



UC CONSORTIUM FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING & TEACHING

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA GUIDELINES ON HERITAGE LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

Approved by The Steering Committee of the UC Consortium for Language Learning & Teaching, November 2002.

INTRODUCTION

The UC Heritage Language Institute, sponsored jointly by the UC Consortium for Language Learning & Teaching and the UCLA Language Resource Center, was held at UCLA on June 22-26, 2002.

The Institute was convened for UC language educators to:

- Learn from the experts in the developing field of heritage language instruction
- Encourage the sharing of knowledge among UC campuses
- Stimulate new solutions and collaborations
- Promote research and curricular development in heritage language acquisition
- Explore the use of technology in the attainment of literacy by heritage
- Draft guidelines for a comprehensive program of heritage language learning at the University of California

DEFINITIONS AND STATISTICS

"Heritage speaker" is the term most commonly used in the United States to describe students who have some knowledge of a home language other than English. Our working definition of the term is adopted from Guadalupe Valdés, a pioneer and leading scholar in heritage language education.

The term "heritage" speaker is used to refer to a student who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or merely understands the heritage language, and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language.¹

Statistics indicate a substantial and increasing number of heritage speakers in California. For the year 2000-01, according to the California Department of Education, 844,671 students in California public schools spoke another language and

¹G. Valdés, Spanish for Native Speakers. AATSP Professional Development Series Handbook for Teachers K-12. Fort Worth: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000: 1.

were designated “Fluent-English-Proficient”; in 1993 there were 626,491 such speakers. Similarly, 1,511,299 students were designated “Limited-English-Proficient” in 2000-01, compared with 1,151,819 Limited-English-Proficient speakers in 1993.² Both of these groups are heritage speakers of languages other than English; many of them are current and future UC students.

THE ISSUE

Knowledge of heritage languages is a valuable resource for individuals, families, communities, and the nation. While the need for proficiency in languages other than English is greater than ever for social purposes, business, diplomacy and national security, education in foreign languages has produced few graduates with proficiency adequate for professional-level use. Because of their basis of knowledge, many heritage speakers, with the proper instruction, can reach professional-level proficiency more quickly than foreign language students. However, in order to take full advantage of this resource and allow students to develop their abilities fully, we as an educational institution need to resolve a number of administrative and pedagogical concerns.

a. Students

Heritage Learners (HLs) have skills that distinguish them sharply from traditional foreign language learners. They typically have high oral/aural proficiency, combined with undeveloped, and in some cases non-existent, literacy. Particularly in the early stages of language study, therefore, HL and non-HL students have distinctly different needs in the classroom.

b. Instruction and Faculty

Although the number of language faculty who have had experience teaching HLs is growing, none have been trained to teach those students. Therefore, in a class with both HLs and non-HLs, neither group of students receives the instruction that they need to reach their potential. Frequently, HLs are treated as a behavior problem, and their pedagogical needs are ignored.

c. Myths

Compounding the challenges caused by lack of knowledge about HLs’ proficiencies and needs are the existence of myths about them. One such myth is that they study their home language solely to earn high grades without having to work. The implicit assumption in this myth is that HLs have the same degree of fluency and proficiency as native speakers and that, accordingly, an instructional program has nothing to offer them. In fact, HLs are not native speakers, and they have a great deal to learn.

Another myth takes the opposite viewpoint. Its assumption is that HLs’ deficiencies, which may include knowledge of a dialect other than the prestige dialect, use of colloquial expressions not appropriate in an academic setting, substandard

²<http://www.cde.ca.gov/demographics/reports/View_Statewide.htm#swlep> (California Department of Education)

grammar etc., mean that HLs do not know the language and that the only way for them to learn it is to start from the beginning.

Acceptance of these and other myths about HLs will contribute to a squandering of the opportunity to help a large number of students acquire high levels of language proficiency. A more enlightened approach would be to assess the HLs' strengths and to use these strengths as a foundation for developing a curriculum to meet HLs' specific needs.

d. Heritage Language Programs at UC

Although knowledge of heritage language issues is not yet common among all language faculty, a number of faculty members have developed expertise in heritage language instruction. Some UC faculty use and/or have developed materials for HLs, have created heritage programs, and have published research in the field. UC is in a position to promote research and pedagogical development and to become the leading U.S. educational institution in this field.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following is a digest of the discussion at the Heritage Language Institute and the recommendations developed by the participants and subcommittee.

1. Recruiting and Motivating Heritage Learners

Although some HLs may be able to pass a proficiency test and satisfy the university language requirement, they should be encouraged to continue to study their home languages in order to attain a high level of proficiency. Programs that would motivate HLs to attain this proficiency should establish goals of instruction that would take into account linguistic profiles of HLs as well as their motivations for studying the heritage language. For example, goals for HLs can be set higher than those for non-HLs within the same period of study. In addition, HLs typically have a cultural literacy that beginning foreign language students do not have. Such knowledge is a skill that should be valued and built upon. Accordingly, the goals of instruction for HLs should be grounded in the social conventions of the language taught and the communities where the language is used.

Establishing such goals of instruction can also benefit the institution. Creation of programs that are attractive to heritage students will increase interest in language study and correspondingly increase enrollment. Moreover, an academic focus on cultural literacy may stimulate interest from language communities in university-level instruction. Some language programs have been created and funded as a result of community demand.

We recommend that campuses initiate recruitment campaigns of their own heritage speakers and explain to them the benefits of becoming truly proficient in their heritage language. One way of stimulating their interest is by offering a certificate of achievement (see below).

We further recommend establishing goals of instruction that take HLs' knowledge and personal motivations into account, as well as setting different instructional goals for them than for non-HLs, thereby motivating them to attain high language proficiency during their university study. Departments that teach languages with a high percentage of HLs should consider offering advanced level courses. These courses could be made attractive to HLs if they required fewer contact hours/units than typical foreign language courses.

2. Advanced Proficiency Certificate

HLs enter language programs equipped with skills that allow them to progress to high-level proficiency far more rapidly than typical foreign language learners. HLs may not, however, be aware of the advantages that such proficiency would afford them in their future careers or professions. In some languages, outside organizations (e.g., the Japan Foundation) offer credentials that serve to motivate as well as validate language proficiency.

We recommend exploring the possibility of instituting a UC Certificate of Professional Language Competency. The certificate would not, of course, be limited to HLs.

3. Placement Exams

Standard placement exams for foreign language students do not elicit the data that would allow a program to place HLs appropriately. This is especially true in the case of HLs who have high aural/oral skills but little or no literacy. Knowledge of HLs' history and experience with the heritage language and culture (such as place of birth, age at emigration, and years of formal schooling in the heritage language) as well as a self-assessment of their language skills would provide a more accurate evaluation of their proficiency and needs.

We recommend that placement exams for HLs be developed to include both oral and written components and to incorporate questions regarding language-relevant biographic information and self-assessment.

4. Separate Tracks/Sequences

Even HLs who have no literacy typically have substantial aural/oral and cultural skills in the heritage language that require that they be taught differently, with different materials, than foreign language learners. This is true not only at the beginning stages of language learning, but throughout the course of study.

We recommend that HLs be offered separate classes whenever feasible or be accommodated in the best ways available to the program. We emphasize that at all times instructors should be aware of the distinct needs of HLs. While classroom instruction is most efficacious, some programs may need to implement independent study for HLs. In any case, HLs would be served best by a coordinated and well-articulated sequence of courses specifically designed for them.

5. Curriculum Design

UCLA has received an NEH Focus grant (PIs: Olga Kagan and Russ Campbell, 2002-2003) to develop a heritage curriculum. A full curriculum design plan will be generated as an outcome of this grant.

When developing the curriculum, in addition to linguistic and cultural content it is necessary to take into account the role of language in HLs' lives and in their daily contact with family and community. HLs will benefit from an introduction to some elements of sociolinguistics with regard to bilingualism, the place of prestige dialects within the context of language knowledge, language etiquette, general pragmatics, and societal attitudes about non-English languages. Such instruction will have at least two implications. It will expand the students' knowledge of the heritage language by situating it within a broader cultural context, and it will help students understand the value of their knowledge, particularly if they have encountered prejudice resulting from their identification with a non-English language community. It would be ideal if some of this instruction were carried out separately with HLs, even if they are in mixed classes.

We recommend that UC promote the appropriate instruction of HLs, not only meeting their linguistic needs but also educating them in relevant cultural and sociolinguistic issues.

6. Materials Development

Materials designed for traditional foreign language students do not address the specific needs of HLs. Instructional materials published for native speakers of the language in the country of origin are not appropriate either. They are unsuitable cognitively if they are designed for children, and they are too complex if they are aimed at educated adults. Therefore, the need for new materials for HLs is urgent. Publication of materials produced for access online or with desktop technology should receive the same scrutiny and recognition as paper publications.

We recommend that the UC administration encourage, support, and reward faculty efforts to produce materials for HLs. We further recommend a systemwide collaborative effort to produce and share these crucially needed materials.

7. Training and Professional Development

Heritage language education is an emerging field. There are as yet few publications dealing with training instructors of heritage languages. Understandably, faculty members and teaching assistants in foreign language departments do not have training in teaching HLs, and UC campuses have not yet put such training in place.

We recommend that foreign language departments, individual campuses, and the UC system establish training programs and provide funding for the development of necessary expertise in the teaching of heritage languages.

8. The Role of Technology in Instruction and Professional Development

Technology may facilitate creation of materials and supplement face-to-face instruction. It can serve as an excellent source of authentic materials and be highly motivating for HLs. However, it is our belief that technology should not be used as the primary vehicle of instruction unless it is the only option, as in the case of the less commonly taught languages.

In addition, distance learning may provide a practical means of training across campuses, as well as a means of sharing resources among heritage language instructors (see below).

We recommend use of technology for developing materials for HLs, creating distance learning opportunities where face-to-face instruction is not feasible, and using telecommunication to provide professional development in heritage language education.

9. Sharing Resources within and across Campuses

Sharing information, materials, and training efforts is uncommon across language programs, departments, and campuses. Some campuses have Language Centers that could make a substantial difference in advancing the cause of heritage language instruction and sharing of materials. In addition, UC now has a central agency, the UC Consortium for Language Learning & Teaching, that is in a position to expedite collaborative efforts.

We recommend that the UC Consortium for Language Learning & Teaching coordinate an effort to implement sharing of information, practices, and materials. The bi-annual UC Language Consortium Conference could be one forum for inter-campus cooperation in this area.

We further recommend setting up a web site for heritage instruction for UC language faculty, where resources such as bibliographies, research papers, links to information about UC and other funding sources, and a listserv for discussion would facilitate information sharing and collaborative work.

10. Research

Only limited research has been conducted so far in the field of heritage language acquisition. A Heritage Language Priorities Conference convened at UCLA in 2001 formulated a research agenda. The priorities document, emphasizing collaboration among linguists, applied linguists, psychologists, policy experts, and foreign language teachers, can be found at <http://www.cal.org/heritage/priorities.html>.

We recommend establishing a UC Committee on Heritage Language Research and Instruction with the goal of involving UC researchers from various disciplines in heritage language research.

11. Outreach and Articulation

UC is in a position to provide leadership in heritage language instruction. Sharing knowledge and collaborating with colleagues outside UC should be part of this mission. Articulation and outreach should be pursued with K-12, community colleges, and the California State University system, as well as community organizations.

We recommend that the UC Consortium for Language Learning & Teaching spearhead an effort to establish ties with other educational institutions and language community organizations in California.

CONCLUSION

Heritage language education presents a challenge that the University of California can meet through well-planned and coordinated curriculum design, training, research, and outreach. It is hoped that this document will launch a concerted effort to promote heritage language instruction and advanced foreign language proficiency in the state of California. Individual programs will need to develop language and campus specific implementation strategies.

In summary, we recommend the following:

- Undertaking recruitment campaigns of HLs
- Offering instruction that recognizes HLs' distinct knowledge and needs in order to motivate them to continue to study their home languages beyond the level needed to satisfy the UC language requirement
- Exploring the possibility of instituting a UC Certificate of Professional Language Competency
- Developing placement exams to elicit data on oral proficiency and personal language history that would allow a program to place HLs appropriately
- Offering separate classes for HLs wherever feasible
- Incorporating instruction in relevant sociolinguistic issues into HL courses
- Encouraging and supporting collaborative efforts by UC language faculty to develop HL instructional materials
- Encouraging and funding the development of expertise in HL teacher training
- Using technology for HL materials development, instruction, and teacher training
- Sharing information, practices, and materials across programs and campuses
- Establishing a UC Committee on Heritage Language Research and Instruction
- Establishing ties with other educational institutions and language community organizations in California

The UC Committee on Heritage Language Guidelines.

Small group discussions, held as part of the Heritage Language Institute at UCLA, led to the production of the first draft of the guidelines. The following participants studied that draft and produced the final version that was reviewed and approved by the Steering Committee of the UC Consortium for Language Learning & Teaching in November 2002.

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