

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25. Have you ever taken Spanish courses designed for Heritage Learners? \_\_\_\_\_

26. Please, describe one of the courses briefly. \_\_\_\_\_

27. What is one example of a positive experience you have had studying advanced Spanish?

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28. Describe one example of a negative experience you have had studying advanced Spanish \_\_\_\_\_

29. Describe your parents' educational background (include years of study)

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Describe the economic status of your parents

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30. Summer Contact Information: address:

---

phone

number(s): \_\_\_\_\_

31. Email

address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Language Use Survey**

The questions below are adapted from the Short Acculturation Scale developed by Marin, Otero-Sabogal and Perez-Stabale (1987) and will provide the researcher with valuable information about your language use and choice.

Please answer each question briefly.

1. In general, what language(s) do you read and speak?

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2. What was the language(s) you used as a child?

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3. What language(s) do you usually speak at home?

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4. In which language(s) do you usually think?

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5. What language(s) do you usually speak with your friends?

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6. In what language(s) are the T.V. programs you usually watch?

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7. In what language(s) are the radio programs (including the internet) you usually listen to?

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8. In general, what language(s) are the movies, T.V. and radio programs you prefer to watch and listen to?

---

---

Your responses to this survey will not be read by the researcher until after the taped interviews are concluded and analyzed.

## Appendix D Interview Protocol and Interview Questions

### Interview Question Sheets Used by Researcher

#### Tier 1: Past Experiences

I understand that you are a student of Spanish who was exposed to the first language in the home and who has been educated in the United States. I am very interested in this experience. Could you please reconstruct your experience for me? Can you tell me what this experience was like for you as someone from a home where you were exposed to Spanish and also as a student educated in an English-speaking educational setting prior to attending the university?

#### Tier 2: Present Experiences (Recent Experiences)

Your experiences as a student who was exposed to Spanish in the home and who has studied advanced Spanish in an institution of higher education are important to this study as well. I am very interested in knowing more about your experience after graduating from high school. How has this experience been for you?

#### Tier 3: Reflecting on Past and Present Experiences

I have enjoyed listening to you tell about your experience and I am very interested to learn more. During this interview, I would like you to reflect on the first two interviews and share more information about your lived experience. What comes to mind as you reflect on the two interviews? What does being enrolled in advanced Spanish courses mean to you as you reflect on your past and present experiences?



## Information and Consent Form

### Study Title: Students Studying Advanced Spanish

Investigator: Alicia Gignoux

Address

Missoula, MT.

Office Phone Number Leave Message at: Home Phone Number

Email

**Special instructions to the potential subject:** Please read this consent form carefully before signing. This consent form may contain words that are new to you. If you read any words that are not clear to you, please ask the person who gave you this form to explain them to you.

**Purpose:** You are being asked to take part in a research study that intends to explore, understand and describe the past and present experiences of students of Mexican descent who have been educated in the United States and are or have studied advanced Spanish at the university level.

**Procedures:** If you agree to participate, you will be involved in one 2-hour interview and another 1-hour interview. In addition, you will fill out a demographic and language use survey which should take about half an hour. Finally, you will be asked to review and respond to the written interpretation of your interview. This should only take approximately 45 minutes to an hour. The interviews may be conducted in person or by phone. The interviews will be recorded.

**Location:** The study will take place in a quiet and private room or by phone to ensure confidentiality. If the interview is conducted by phone, the participant will agree to be located in a private room.

No compensation will be provided for your participation in this study.

**Risks/Discomforts:** No discomforts or risks are involved in this study. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, you will be referred to the appropriate health service at your university or health service.

**Benefits:** This study is expected to make a contribution to the research regarding the education of students who are exposed to Spanish in the home environment.

**Confidentiality:** Confidentiality is guaranteed. Anonymity will be maintained for all participants in the dissertation. The names of the participants will never be used or associated with the information in the completed dissertation and the tapes will be destroyed after the dissertation is defended. Your records will be kept private and only the researcher and her faculty supervisor will have access to the files. Your identity will be kept confidential. If the results of this study are written in a journal or presented at a meeting, your name will not be used. The data will be stored in a

locked file cabinet. Your name and associated pseudonym and this signed consent form will be stored in a cabinet separate from the data. The audiotape will be transcribed without any information that could identify you. The tape will then be erased. The section of the tape with your recorded consent will be kept in a separate cabinet as well.

**Compensation for Injury:** There is no foreseen risk in being involved in this study. Although I do not foresee any risk in taking part in this study, the following liability statement is required in all University of Montana consent forms:

In the event that you are injured as a result of this research you should individually seek appropriate medical treatment. If the injury is caused by the negligence of the University or any of its employees, you may be entitled to reimbursement or compensation pursuant to the Comprehensive State Insurance Plan established by the Department of Administration under the authority of M.C.A., Title2, Chapter 9. In the event of a claim for such injury, further information may be obtained from the University's Claims representative or University Legal Counsel. (Reviewed by University Legal Counsel, July 6, 1993)

**Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:** Your decision to take part in this research study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to take part in or you may withdraw from the study at any time. You may leave the study for any reason. You may be asked to leave the study for any of the following reasons:

1. Failure to follow the Project Director's instructions.
2. The Project Director thinks it is in the best interest of your health and welfare.
3. The study is terminated.

**Questions:** You may wish to discuss this with others before you agree to take part in this study. If you have any questions about the research now or during the study contact: Alicia Gignoux, Phone Number, Leave Message at: Phone Number or **Email address.**

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Chair of the IRB through The University of Montana Research Office at 243-6670.

**Subject's Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above description of this research study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that any future questions I may have will also be answered by a member of the research team. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I understand I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I also agree to being audio recorded during this interview. I understand that the audio files will be destroyed once the dissertation is published.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_