College Heritage Language Speakers' Perceptions of Heritage Languages and Identity

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Abstract

As one of the primary sectors for providing the nation's capacity for less commonly taught languages (LCTLs), the resource of heritage languages needs to be developed and honored (Brecht & Walton, 1994). Heritage languages, however, give way to English quickly in this country. The underlying reasons are very complex, among which are the heritage language speakers' perceptions of their own heritage languages, a topic that has yet to be investigated. By utilizing a questionnaire and follow-up semi-structured interviews, this study explored ten college heritage language speakers' perceptions of heritage languages and identity. The findings showed that they generally held positive attitudes toward heritage languages, though most of them felt identified with English. In addition, community and familial support played a crucial role in maintaining heritage languages. In such a diverse country as the United States, heritage language speakers' multilingual talents should be valued so as to expand the nation's LCTL base and strengthen language capacity.

Introduction

In this globalized world, the country's demand for multilingual talents, enabling communication with the rest of the world, is increasing dramatically due to political, security, economic, social, and humanitarian reasons. We see this partly evidenced in the newly launched National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) aimed at boosting the nation's foreign language skills in the 21st century. In this regard, foreign language education plays a significant role in meeting the increasing demand for preparing a population with multilingual competencies. However, a quick look at foreign language education offered in this country reveals a disconcerting picture that "approximately ninety-one percent of Americans who study foreign

languages in schools, colleges, and universities choose French, German, Italian, or Spanish" (http://www.councilnet.org). The rest of the world's languages, some of which are critical for a variety of reasons to this country, are seldom taught, although they are spoken by the overwhelming majority of people around the world, such as Chinese, Arabic, Hindi and so on. In light of the nation's narrowly focused and inadequately prepared foreign language capacity, Brecht and Walton (1994) initiated a judicious strategic plan aimed at expanding the nation's capacity for the less commonly taught languages (LCTLs).

In writing about the nation's LCTL capacity and the development of the LCTL field, Brecht and Walton (1994) explicitly described, "the domestic ethnic language preservation or enhancement sector" (p. 195) with "the potential to supply language capacities without instruction" (pp.195-196) as one of the four primary sectors for providing LCTL capacity, which, however, had been overlooked. Fortunately, the then "seemingly largely overlooked contribution" (p. 196) deplored by Brecht and Walton, has recently attracted more and more attention in academic fields under the name of "heritage languages" or "community languages." In applying the term "heritage languages" to languages other than English spoken by immigrants, refugees, and indigenous people in this country, Baker and Jones (1998) cautioned the possible pejorative connotations that could be associated with this term. In the opening remarks of the recent issue of *Modern Language Journal*, Byrnes (2005) stated, "'heritage languages' and 'heritage learners' have recently come into the limelight for the foreign language community in the United States" (p. 582). In addition to the increasing attention received in the academic community, McGinnis (2005) noted that U.S. Government agencies and departments were now also recognizing the heritage sector as a natural national resource. In recent years, especially after the events of 9/11, speakers of heritage languages related to critical political and economic issues in the country have been recognized as national resources, partly because foreign language education has failed to turn out enough personnel in these languages to address immediate concerns. Yet, it should be noted that this potential resource for expanding the nation's LCTL base is predicated on the assumption that heri-

tage language speakers have maintained and developed their heritage languages.

Recently, a number of studies have documented that heritage languages are not typically maintained, and that their speakers tend to shift to the dominant language in this country (e.g., Fishman, 1991; Krashen, 1996; Veltman, 1983; Wong Fillmore, 1991). In the case of indigenous languages, government policy has been notorious for forcing the linguistic and cultural assimilation of Native Americans, thus contributing to the erosion and loss of indigenous languages. As Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) observed, "language shift in the direction of a particular language-partner occurs either because that partner overwhelms a particular language or because a particular language has resources to offer which are not available in the indigenous language" (p. 283). For immigrant languages, however, Wong Fillmore (1991) maintained that unlike indigenous groups, immigrants had voluntarily given up their languages, because there was nothing prohibiting the use of their languages at home or in the community, although they had to acquire and use English to survive educationally or economically.

This view has been shared and reinforced by Wright (2004) who stated, "a language can do nothing. Only the speaker can decide whether or not they will use a language . . . the speakers are always the final arbiters of whether a language survives or not" (p. 250). No matter whether the indigenous languages were taken away from the Native Americans by external forces or whether immigrants gave up their languages due to practical reasons, heritage language speakers themselves play a decisive role in the battle for maintaining their languages and reversing the language shift to English. If heritage language speakers feel the desperate need for using their heritage languages, passing them onto their children, and developing an active community of speakers within which heritage languages are used, then the likelihood of maintaining heritage languages is much greater. On the other hand, if they themselves hold a laissez-faire attitude toward maintaining heritage languages or have a strong desire to integrate themselves into the mainstream society and use its dominant language, then the loss of heritage languages is inevitable, no matter how strong the external efforts.

The reasons for the loss of heritage languages documented by previous research are numerous, such as the differential power among cultural and linguistic groups (Hornberger, 1998; Shannon 1995), the corresponding implicit and explicit language policies (Crawford, 1997; Kondo, 1998), the individual perception of the linguistic prestige between heritage languages and dominant language (Giles & Byrne, 1982; Giles & Johnson, 1987), parental language use and attitudes (Kondo, 1998; Tse, 1997), and the lack of input and exposure to heritage languages (Krashen, 1998; McQuillan, 1998). However, little research has hitherto been conducted to investigate heritage language speakers' perception of their heritage languages and identity, except for a few survey studies.

Ghuman (1991), for example, studied 13 through 15-year-old Asian adolescents who had been schooled entirely in English and reported, "over 90% expressed the wish to learn their mother-tongue, although nearly all preferred to speak English most of the time" (p.333). In a similar vein, Nguyen, Shin, and Krashen (2001) found that older Vietnamese-speaking elementary school children showed a strong interest in developing their heritage language, although there was a clear decline in the use of Vietnamese among these children. What was lacking in both studies was the participants' in-depth perception of their heritage language and identity, which could not be accessed by only a few survey questions. In addition, these two studies mainly focused on heritage language speakers in elementary and middle schools, so little is yet known about college heritage language speakers. According to Tse (1998), heritage language speakers might go through different stages about their perceptions of heritage languages and ethnic identity. Thus, it is worthwhile to investigate how college heritage language speakers perceive their heritage language and identity, which might differ from elementary and middle school heritage language speakers.

With this aim, the present study investigated American college heritage language speakers' perceptions of heritage languages and identity in an attempt to answer the following two research questions:

1. What are college heritage language speakers' perceptions of heritage languages and identity?

2. How are self-perceived proficiency in heritage languages, parental attitudes toward maintaining heritage languages, and experiences in learning heritage languages related to college heritage language speakers' perception of heritage languages and identity?

My goals in conducting this research were twofold. First, the results of the study would provide some insights into the two research questions. Second, some of the findings could shed light on issues related to the LCTLs that need attention and offer advice on how to strengthen language capacity and the LCTL base in this country. Indeed, some personal narratives in the present study illustrated telling stories about how heritage language speakers of LCTLs encountered more restrictive forces in maintaining their heritage languages than did some speakers of more commonly taught languages, such as Spanish. Though most of the participants' heritage languages turned out to be Spanish, a commonly taught language in this country, some of the participants' successful experiences in maintaining Spanish could give us some lessons on how to help speakers of heritage LCTLs maintain their heritage languages as a possible way of strengthening the nation's LCTL base.

At this moment, it is relevant to discuss the term "heritage language speakers" before going to the methodology section, because it is such a controversial term. In fact, Wiley (2005) observed that the question of who can be categorized as heritage language speakers has raised issues related to identity, inclusion, and exclusion. The controversy of defining this term lies in the debate over which of the two factors—affiliation with an ethno-linguistic group or proficiency in a heritage language—is more important in the categorization of a "heritage language speaker" (Wiley & Valdés, 2000, p. iii). Wiley (2001) suggested defining "heritage language speaker" from the perspective of meeting different needs. In the cause of reversing language shift and maintaining heritage languages, for example, relevance to an ethnic group outweighs proficiency in a heritage language, since the crux of the cause is to encourage and include more people to join in the revitalization effort. On the other hand, it is more pedagogically useful to demarcate heritage language speakers with some proficiency in heritage languages from those with no pro-

ficiency at all, despite the latter's possible ethnolinguistic affiliation with heritage languages. In this vein, Valdés (2001) defined a heritage language speaker as "someone who has been raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken and who speaks or merely understands the heritage language, and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language" (p. 1).

In the present study, Valdés' (2000) definition is adopted in the sense that participants were required to at least demonstrate some knowledge of heritage languages, no matter active or passive, in order to be considered as heritage language speakers. It is my belief that someone affiliated with an ethnic group, but with no proficiency in the heritage language is no different from a foreign language learner in the general sense. As Wright (2004) points out, language is a robust marker of group membership and one that is not easily changed; a member of the ethnic group without any knowledge of the heritage language fails to feel the strong ethnic belonging experienced by his or her counterparts with some knowledge of the heritage language. Furthermore, the latter is more likely to contribute to maintaining heritage languages than the former.

Methodology

Context and Participants of the Study

This study took place in a medium-sized public university of about 19,000 students in the southwestern United States. Participants were recruited with the help of freshmen English composition instructors, who gave me the names of possible heritage language speakers in their classes. With the help of their contact information, I mailed the questionnaire to them or sent the questionnaire to them as an email attachment. There were twelve surveys completed and returned. One point worth noting here is that only those who fit the definition of heritage language speakers in the present study were chosen. The criteria for choosing the qualified participants were based on selected item responses in the questionnaire that indicated whether or not the participants had some knowledge of their heritage languages. Therefore, only ten surveys were chosen in the end.

Given the demographic characteristics of the southwestern part of the United States, most of the participants' heritage languages turned out to be Spanish (N=7), a commonly taught language in the U.S., with the other three heritage languages being LCTL's: Korean (N=1), Czech (N=1), and Portuguese (N=1). The participants' average age was 21.6. Nine of the ten participants were born and raised in the U.S. One participant came to the U.S. at the age of 10 and had lived in the U.S. for 23 years.

Instrumentation

Questionnaire. A questionnaire (see Appendix A) was used in the study. After consulting several resources (e.g., Feuerverger, 1991; Gardner & Lambert, 1972), I included the following five categories, which might be related to heritage language speakers' perceptions of heritage languages and identity: education of heritage languages, self-perceived proficiency in heritage languages, feelings about heritage languages, perceived parental attitudes toward maintaining heritage languages, and experiences in learning English. The background information at the beginning of the questionnaire was designed to provide some factual information about the participants' age, gender, first language, educational level of parents, and parents' heritage language and English proficiency. There are other possible factors that might influence perception of heritage languages, such as the community in which they have lived and socio-economic background, but they are beyond the scope of this study.

Interviews. Based on the results of the questionnaire, three participants out of the ten were purposefully selected for the follow-up semi-structured interviews. They represented three types of heritage language speakers: those who felt identified with English, the heritage language, or both. An interview guide was emailed to them several days before the actual interviews so that they could have more time to reflect about their experiences. The questions in the interview guide generally followed the ones in the questionnaire except that the questions were adapted to maximize the participants' comfort level, and thus the best performance. During the interviews, participants were prompted to guide the direction of the interviews so as to en-

courage any interesting views or opinions to emerge, while still exploring answers to the research questions.

Quantitative Analysis

In this section, the results gleaned from the closed questions of the questionnaire are analyzed and presented. Descriptive statistics are provided.

Table 1
Self-perceived Proficiency in Heritage Languages

	Yes	No
Can you understand your heritage language?	100% (N=10)	0%(N=0)
Can you speak your heritage language?	60% (N=6)	40% (N=4)
Can you read in your heritage language?	80% (N=8)	20% (N=2)
Can you write in your heritage language?	70% (N=7)	30% (N=3)

Proficiency in Heritage languages

Table 1 and Table 2 summarize the data obtained from the questionnaire for the category of heritage language proficiency. Table 1 offers descriptive statistics related to the subjects' self-perceived proficiency in heritage languages in terms of understanding, speaking, reading and writing. As Table 1 shows, all ten participants checked "yes" to the question of "Can you understand your heritage language," which also verified that all ten participants fit the definition of heritage language speakers in the study. There were more heritage language speakers who could understand the heritage languages than could actually use the languages in terms of speaking, reading, and writing. Table 2 provides other descriptive statistics about self-reported opportunities for using heritage languages in terms of speaking, reading, and writing. These questions were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 5 "always" to 1 "never". Table 2 indicates that the participants generally had more chances for speaking

than for reading and writing in heritage languages. They had the fewest opportunities for writing in heritage languages.

Table 2
Chances for Using Heritage Languages (N=10)

	Mean	SD
Speaking	2.7	1.06
Reading	2.1	0.57
Writing	1.9	0.32

Feelings about Heritage Languages

The first two questions in this category were concerned with the self-perceived importance of maintaining heritage languages and the importance of passing heritage languages onto future generations. The questions were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 5 "very important" to 1 "unimportant". The mean for the first question was 4.5, which showed that the ten participants generally thought the importance of maintaining heritage languages was between "very important" and "important." The mean of the second question was 3.89, which indicated that the importance of passing heritage languages onto future generations was between "important" and "fairly important."

Table 3
Reasons for Maintaining Heritage Languages (N=10)

	Mean	SD
Talking with heritage language-speaking relatives and friends	4.7	0.48
Increasing chances for getting a better career	3.8	1.75
Traveling to places with the heritage culture	3.7	1.42
Knowing more about ethnic heritage culture	3.1	1.37
Having important position in the ethnic community	2.6	1.58
Watching TV or movies in the heritage language	2.2	1.23

In the third question, participants were asked to rate, on a 5-point Likert scale, the relative importance of various reasons for maintaining heritage languages. Table 3 shows that the top three most important reasons chosen by the participants were "talking with heritage language speaking relatives and friends," "increasing chances for getting a better career," and "traveling to places of the heritage culture."

Perceived Parental Attitudes toward Maintaining Heritage Languages

The first question in this category was intended to gain information about parental attitudes toward maintaining heritage languages. The mean for this question was 4.4, which showed parental attitudes toward maintaining heritage languages were generally between "strongly supportive" and "supportive." The second question was intended to discover how often parents spoke heritage languages with the children. The mean for this question was 3.00, which meant parents "sometimes" spoke heritage languages with the children.

Qualitative Analysis

This section presents major themes emerging from the open-ended questions of the questionnaire and the in-depth semi-structured interviews. The implications are also discussed.

English or the Heritage Language

One major finding of the study is that if one parent spoke English and the other parent spoke a language other than English in a family, most likely the children's first language would be English. In other words, English was preferred in daily communications with children in a family, while the language other than English spoken by the other parent was often neglected. Even in the case where both parents shared a language other than English, they would abandon using their heart-felt mother tongue and speak stilted English to the children for the sake of the children's future. The following anecdote narrated by Alicia, whose parents both spoke Czech, was a case in point:

> At some point before I started school, maybe in preschool, my mother didn't want to speak to me in English because she was concerned that she would somehow transmit her accent to me. However, at one point, she noticed that I was playing in a park with some kids and that I couldn't understand them/they couldn't understand me. At that moment, she realized that I needed to learn English before I started school, and began speaking to me in English (personal communication, November 24, 2004).

Naturally, parents would like their children to learn the dominant language over heritages languages, as English is often associated with wider communication and more opportunities in the society. Most parents like Alicia's believed that heritage language development would be detrimental to the learning of English. Consequently, they were willing to give up teaching heritage languages to their children for the sake of the children's English development. Lao (2004) reported similar findings in a study showing that most of the eighty-six parents who enrolled their children in a Chinese-English bilingual preschool in San Francisco were like Alicia's mother in their concerns, as they also believed that teaching children the heritage language in the home would affect the development of their English.

I am Competent in Both English and the Heritage Language

In stark contrast with Alicia's experiences in learning the heritage language, Lucette, the only participant in this study who felt identified with the heritage language, had successful experiences in maintaining her heritage language of Spanish. As a third-generation immigrant, she was raised in Nogales, a city adjacent to the Mexican border. Even before she went to school, her bilingually proficient parents had spoken both Spanish and English to her. Moreover, her parents had always taken her to visit her grandparents, aunts, and uncles living on the other side of Nogales, which belongs to Mexico. She loved Spanish so much that she ended up taking Spanish as an elective in high school for three consecutive years, although only two years of foreign language was required in her high school. She perceived herself to be equally proficient in Spanish and English, and also said with great assurance that all her peers living in Nogales were like her in their advanced bilingual proficiency.

I am Comfortable with English

The powerful language shift toward English was also evident in this study: eight out of ten participants felt more comfortable speaking English than their heritage languages. This trend of losing heritage languages reflects similar findings of previous studies about the language shift toward English that happens in this country. Veltman (1983) argued that immigrants typically lost first language competence in a few generations. Of the ten participants in this study, three spoke LCTLs (i.e., Korean, Czech, and Portuguese), yet felt more comfortable speaking English. Though the number of participants is too small to draw any definitive conclusions, it points to a possible trend that heritage languages of the LCTL variety are not typically maintained, with their speakers willingly giving up their languages for the dominant language, which is often associated with greater practical benefits. When asked why she didn't study Czech in school, Alicia made the following remarks:

It is not available. Also, if it had been available, I doubt that I would have studied it; it's only "useful" to me personally (as

far as my family is concerned), but it's not a very "useful" language in a broader social or academic sense (personal communication, November 24, 2004).

Alicia's remarks are somewhat representative of the kind of dilemma many heritage language speakers might experience, for although they think it is important to maintain heritage languages, the data from this study indicate that they consider the importance only in the sense of the perceived need for maintaining their bond with their heritage, such as being able to talk with heritage language speaking relatives and friends. As Alicia's comments imply, they are not deemed as indispensable in some intrinsic way or useful in a broader social sense.

I Felt More Identified with English

It would be natural to expect heritage languages speakers to have identities in both languages. In this study, bilingual identities were exhibited in Alexandria, whose heritage language was Portuguese. She stated, "It feels like I have two identities, which I can use separately or interchangeably depending on the situation." These double identities were also found in Alicia, who said, "For some reason, being bilingual/bicultural is an important part of who I am . . . Because of the way I was raised, I don't really feel 100 percent American" (personal communication, November 24, 2004). Their identification with both languages is in line with Wright (2004) who observed that there was nothing intrinsic about language and identity: they could both shift; they could both be hybrid; they could both be layered. However, the results of this study indicated that six out of ten of the subjects felt identified with English, and were more attached to it than their heritage languages.

Discussion

In the present study, one result indicated that most participants had some degree of proficiency in their heritage languages. The mean of self-perceived proficiency in heritage languages was 3, which meant "good", though there existed great variation among individual

participants. With regard to specific skills, more participants tended to answer that they could understand heritage languages rather than actually use them in terms of speaking, reading, and writing. Similarly, Vietnamese-speaking elementary students in Nguyen, Shin & Krashen's (2001) research reported that their competence in spoken Vietnamese was high, but much lower in written Vietnamese. Byrnes (as cited in Brutt-Graiffler, 2005) notes that around the world "a multilingual citizenry" will not only require a knowledge of foreign languages but that this citizenry will need "to be able to use an L2 competently in a wide variety of public and professional contexts and not only in private settings among family and friends" (p. 612). If these heritage language speakers' proficiency remained only at the level of understanding, with little competence for actual use, then these potential multilingual resources would be restricted. In particular, for the LCTL heritage language speakers who had few opportunities to receive instruction in their languages at school, their minimal proficiency in heritage languages would be detrimental to the cause of expanding the nation's LCTL capacity. It follows that Brecht and Walton's (1994) advocacy of utilizing the ethnic sector to provide for the nation's language capacity would be undermined.

Regarding the self-reported opportunities for using heritage languages in terms of speaking, reading, and writing, it was found that speaking occurred more frequently than reading, and reading occurred more frequently than writing. However, most participants rated the chances for using these skills as between "sometimes" and "seldom." It is not surprising that the most accessible modality was speaking, since one of the parents or even both parents might speak the heritage language to the children at home. The chances for reading, however, depend on the availability of heritage language reading materials. Since Tse (2001) argues that there is a lack of reading materials in heritage languages, one could predict that there are fewer opportunities for reading in heritage languages than there are for speaking. Even fewer opportunities exist for writing in heritage languages because there is no apparent need for it in daily life. The unfavorable condition, of having few opportunities for using heritage languages, may be compounded for LCTL heritage languages which are seldom taught in schools. Nevertheless, in recent years, with the development of technology and the internet, self-directed learning using com-

puter-driven technologies can help address the problem of shortages in materials, especially in the case of the LCTLs. In actuality, several participants in the present study reported that they sometimes looked for information on the internet about their heritage languages and culture.

Most participants in the present study generally held positive attitudes toward heritage languages and thought it was important to maintain them, despite the clear signs of language shift as eight out of the ten participants felt comfortable with speaking English only. This result is consistent with previous studies documenting that elementary and middle school heritage language speakers showed a strong interest in their heritage languages, although they preferred speaking English most of the time (e.g., Ghuman, 1991; Nguyen, Shin, & Krashen, 2001). It is impossible to determine the exact reasons for the loss of heritage languages. Yet, only three out of ten participants had ever had the opportunity to learn their heritage language at school, even though the three shared the same heritage language, Spanish, the most popular foreign language in American high schools and colleges. This could give a hint about one possible reason for the loss of heritage languages, namely, the scarcity of heritage language education available in this country especially in the case of the LCTLs. Several participants in the study expressed disappointment that their heritage languages were not taught in school, although they were eager to learn them.

The small number of heritage languages offered in school relates to a primary finding of the study: that parental support plays an important role in the maintenance of heritage languages—a finding supporting Fishman's (1996) argument that language promotion needs the support of families committed to intergenerational transmission and private use of the language. Lucette's example of successfully maintaining both her heritage language and English was a good illustration. It is undeniable that Lucette's parents' insistence on speaking both English and Spanish to her from a young age played a tremendously influential role in her successful bilingual development. This is further evidenced in Tse (2001) who found that having access to heritage language support and guidance from more literate adults and peers was one of the main factors for producing successful bilinguals in the U.S. In contrast, Alicia's mother, who gave up her last

chance to pass on the heritage language to her daughter because of the belief that learning the heritage language would negatively affect her English learning, serves as a deleterious example. This attitude would be extremely undermining to the future of the nation's LCTL capacity, since these languages are not often taught or learned in schools. What is worse is that this critical source of heritage language expertise might be cut off if these learners forsake the continuation of learning and using their heritage languages. For heritage languages, especially in the case of LCTLs such as Czech, family support may remain the primary or even sole channel of maintaining the languages, since the instruction of these languages in schools is often not available.

The conventional view held by Alicia's mother, that learning heritage languages is detrimental to learning English, and the view held by some of the participants, that maintaining heritage languages is useful only in the sense of connecting with one's heritage, are not supported by empirical evidence. Instead, recent research has indicated the benefits and advantages of maintaining heritage languages both to the individual and the society at large. At the societal level, Shibata (2000) maintains that bilingual and multilingual abilities will become increasingly important for the diverse population in the United States. Carreira and Armengol (1999) have described areas in government, business, media, and communications sectors desperately in need of heritage language speakers. At the individual level, there are academic and psychological advantages for the individual who retains his or her heritage language. For example, Krashen, Tse, and McQuillan (1998) reviewed several studies (e.g., Fernandez & Nielsen, 1986; Nielsen & Lerner, 1986; Tienda & Neidert, 1984) which concluded that retention of heritage languages could contribute to the individual's enhanced school success and slightly higher occupational status. In terms of psychological benefits, Moses (2000) contended that maintaining heritage languages could help heritage language speakers have a secure sense of authenticity in their cultural identity and a favorable social context within which to make important life choices. Contrary to the common belief that the development of a heritage language would hinder English learning, all these studies have shown that development of one's heritage language is

not a barrier to English learning, but has practical and cognitive advantages.

Despite these benefits of maintaining heritage languages, heritage language education has historically experienced an uneven path, depending on the social, political, and historical context of the time. The U.S. government has historically taken a laissez-faire stance towards heritage language education. According to Wright (2004), laissez-faire policies mean that the language of power and prestige will eventually take over in all situations, which is evidenced the present study by the fact that most of the participants lost their heritage languages. To make things worse, for the past two decades, there has been a steady undertow of resistance to bilingualism and bilingual education (Wiley & Wright, 2004) culminating in the recent English-only movement intended to make English the only official language of the United States. With this in mind, Wright (2004) argued that the cause of maintaining heritage languages would be left solely to communities with the resources and the desire to maintain their ancestral languages. This view has been reinforced by Cummins (2005) who sees little hope for change in the heritage language education situation under the current macro- sociopolitical context, causing him to recommend efforts through local activism and parental and community groups.

This implies that, especially for heritage languages of the LCTL variety, communities and educators in local contexts play an even more crucial role in strengthening proficiency in heritage languages and the desire of speakers to maintain and develop this proficiency, thus contributing to the cause of expanding LCTL capacities in the long term. In this regard, McGinnis (2005) presented an excellent example of heritage language schools making important contributions to the development and instruction of Chinese in the U.S. According to the most recent statistics, Chinese heritage language schools have become the major provider of Chinese language instruction in the United States. With the support of the community and local efforts, Chinese heritage language has been maintained and developed in this country, thus helping to provide for the nation's need of bilingual talent in this language.

Limitations of the Current Study and Implications for Future Research

Due to the small number of participants and the few varieties of heritage languages they represented, generalizing the findings of the present study is almost impossible. Future research with large samples of participants with diverse heritage languages is therefore desired. Another aspect of the current study that merits improvement is the participants' self-perceived proficiency in heritage languages. Self-perception sometimes entails bias and subjectivity in the results of a study, and thus decreases its reliability. Inclusion of the results of an actual heritage language proficiency test in future research would help address this limitation.

Previous studies have documented a gap between expressed language attitudes and actual observed language behaviors (e.g., Baker, 1992; King, 2000; Lyon & Ellis, 1991). In the present study, college heritage language speakers generally expressed positive attitudes toward maintaining heritage languages. Future research can further investigate their actual behavior in using heritage languages in order to see whether this gap really exists.

Conclusion

As more and more multilingual talent is needed in this country, the foreign language education field has experienced an unprecedented challenge in producing foreign language experts who can address immediate concerns in various inter-cultural and intra-cultural contexts. This challenge can be partly eased by the country's often-overlooked multilingual and multicultural resources, which are now recognized by academics and other segments of society as potential foreign language assets. Especially for LCTLs that are viewed as critical to the nation's needs, heritage language speakers can provide a potentially rich resource of experts in these languages. However, heritage languages are typically not maintained and are rarely developed among ethnic minority groups. The reasons for language loss are complex. This study investigated college heritage language speakers' perceptions of their heritage languages and identity, which was believed to possibly influence the loss of heritage languages and the

shift to English. The results gleaned from the questionnaire and the interviews showed that they generally held positive attitudes toward heritage languages, although the individual self-perceived proficiency in heritage languages varied significantly. The study also indicated a pervasive language shift to English, which is seen as diminishing the potential of heritage language speakers to serve as a critical resource for expanding the nation's LCTL capacity.

In an effort to maintain this nation's multilingual resources and also value them as possible sources for meeting the nation's increasing need for foreign language talent, heritage languages should be maintained and developed. However, the current large-scale policy with respect to heritage language education seems not to be favorable to the development of heritage languages. In this context, bottom-up support is all the more important, and points at parental support as a critical component for the maintenance of heritage languages. Kaplan and Balduaf (1997) emphasized that parents must be willing and able to transmit the language to their offspring and must actually do so in order for a heritage language to survive. In Alicia's mother's case, as well as in previous studies, parents were reluctant to transmit heritage languages to their children for fear of hindering their children's development of English, which is valued much more than heritage languages in this society. Nevertheless, they are oblivious to the fact that, in this globalized society, multilingual talent is much more treasured and needed than monolinguals who are actually viewed by some to be linguistically deficient. Consequently, as Cummins (2005) strongly advocates, a correct message should be communicated to heritage languages speakers about the value of their heritage languages and culture so that these personal, community, and national linguistic and intellectual resources can benefit both the individual and the society. Only in this way can the nation's LCTL capacity be expanded through this ethnic sector.

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College Heritage Language Speakers' Perception of Heritage Languages and Identity

I. Background Information
1. Age _____
2. Gender _____
3. Place where you were raised _____
4. First Language _____
5. Languages Spoken by Parents _____
6. Educational Level of Parents _____ (College, High School, Secondary School, etc)
7. English Proficiency of Parents (Please circle one of the following numbers)
   5= Excellent, 4= Very good, 3= Good, 2= Fair, 1= Poor
8. Heritage Language Proficiency of Parents (Please choose one of the following numbers)
   5= Excellent, 4= Very good, 3= Good, 2= Fair, 1= Poor

II. Education of Heritage Languages
1. Which language did you speak before you received formal schooling in the U.S. (If you can remember)?
2. After you entered the U.S. school system, did you ever study your heritage language in the U.S. school system?
   Yes _____ (Go to Question 3)   No _____ (Go to Question 4)
3. If Yes to the above question, what did you usually learn about the heritage languages? (Please circle all the numbers that can apply.)
   A. Culture   B. Basic Conversation Skills   C. Reading   D. Writing
4. If No to Question 2, where did you learn the heritage language? (Please choose all the numbers that can apply)
   Community schools   B. Family (Parents, Siblings)   C. Television   D. Books   E. Others (Please specify) _____
5. If in community schools, how often did you meet?
   _____ hours per week or _____ days per month
6. What did you usually learn about the heritage language in community schools?   (Please circle all the numbers that can apply)

A. Culture   B. Basic Conversation Skills   C. Reading   D. Writing
7.   In college, do you learn your heritage language?
     Yes _____   No_____
8.   If No to the above question, Please specify the reasons
     _____

III. Proficiency in Heritage Languages
1.   Can you understand your heritage language?
     Yes _____   No_____
2.   Can you speak in the heritage language?
     Yes_____   No_____
3.   How often do you speak your heritage language? _____
     5= Always, 4= Often, 3= Sometimes, 2= Seldom, 1= Never
4.   Can you read in your heritage language?
     Yes_____   No_____
5.   How often do you read in your heritage language? _____
     5= Always, 4= Often, 3= Sometimes, 2= Seldom, 1= Never
6.   Can you write in your heritage language?
     Yes _____   No _____
7.   How   often   do   you   write   in   your   heritage   language?
     _____
      5= Always, 4= Often, 3= Sometimes, 2= Seldom, 1= Never
8.   What's the overall proficiency of your heritage language?
     _____
     5= Excellent, 4= Very good, 3= Good, 2= Fair, 1= Poor

IV. Feelings about Heritage Language
1.   How   important   is   maintaining   your   heritage   languages?
     _____
     5= Very Important 4= Important 3= Fairly Important
     2= Just so so 1=Unimportant
2. What do you think of the importance of passing your heritage
    language to the next generation? _____
    5= Very Important 4= Important 3= Fairly Important
    2= Just so so 1=Unimportant
3.   To what extent has each of the following reasons been important
     in maintaining your heritage language?
     5= Very Important 4= Important 3= Fairly Important

2= Just so so 1=Unimportant

a. Because I am able to talk with the grandparents and relatives
_____

b. Because bilingual skill will increase my chance for getting a better career _____

c. Because I want to know more about my ethnic heritage culture
_____

d. Because I can watch TV or Movie in my heritage language
_____

e. Because I want to travel to my heritage culture _____

f. Because I want to have an important position in my ethnic community in the future _____

g. Other reasons, please specify_____

4. What language do you feel comfortable speaking? _____
   A. Heritage Language   B. English   C. Neither   D. Both
5. Which language do you feel identified with? _____
   A. Heritage Language   B. English   C. Neither   D. Both
6. As to the above question, please specify the reason _____

V. Perceived Parental Attitudes toward Maintaining Heritage Language

1. How would you describe your parents' attitude toward maintaining your heritage language while you were growing up?
   _____
   5= Strongly supportive 4= Supportive 3= Sort of Supportive
   2= Don't Care 1= Opposing
2. How often do your parents speak your heritage language to you?
   5= Always, 4= Often, 3= Sometimes, 2= Seldom, 1= Never
3. Did your parents help you maintain your heritage languages in any time?   Yes _____   No_____
4. If yes, please circle all the following ways that can apply
   A. Sent you to heritage language schools
   B. Bought readers or videos in your heritage language
   C. Visited the home country (If yes, how often _____ times per year)
   D. Others, please specify _____

VI. Experiences in Learning English

1. When did you start to learn English?

    _____

    _____

2. Have you even been put into an ESL class?

    _____

    _____

3. When did you start to feel that English is part of yourself (If you ever have had this kind of feeling) or Never?

    _____

    _____

4. Have you ever had an experience of being ridiculed or punished for speaking your heritage language?

    _____

    _____