

Heritage Learners versus Non-heritage Learners in Five Less Commonly Taught Languages: Conditions, Practices, and Challenges

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Abstract

In the context of five less commonly taught languages (LCTLs), this article investigates learners' perceptions of the difficulty level of the language of study, their insights on their learning experience and their classrooms' conditions and practices, and most importantly their views on having both heritage and non-heritage learners in the same classroom. 124 university students enrolled in Arabic, Chinese, Hebrew, Japanese, and Russian completed a questionnaire survey. The findings reveal that non-heritage learner of the five LCTLs view the LCTL of study as difficult because of the writing system; heritage learners, however, perceive it as neither easy nor difficult. In addition, among all learners, Arabic heritage learners are the only ones who recognize that the learning challenges are the various levels of proficiency in the same classroom, and the dissimilarity between the standard variety and the dialect are. Results also show that both heritage and non-heritage learners disapprove of the learning conditions and practices of the classrooms. Surprisingly, nearly all learners from the two groups are in favor of having both groups in the same classroom. Based on the findings, the researcher suggests some pedagogical implications and recommendations to accommodate needs of both heritage and non-heritage learners and enhance teaching such combined classes of LCTLs.

Keywords: Less Commonly Taught Languages--Learners' perceptions-- presence of both heritage and non-heritage learners.

Introduction

A significant portion of the United States' diverse population is composed of foreign-born immigrants who came from various countries and speak different languages such as French, Spanish, German, Italian, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Arabic, Persian, Swahili, etc. These foreign immigrants "have brought to the collective conscious the recognition that the United States' citizenry is woefully 'unprepared' with respect to functional foreign language proficiency, especially in certain languages" (Brown, 2009, p.406). Amongst these foreign languages are the less commonly taught languages (LCTLs), a designation emerging from the U.S. government's educational policy and linguistic needs (Gor & Vatz, 2009) that includes "all languages other than English and the commonly taught European languages of German, French and Spanish" (The National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages, 2007). Other terms used to define LCTLs "range from crucial, critical, strategic, neglected, rare, [and] uncommon ... to non-cognate, exceptional, and even exotic" (Sanatullova-Allison, 2008, p.82-83).

As the world becomes more globalized, there is a great need for highly proficient Americans in LCTLs who most probably will be working closely with people who do not speak English in the national job arena and or in the sectors of international and foreign affairs (Brecht & Rivers, 2000). Also, since direct contact with culturally and linguistically diverse communities in small and rural areas is increasing due to humanitarian aid and ecological fortification, knowing the languages of these communities is necessary for communicative purposes. On the other hand, for the young generation of immigrants, becoming proficient in their heritage languages will enable them not only to explore their roots and associate more closely with their own communities, but also to overcome feelings of isolation and alienation (Tse, 2002). This is particularly true for those who express negative attitudes towards their own culture. For other young immigrants, learning their heritage language will be the medium of communication between their parents and grandparents, if these latter do not speak English.

Interest in learning LCTLs has seen a big increase during the last decade. The enrollment figures from 2013 provided by the Modern Language Association (MLA) show that general enrollment in languages other than English increased to 1,682,627 in 2009 from 1,577, 810 in 2006. Among all the foreign languages, the LCTLs that make up the topic of this study also displayed a gain from previous years: Arabic a growth of 46%, Japanese 10.3%, Chinese 18.2%, and Russian 8.2% (Furman, Goldberg, & Lustin, 2009, p.2). Each of these languages presents compound challenges for American learners that are inherent in acquiring even the basics of orthography and grammar – ones distinct, for instance, from the Germanic or Romance languages. According to Liskin-Gasparoo (1982), in normal settings it takes an American student 720 hours of instruction to attain level 3 oral skills in French or Spanish, whereas it takes the same student 2,400 to 2,760 hours to reach the same level, for instance, in Japanese or Chinese. (Oral Proficiency Testing Manual). The Foreign Service Institute (FSI) and the Defence Language Institute (DLI) have classified various LCTLs they teach into four categories based on the levels of difficulty presented to native speakers of English and on the number of hours of study needed to attain Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) level 3 proficiency which corresponds to Superior on the ACTFL scale. The languages in category III, such as Russian, and those in category IV, such as Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese are, according to Gor & Vatz (2009) “typically somewhat more difficult to learn than other languages in the same category” (p.236). These researchers associate this difficulty with the fact that LCTLs are non-cognate languages, not naturally connected and typologically distant with regard to structures, lexicon, writing system, and cultural distance (p.236-237) while Walton (1992) relates it to differences in the linguistic code, such as phonology, morphology, grammar, lexicon, and orthography. Walker and McGinnis (1995), however, associate this difficulty with the writing systems that “differ from the alphabetic principle of the learners’ base language and from cultures that are not cognate with the Western tradition” (p.5).

Besides these LCTLs’ linguistic difficulty, the diverse and heterogeneous composition of classrooms can make the learning a

daunting task, not only for learners, but also for teachers. The question of whether the presence of heritage learners alongside non-heritage learners in the same classroom is beneficial or detrimental to both groups has been the topic of a much-debated discussion. On one side of the debate, it is argued that having heritage learners in a traditional classroom may be problematic, and can encumber non-heritage learners' learning experience and progress by intimidating them (Kagan & Dillon, 2001). In addition, non-heritage learners may express resentment towards heritage learners' native-like familiarity with oral language and their studying "a language they already know" (Peyton, Lewelling, & Winke, 2001, p. 1). On the other side of the debate, it is claimed that the presence of heritage learners in the same classroom can offer insights into the target culture that are extremely valuable, and their descriptions of firsthand experiences often leave lasting impressions on their classmates.

1. Literature Review

Recently, the field of LCTLs has drawn the attention of many researchers, such as Stansfield & Harman, 1987; Marshall, 1987; Walker, 1991; Schrier, 1994; Walker & et al., 1995; Stenson, Janus & Mulkern, 1998; Moshi, 1999; Janus, 2000; Ryding, 2001; Sanatullova-Allison, 2008; Gor et al., 2009, and Mona, 2012. These researchers have dealt mainly in their reports and observations with LCTLs education and its current state, including enrollments, trends, goals, and the needs for LCTL study; the role of the National Security Language Initiative and National Language Centers and Resources in funding a variety of LCTLs; instructors' professional training; development of teaching materials, and creation of appropriate instructional models. Also empirical studies that explore issues related to learners of LCTLs such as motives and reasons for learning these languages, relationship between motivation and attitudinal variables and learners' linguistic performance have grown dramatically. Among these studies are Walker, 1991; Samimy & Tabuse, 1992; Saito & Samimy, 1996; Romanov, 2000; Kagan & Dillon, 2001; Seymour-Jorn, 2004; Geisherik, 2004; Lee, 2005; Husseinali, 2006; and Brown, 2009. To date, there are not many studies, of which we are aware that investigate heritage and non-heritage learners' perceptions of the

LCTL of study, their attitudes towards their presence in the same classroom, and how combined learning experiences influence both groups. The only readily available studies that have dealt mainly with heritage and non-heritage learners of some of the LCTLs and that are relevant to this study are those of Abuhakema, 2012; Xiao, 2006; and Lee, 2005. For example, Lee (2005) in his study that examined how 530 college students of eleven LCTLs (Arabic, Chinese, Hebrew, Hindi, Hungarian, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Russian, Swahili, and Yoruba) perceive their identities as heritage or non-heritage language learners found that these students' self-identity as heritage and non-heritage learners is not static as previously observed but as manifold and variable. They also show that "the complexity of learners' characteristics involved in the identification process of heritage and non-heritage learners suggest that these two categories may not be mutually exclusive" (p.554). In another study, Abuhakema (2012) surveyed 57 heritage and non-heritage students in five Arabic courses of different levels of proficiency, and examined their perceptions of each other, and of the dynamics of the mixed classroom setting. The findings show that even though both groups of learners do not feel strongly about combining them in one classroom or separating them, they recognize that as they are hindrances to mixing them, they are also benefits. Moreover, when comparing the language development of heritage learners who had some background knowledge in Chinese language and culture with their non-heritage counterparts in various skills, Xiao (2006) found statistically significant differences between the two groups only in speaking, listening and grammar. This finding implies that "heritage learners' oral exposure to their home language does not necessarily lead them to acquire reading and writing skills more quickly than non-heritage learners" (p.47).

The above examination of these four studies provides little evidence of heritage and non-heritage learners' characteristics. However a gap exists in the research on both groups' perceptions of the difficulty of LCTLs, their views on learning experiences in mixed classroom settings, and their attitudes towards each other.

2. The Study

This study and the data presented here are part of a large research project that aims at comparing the demographic makeup and linguistic background of students enrolling in five LCTLs (Arabic, Chinese, Hebrew, Japanese, and Russian), their knowledge of other languages, their use and their proficiency in these languages, and their reason and motivational orientations for learning these LCTLs. The substantial study also intends to examine these learners' perceptions of the difficulty level of the LCTL of study, their self-assessment of the four skills in the LCTL, their insights on their learning experience and classrooms' pedagogical conditions and practices, and their opinions on having both heritage and non-heritage learners in the same classroom. In this particular study, we will only tackle these four research questions:

- 1) Are learners of the five LCTLs (Arabic, Chinese, Hebrew, Japanese, and Russian) similar or different demographically?
- 2) Do learners' perceptions and attitudes towards the difficulty of LCTL differ depending on the language type?
- 3) What are the learners' insights on learning challenges and on pedagogical conditions and practices of these LCTLs' classes?
- 4) Do heritage and non-heritage learners of these LCTLs in the same classroom portray favorable or negative attitudes towards each other?

2.1 Participants

One hundred twenty four university students enrolled in five LCTLs' courses (44 Arabic, 16 Chinese, 11 Hebrew, 26 Japanese, and 27 Russian) took part in this study. For each language, there were two classes of Beginning I & II. Only for Arabic were there four classes, two of each level, because among these five LCTLs, Arabic is the only language that is largely offered in this institution and has been growing remarkably. For all of these LCTLs, beginning-level classes met twice a week for 1 hour and 15 minutes each period, and a

selected textbook by the instructor was used with an online component.

2.2 Data Collection

A five-section survey questionnaire of 40 questions was used as an instrument to collect the data for the larger research study. The same questionnaire was given to all learners of each LCTL, with one modification which entails replacing the target LCTL in questions under section III for each language group (see Appendix A). To address the first research question about demographic background, questions 1 to 4, and question 8 were analyzed. To compare learners' perceptions towards level of difficulty of the LCTL of study and their learning challenges, only questions 6 to 7 under section III were dealt with. Learners' attitudes towards teaching conditions and practices, and towards a mixed classroom of both heritage and non-heritage learners, all questions under section IV and V were analyzed. Two analyses were conducted: A quantitative analysis to calculate the percentage of all learners of the five LCTLs' responses, and a qualitative analysis for open-ended questions in section V that ask both heritage and non-heritage learners to give their stance of being in the same class, comment on their experience, and convey their opinions on any negative aspects of studying in a mixed class.

3. Results

As seen in table 1, most learners of Arabic, Hebrew, and Japanese are female. For Russian, however, male learners constitute twice the number of female learners, and for Chinese there is an equal number of male and female learners. Also, most learners of the five LCTLs are between 18 and 20 years of age, and in their first year of study. Since each of these LCTLs satisfies world language requirement for each discipline at the institution, most students usually take any language of their choice during the freshmen year.

Table 1: Distribution of the Five LCTLs Learners by Gender, Age, Ethnic Origin, L1, and Education

Learners of LCTLs	Arabic Learners N=44	Chinese Learners N=16	Hebrew Learners N=11	Japanese Learners N=26	Russian Learners N=27
Gender					
Male	30	8	1	10	18
Female	14	8	10	16	9
Age					
18-20	34	14	8	18	15
21-24	10	2	3	8	12
25-30	0	0	0	0	0
Ethnic Group					
Asian (East/West, North and South)	10	12	0	23	3
White/Non- Hispanic (from America Eastern & Western Europe)	14	4	10	3	24
(from the Middle East, North Africa)	20	0	1	0	0
First language (L1)	Arabic: 18 English: 13 Hindu, Urdu: 8 Spanish: 3 Turkish: 2	Chinese: 10 English: 6	Hebrew: 9 English: 2	Japanese: 14 English: 10 Korean: 2	Russian: 15 English: 10 Ukrainian: 2

Education					
1st year					
2 nd and up	38	11	6	20	19
	6	5	5	6	8

Based on the ethnic origin and the first language (L1), out of the 124 participants, 66 are considered heritage speakers and 58 non-heritage speakers. Most learners of Chinese, Hebrew, Japanese and Russian came from two major ethnic groups and their L1 is either English or the LCTL of study. Only for Arabic were there more non-heritage learners than heritage learners (26 and 18 respectively) whose L1 is not only Arabic but other languages.

In question # 6 section III, when learners were asked for their opinions about the language of study compared to other languages they had learned, almost all non-heritage learners of the five LCTLs considered the language of study “very difficult” or “difficult,” and the “very difficult” option got the maximum percentage for all of the languages (77% for Arabic, 83% for Chinese, 75% for Japanese, and 58% for Russian) – except for Hebrew learners, all of whom viewed the language as “very difficult” as revealed in table 2.

Table 2: Level of Difficulty of the LCTL of Study

Learners of LCTLs	Very difficult	Difficult	Neither difficult nor easy	Easy
Arabic N=44				
Heritage N= 18	(11%)	(17%)	(50%)	(22%)
Non-heritage N= 26	(77%)	(20%)	(0%)	(0%)
Chinese N= 16				
Heritage N= 10	(0%)	(0%)	(80%)	(20%)
Non-heritage N= 6	(83%)	(17%)	(0%)	(0%)

Hebrew N= 11				
Heritage N= 9	(0%)	(0%)	(78%)	(22%)
Non-heritage N= 2	(100%)	(0%)	(0%)	(0%)
Japanese N= 26				
Heritage N= 14	(14%)	(14%)	(57%)	(14%)
Non-heritage N= 12	(75%)	(25%)	(0%)	(0%)
Russian N=27				
Heritage N= 15	(0%)	(47%)	(13%)	(40%)
Non-heritage N= 12	(58%)	(41%)	(0%)	(0%)

The majority of heritage speakers considered the LCTL as “neither difficult nor easy” or “easy,” with the former achieving the highest percentage; for example, for Chinese (80% and 20% respectively), and for Hebrew (78% and 22%). However, for Russian 47% chose “difficult,” 40% “easy,” and the rest “neither difficult nor easy.” Only for Arabic, 17% chose “difficult” and 11% selected “very difficult.”

In question # 7 when learners were asked to identify which linguistic aspect makes the LCTL a difficult one to learn, the “writing system” of the LCTL received the highest percentage by all non-heritage learners of the four LCTLs (Arabic 62%, Chinese 67%, Japanese 83%, and Russian 50%) followed by “pronunciation.” Except for Hebrew, both “writing system” and “pronunciation” got equal number (50%) as shown in table 3. However, for heritage learners of Arabic, Hebrew, and Russian “grammar” was chosen the first linguistic aspect that makes these languages difficult to learn (33%, 56%, and 60% respectively) followed by “vocabulary” (28% for Arabic, 44% for Hebrew, and 33% for Russian). For both Chinese and Japanese learners, “pronunciation” was selected first with 40% for Chinese, and 43% for Japanese followed by “writing system” for Japanese with (36%), and for Chinese the three linguistic aspects (“vocabulary”, “grammar”, and “writing system” received equal percentage (20%).

Table 3: LCTL Difficult Linguistic Aspect

Learners	Grammar	Vocabulary	Pronunciation	Writing System
Arabic N=44 Heritage N= 18 Non-heritage N=26	(33%) (12%)	(28%) (8%)	(17 %) (19%)	(22%) (62%)
Chinese N=16 Heritage N= 10 Non-heritage N= 6	(20%) (0%)	(20%) (0%)	(40%) (33%)	(20%) (67%)
Hebrew N=11 Heritage N= 9 Non-heritage N= 2	(56%) (0 %)	(44%) (0%)	(0%) (50 %)	(0%) (50%)
Japanese N=26 Heritage N= 14 Non-heritage N=12	(21%) (8%)	(0%) (0%)	(43%) (8%)	(36%) (83%)
Russian N=27 Heritage N=15 Non-heritage N=12	(60%) (17 %)	(33%) (17 %)	(17%) (17%)	(0%) (50%)

As shown in table 4 when learners (heritage and non-heritage) were asked to agree or not as to whether there are challenges in learning the LCT, nearly all heritage and non-heritage of the five LCTLs answered “Yes” (for Arabic 85% non-heritage and 67% heritage; for Chinese 100% non-heritage and 80% heritage; for Japanese 60% for heritage and 92% for non-heritage, and for Russian 85 % non-heritage and 70 % heritage). Only with Hebrew were the answers of both groups divergent. 100% of non-heritage answered “Yes,” while 89% of heritage learners answered “No”.

Table 4: Learners' responses on learning challenges

LCTLs Learners	Yes	No
Arabic: N=44		
Heritage: N=18	(67%)	(33%)
Non-heritage: N=26	(85%)	(15%)
Chinese: N=16		
Heritage: N=10	(80%)	(20%)
Non-heritage: N=6	(100%)	(0%)
Hebrew: N=11		
Heritage: N=9	(11%)	(89%)
Non-heritage: N=2	(100%)	(0%)
Japanese: N= 26		
Heritage N = 15	(60%)	(40%)
Non-heritage N= 12	(92%)	(8%)

Section IV about pedagogical conditions and practices comprises eight questions, three of which consist of multiple choice answers, two entail “Yes” or “No” answers, and three open-ended answers. Table 5 displays responses of both heritage and non-heritage learners of the five LCTLs for question #1 about the skills emphasized in the class. Data revealed that the majority of Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian heritage learners selected “writing” the skill mostly stressed in the class (Arabic 44%, Chinese 60%, Japanese 56%, and Russian 47%) and almost equally selected “reading” as the second skill (Arabic 39%, Chinese 30%, Japanese 29%, and Russian 33%). Only for Hebrew, the majority of heritage learners (56%) chose first “reading” followed by “writing” with (33%). In the same way, the most frequent response by non-heritage learners of the four languages was “writing skill” (Arabic 58%, Chinese 60%, Japanese 43%, and Russian 67%); second came “reading skill” (Arabic 42%, Chinese 30%, Japanese 36%, and Russian 33%). However, all Hebrew heritage learners only chose “writing” skill.

Table 5: Question # 1 “Which of these skills are stressed in the class?”

	Speaking	Writing	Reading
Arabic N=44			
Heritage N=18	17%	44%	39%
Non-heritage N=26	0%	58%	42%
Chinese N=16			
Heritage N=10	10%	60%	30%
Non-heritage N=6	0%	67%	33%
Hebrew N=11			
Heritage N=9	11%	33%	56%
Non-heritage N=2	0%	100%	0%
Japanese N=26			
Heritage N=14	21%	50%	29%
Non-heritage N=12	8%	43%	36%
Russian N= 27			
Heritage N=15	20%	47%	33%
Non-heritage N=12	0%	67%	33%

As for grammar teaching, the responses (table 6) indicate that both heritage and non-heritage learners of the five languages agree that it is a major subject of teaching with a high percentage of the non-heritage learners for all the five languages (Arabic 92% vs. 67%, Chinese 83% vs. 60%, Hebrew 100% vs.78%, Japanese 100% vs. 80%, and Russian 100% vs. 94%).

Table 6: Question # 2 “Is grammar a major subject of teaching?”

LCTLs Learners	Yes	No
Arabic N=44		
Heritage N=18	67%	33%
Non-heritage N=26	92%	8%

Chinese N=16 Heritage N=10 Non-heritage N= 6	60% 83%	40% 7%
Hebrew N=11 Heritage N=9 Non-heritage N=2	78% 100%	22% 0%
Japanese N=26 Heritage N=15 Non-heritage N=12	80% 100%	20% 0%
Russian N=27 Heritage N=15 Non-heritage N=12	94% 100%	7% 0%

In terms of culture inclusion in the class, a majority of heritage and non-heritage learners of Arabic, Chinese, Hebrew, and Japanese answered “No” to the question “Is culture included in the class?”, but non-heritage percentage responses are higher than those of heritage learners as seen in table 7. Only for Russian 80% of heritage learners said that culture is incorporated in the class while 67% non-heritage learners join most learners of other LCTLs in negating this question.

Table 7: Question # 3 “Is culture included in the class?”

LCTLs Learners	Yes	No
Arabic N=44 Heritage N=18 Non-heritage N=26	44% 8%	56% 92%
Chinese N=16 Heritage N=10 Non-heritage N= 6	40% 0%	60% 100%
Hebrew N=11 Heritage N=9 Non-heritage N=2	22% 0%	78% 100%

Japanese N=26		
Heritage N=15	47%	53%
Non-heritage N=12	17%	83%
Russian N=27		
Heritage N=15	80%	20%
Non-heritage N=12	33%	67%

With respect to the teaching materials and tools used in the class to enhance learning, a good number of heritage learners of the five LCTLs (Arabic 56%, Chinese 60%, Hebrew 78%, Japanese 64%, and Russian 67) and of non-heritage learners (Arabic 73%, Chinese 67%, Hebrew 100%, Japanese 68%, and Russian 58%) selected written exercises and drills materials as the first choice followed by proficiency-oriented materials.

Table 8: Question # 6 “What are the teaching materials and tools used in the class to enhance learning?”

	Proficiency - oriented materials	Group Activities	Authentic materials	Written exercises and drills
Arabic N=44				
Heritage N=18	22%	17%	6%	56%
Non-heritage =26	19%	8%	0%	73%
Chinese N=16				
Heritage N=10	20%	10%	10%	60%
Non Heritage N=6	33%	0%	0%	67%
Hebrew N=11				
Heritage N=9	22%	0%	0%	78%
Non-heritage N=2	0%	0%	0%	100%
Japanese N=26				
Heritage N=14	29%	7%	0%	64%
Non-heritage N=12	17%	17%	0%	68%

Russian N=27				
Heritage N=15	27%	7%	0%	67%
Non heritage N=12	25%	8%	8%	58%

Also, when learners were asked to choose among four pedagogical approaches used by the instructor to teach the LCTL, both heritage and non-heritage learners of the five languages agreed that the traditional grammar translation is the teaching approach used mostly by the instructor followed by audio-lingual approach. For heritage learners, the percentages are (Arabic 58%, Chinese 60%, Hebrew 89%, Japanese 71%, and Russian 53%) compared to those of non-heritage learners (Arabic 69%, Chinese 83%, Japanese 71%, and Russian 53%). For Hebrew, all non-heritage learners only chose traditional grammar translation.

Table 9: Question # 7 “What is the teaching approach used by your instructor to teach the LCTL?”

	Tradit- ional Grammar Trans- lation approach	Audio- lingual approa ch	Communica- tive Approach	More than one approach
Arabic N=44				
Heritage N=18	56%	33%	0%	11%
Non-heritage N=26	69%	19%	0%	12%
Chinese N=16				
Heritage N=10	60%	40%	0%	0%
Non Heritage N=6	83%	17%	0%	0%
Hebrew N=11				
Heritage N=9	89%	11%	0%	0%
Non-heritage N=2	100%	0%	0%	0%

Japanese N=26				
Heritage N=14	71%	29%	0%	0%
Non-heritage N=12	92%	8%	0%	0%
Russian N=27				
Heritage N=15	53%	34%	0%	13%
Non heritage N=12	83%	17%	0%	0%

For the last section V about presence of heritage and non-heritage classmates, there are seven questions, four of which entail “Yes” or “No” answers, and three of which involve open-ended answers. Tables 10 and 11 display learners’ responses for questions 1 and 2. Data show that for question # 1 nearly everyone of each language group asserts that they mostly know who are the heritage and the non-heritage students. The percentages for both groups of all five languages are almost equal (Arabic 89% heritage and 85% non-heritage; for Chinese 100% heritage and 83% non-heritage; for Hebrew 78% heritage and 100% non-heritage; for Japanese 80% heritage and 100% non-heritage; and for Russian 87% heritage and 83% non-heritage). In a similar vein, for question # 2 a high percentage of heritage learners of each language (Arabic 78%, Chinese 90%, Hebrew 78%, Japanese 87%, and Russian 73%), and all non-heritage learners in each group affirm that they have hard time understanding the non-heritage learners.

Table 10: Question # 1 “Do you usually know who the heritage or non-heritage students are?”

LCTLs Learners	Yes	No
Arabic N=44		
Heritage N=18	89%	11%
Non-heritage N=26	85%	15%
Chinese N=16		
Heritage N=10	100%	0%
Non-heritage N= 6	83%	17%

Hebrew N=11		
Heritage N=9	78%	22%
Non-heritage N=2	100%	0%
Japanese N=26		
Heritage N=15	80%	20%
Non-heritage N=12	100%	0%
Russian N=27		
Heritage N=15	87%	13%
Non-heritage N=12	83%	17%

Table 11: Question # 2: Do you have a hard time understanding the heritage or non-heritage speaker when they speak?

LCTLs Learners	Yes	No
Arabic N=44		
Heritage N=18	78%	22%
Non-heritage N=26	100%	0%
Chinese N=16		
Heritage N=10	90%	10%
Non-heritage N= 6	100%	0%
Hebrew N=11		
Heritage N=9	78%	22%
Non-heritage N=2	100%	0%
Japanese N=26		
Heritage N=15	87%	13%
Non-heritage N=12	100%	0%
Russian N=27		
Heritage N=15	73%	27%
Non-heritage N=12	100%	0%

In question 3, when learners were given a choice of a heritage or non-heritage student as a partner for a group activity, almost an equal number of non-heritage learners and heritage learners chose to work with each other (69% of non-heritage learners preferred to partner for group activities with heritage learners, and 67% of heritage learners favored non-heritage learners as partners for group activities). Table 12 displays responses of both heritage and non-

heritage learners of the five LCTLs about their choice of partner for group or pair activity.

Table 12: Heritage and Non-heritage learners' responses on a partner choice for pair/group activities

	Types of Partners	Heritage learners of five LCTLs N=64	Non-heritage of five LCTLs N=58
3. Will you choose a _____ or _____ as your partner for a group activity?	heritage student	(43%)	(69%)
	non-heritage student	(67%)	(31%)
4. Do you like to do pair work with a _____ or _____ ?	Heritage student	(28%)	(52%)
	non-heritage student	(72%)	(48%)

Some of the explanations and justifications given by non-heritage learners about choosing heritage learners as partners in pair and group activities are:

"I get to learn and interact with them in a new perspective." (Chinese non-heritage learner)

"There may be things that the heritage students may know more than me." (Russian non-heritage learner)

"I wouldn't mind if a heritage student corrects me when I make a mistake. I will actually be happy that he/she is willing to help me." (Arabic non-heritage learner)

A few of the non-heritage learners expressed a negative reaction. One remarked that the heritage students tended to “clump together in class,” and that it was difficult to approach them. Another comment was: “I will learn and understand the work better instead of having the heritage student complete the work for me.”

For question 4 about pair work, 72% of heritage learners of the five languages preferred mostly to work in pairs with non-heritage learners, and only 28% preferred to work with the same group. For all non-heritage learners, results show an almost equal percentage (52% favored heritage learners and 48% non-heritage). Generally, for both questions, each group preferred to work with the opposite group.

For question 5, when heritage and non-heritage learners were asked to comment on their experience of having either group as a classmate, not all learners answered this question or gave their opinions explicitly. Most learners of the five LCTLs were reluctant and left this question blank. Those heritage and non-heritage learners who responded provided positive comments in most cases. Examples include the following:

“Interesting. I liked having non-heritage speakers, they are funny and enjoyable and ask good questions.” (Hebrew heritage learner)

“It makes me feel good that other people want to learn my native language.” (Arabic heritage learner)

“It’s nice to see non-heritage having an interest learning a language that used to not be so popular or desirable.” (Arabic heritage learner)

“It’s good for non-native students because heritage students in the class can help non-heritage students with things they don’t know how to do. If they were isolated they would have more concentration planned onto them by the teacher.” (Russian heritage learner)

“I enjoy seeing non-heritage students learning the language and culture”; “I love working with them. I feel like I can tell them about my culture and language. Although it takes me a lot of patience”. (Chinese heritage learner)

The non-heritage learners’ experiences of having heritage speakers also seem positive and, again, not all non-heritage learners gave their opinions. Examples of positive comments of four non-heritage learners of Arabic and Chinese are:

“I got a chance to know a lot of things that the teachers fail to deliver. Also I learn a lot of cultural details and expressions that I will never learn in class.” (Non-heritage Arabic learner)

“I appreciate having native speakers in the class because they correct my mistakes.” (Non-heritage Arabic learner)

“I always turn to my heritage learner’s classmates for more explanation.” (Chinese learner)

“Sometimes the teacher goes fast or fails to explain well the grammar point, so the heritage learners are there to help.” (Chinese non-heritage learner)

4. Discussion

This study shows that for most cases Chinese, Hebrew, Japanese, and Russian learners come from two linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, English speakers who represent the non-heritage learners, and the LCTL heritage learners. For Arabic, on the other hand, learners come from varied ethnic backgrounds, including American, Pakistani, Indian, Bangladesh, Turkish and Spanish, whose L1 is either English, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Turkish, or Spanish, making more non-heritage learners than heritage learners. Based on personal observation of these LCTLs in our institution, we presumed that the number of heritage learners for all the five languages would constitute more than half of the composition of the class. Our assumption was largely confirmed, except for Arabic, which was a surprise because there are a lot of Arabic-speaking students at the

institution because Arabs constitute one of the largest communities in the area.

Selecting the “writing system” and “pronunciation” as the most difficult linguistic aspects for these non-heritage learners is evident. For learners whose native language is English, learning a LCTL can be very laborious and overwhelming because they find themselves faced with a new language with different phonetic sounds, alphabets and characters. Such is the case for this study where the five LCTLs are typologically distant languages from English language and Indo-European languages with their own phonetic, phonological, and writing systems. This finding is consistent with other studies. For example, Samimy et al.’s study (1992) that reveals the “unfamiliarity with the orthographic systems in Japanese and/or Chinese often appears to create ... cognitive barriers for the learners to overcome”, (p.384). The difficulty of these languages can generate negative affective reactions from students and hamper their learning interest.

When learners were asked to identify and explain the things that present learning challenges they face, not all learners were explicit and justified their answers. Only a few Arabic and Chinese non-heritage learners recognized that different levels of proficiency in one class present unique learning challenges. This is true for these kinds of classrooms which comprise heterogeneous students with varied levels of proficiency. Such heterogeneity includes non-heritage speakers who have no knowledge of the language or possess a minimum knowledge as well as heritage speakers who possess a command of the basic grammatical and syntactical structures, vocabulary, and writing system. In the case of the heritage speakers, they were either introduced to the language in their native countries (between 5 to 7 years) before coming to the U.S. or possess some knowledge of sounds and pronunciation, and dialectal speaking skills, but who lack skills in writing, reading, and knowledge of grammar because they were introduced to the spoken (dialectal) variety at home since birth and not to the standard variety.

Another learning challenge noted only by a few non-heritage and heritage Arabic learners is the dissimilarity between two varieties of one language. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), with its written form is the official language of all Arab countries, and is used in official functions and formal situations, and dialects of Arabic typical to each region. These are “the languages” of everyday conversation which are not standardized and possess no written form. Some of the Arabic learners mention that they were introduced to both MSA and Egyptian dialect because the textbook used in the class included this dialect. Others said that they were introduced to Palestinian or Syrian, depending on their instructor. This concern raises the question here: which Arabic should be taught? Both varieties of Arabic be taught - namely MSA to read, write, and speak formally as well as one of the many colloquial forms of the language for informal speaking situations? If so, then which dialect? In fact it was argued by the National Foreign Language Center that to be fully functional in Arabic language, students should learn the two types of Arabic.

With regard to pedagogical conditions and practices in the classroom, both heritage and non-heritage learners share similar views. They are not satisfied with the content of the courses which focus mainly on grammar and reading. The traditional approach-grammar translation - was selected by most learners (heritage and non-heritage) of the five LCTLs where grammar is the major subject of teaching, and writing and reading skills are more stressed in the classroom. For the teaching materials and tools used in the class to enhance learning, most learners preferred to have useful teaching activities and tools such as videos, audios, and flashcards to be incorporated to improve learning.

Surprisingly, both heritage and non-heritage learners' perceptions about each other were positive. In general, the impact of heritage students on their non-heritage classmates was described mainly as positive. The few non-heritage learners of Arabic and Chinese who elaborated and commented on their positive answers see the advantages of having heritage learners in the same classroom in helping them with their learning problems. More importantly, the non-heritage learners saw heritage learners as useful in providing

them with more explanation, clarification, and correction of grammatical mistakes when the instructor fails to do so or go fast over the grammar. Most importantly, non-heritage learners were delighted to learn details and expressions from them, especially in the context of group learning. Having heritage learners in the same classroom offers important insight into different cultural aspects and perspectives because they share with their classmates their own culture, customs, and traditions. This finding corroborates other studies, for example, Zabarrah's study (2015) which claims that heritage language learners "bring many degrees of linguistic and cultural background to the classroom" (p.95); and Mazzoco's study (1996) in which he argued that heritage learners come with a linguistic and cultural means and sources that should not be ignored. Scalera (2003) adds that:

Recognizing what students know, asking for their contributions and support, helps everyone.....[non-native] students will learn to have respect for an actual speaker of the language, and heritage speakers will feel recognized and supported for the cultural knowledge and linguistic skills they bring to the class (p.3)

Needless to say that the amiable personalities of the heritage speakers and their willingness to help their non-heritage classmates seem to be the reasons why the non-heritage learners did not feel intimidated when speaking in front of the native classmates and why they were in favor of having them in the classroom as learners. The heritage learners' sense of community makes the non-heritage learners comfortable and at ease in the class. One of the non-heritage learners' remarks was that even some heritage speakers in his class had similar problems, which made him feel more confident about his own language skills. Heritage learners' difficulties may arise either by their exposure to their native language – in a dialectal variety at early age at home through their parents which can interfere with their learning the standard variety. Only Arabic heritage learners in this study identified the divergence between the two varieties as a learning challenge. This should be investigated further for other LCTLs.

4.1 Pedagogical implications

Some pedagogical implications are made based on the findings of this study. When faced with classes with a majority of heritage learners whose level of proficiency may be higher than the non-heritage learners, teachers have a difficult pedagogical task. On the one hand, there are non-heritage learners who require more hours of instruction to develop the required level of proficiency; on the other hand, the heritage learners require specific language skills, the effective teaching of which demands both content and pedagogy different from those most helpful in addressing the needs of non-heritage learners. To successfully integrate non-heritage and heritage learners with varying levels of proficiency into the same classroom, instructors should understand the linguistic backgrounds of the students who make up their class.

Because most students come from the target language background, instructors should make an effort to find out which students have studied the target language in their native countries or in the U.S. and/or speak it at home, and which dialect they speak. This will help instructors to place students in the appropriate level. Those students who have strong speaking, writing, and reading skills because of their previous exposure to the target language in their native countries or through community programs in the U.S. should be put into upper level classes. Those who know and speak the dialect and have never studied the standard version are in a more complex situation. They may have a basic knowledge of sounds and an advantage in speaking and conversing in the spoken variety, but their proficiency in the standard variety is usually minimal. Having these types of students may be a problem for non-native speakers but being armed with greater language awareness, instructors can work with students to cultivate a supportive and dynamic learning environment for all. They have to take full advantage of the rich personal, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of the students to construct a context for creative and meaningful discourse (Bialystock & Hakuta, 1994), and must create a sense of belonging in the classroom despite these differences in the students' proficiency in the target language (Blyth (1995).

In addition, instructors should provide appropriate comprehensible input in the target language in the formal classroom to help heritage speakers maintain their language skills, and to provide input outside the classroom in the form of authentic texts, movies, songs, and short trips, etc. to explore cultural practices and to improve students' language proficiency.

Similarly, the pedagogical approaches and teaching materials used in these LCTLs classes are of great importance. Instructors should use effective pedagogical approaches and teaching materials that contribute to non-heritage learners' development of oral fluency and cultural awareness and also help heritage learners maintain and extend their proficiency in their native language. In addition to textbooks that focus on teaching grammar and vocabulary, instructors should use contextualized communicative activities that develop speaking and listening skills, and select authentic readings in the target language.

Moreover, teachers should help learners especially non-heritage learners develop interest and take pleasure in studying the LCTLs by introducing them to the target culture in the classroom through the use of TV commercials, scenes from a film, and magazines. Target culture could also be incorporated through extracurricular activities, such cooking and traditional craft workshop, or field trips to historical places and museums. These authentic materials present opportunities to promote student interests and help them appreciate the target culture. Teachers can also integrate real-life experiences into their class by inviting native-speakers to provide students with cultural aspects. It is argued that real-life experiences tend to have a vital effect on learners' perceptions of their communicative competence (Ushioda, 1996).

5.

Conclusion

Although the findings of this comparative study cannot be generalized, they succeed in addressing issues and concerns relevant to learning and teaching of LCTLs, and to the advantages of having both heritage and non-heritage learners in the same classroom. This

study makes a contribution to the field and serves as a model for other researchers who are interested in investigating other aspects of LCTL education. As the interest to learn LCTLs grows steadily, more research studies that look in-depth at each language individually and/or comparing two languages from the same family (e.g. Arabic vs. Hebrew, Chinese vs. Japanese) will prove insightful to LCTL instructors and curriculum designers in creating courses and programs that are effective and suitable to the needs of these student populations.

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Appendix A

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

I. Student Personal Information

1. Are you.....?
 Male or Female

2. What is your age group? *(Please check one)*
 - a. 18 – 20
 - b. 21 – 24
 - c. 25 – 30
 - d. 31 – 35

3. What ethnic group do you associate yourself with?
 - a. Hispanic
 - b. Asian
 - c. Black, Non-Hispanic
 - d. White, Non-Hispanic

4. What is your current educational status? *(Please check one)*
 - a. 1st year of undergraduate program
 - b. 2nd, 3rd, or 4th year of undergraduate program
 - c. Graduate student
 - d. Special student

5. Were you born in the United States?
 Yes No

If you answered **YES** please go to question 8

6. If the answer is NO, what is your country of birth?

7. How old were you when you came to the United States?

8. What is your first language (L1)?

II. Knowledge of Other Languages (Other than your L1 and LCTL of study)

1. Are there any languages you know other than your **FIRST** language?

Yes

No

If you answered **NO** please go to **SECTION III**

2. If the answer is **YES**, what is/are this/these other language(s)?

- a. _____
 b. _____
 c. _____
 d. _____

3. Where did you learn this/these language(s)? (*Please check one box for each language*)

environment	At home	At school	Other
language a	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
language b	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
language c	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
language d	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. Can you understand this/these language(s) when **WRITTEN** or **SPOKEN** or **BOTH**? (Please check one box for each language)

	Written	Spoken	No
language a	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
language b	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
language c	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
language d	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. How often do you use this/these language(s)? (Please check one box for each language)

	Very frequently	Frequently	Sometimes	Never
language a	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
language b	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
language c	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
language d	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Where do you use this/these language(s)?

	At home	At school	At work	On trip
language a	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
language b	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

language c	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
language d	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

III. The Target LCTL: Arabic

1. Have you learned Arabic before?

Yes

No

If YES, please specify where and for how long.

2. What is/are your motivation and reason for taking Arabic? (*Please check only one answer that applies to you*)
- Personal interest
 - Academic requirement
 - Heritage background
 - Learning about culture

3. What, in your opinion is/are the advantage(s) of learning Arabic?

4. What type of Arabic are you learning?

5. Is there any difference between the Arabic you are learning and the dialect variety that you speak or you know?

Yes

No

If you answer **YES**, please justify your response by listing the differences

6. How do you find learning Arabic compared to other languages you learnt and studied? *(Please check only one choice)*
- very difficult language
 - difficult language
 - neither easy nor difficult
 - easy language
7. According to you, what makes Arabic a difficult language to learn? *(Please check only one choice)*
- grammar
 - vocabulary
 - pronunciation
 - writing system
8. Are you facing any learning challenges in the classroom?
- Yes No
9. List most learning challenges you are facing? *(Be specific in your answer)*
-
-
10. Compared to other learners in your class, how well are you doing in learning Arabic?
- Above average Average Below average
-
11. Compared to other learners in your class, how would you rate your performance in the following areas?

	Better	Same	Worse	Can't say
Speaking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listening	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Writing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reading	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

IV. Teaching Conditions and Practices

1. Which of this/these skill(s) are stressed in the class?

- a. speaking
- b. writing
- c. reading
- d. listening

2. Is grammar a major subject of teaching?

Yes No

3. Is culture included in the class?

Yes No

If you answer **YES**, please answer question 4

If you answer **NO**, please go to question 5

4. What aspects of Arabic culture are included in your class?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

5. What types of culture would you like to be included in the course?

6. What are the teaching materials and tools used in the class to enhance learning?
 a. Proficiency-oriented materials
 b. Reading activities
 c. Authentic materials
 d. Grammar exercises and drills
7. What is the teaching approach used by your instructor to teach the LCTL?
 a. Traditional Grammar-Translation approach
 b. Audio-lingual approach
 c. Communicative approach
 d. More than one
8. What useful teaching activities and tools in your opinion should be used in the classroom to enhance learning?

V. Presence of Heritage / Non heritage classmates

1. Do you usually know who the heritage or non-heritage students are?
 YES NO
2. Do you have a hard time understanding the heritage or non-heritage speaker when they speak Arabic?
 YES NO
3. Will you choose a heritage or non-heritage student as your partner for a group activity?
 Heritage Non Heritage

Please explain your answer.

4. Do you like to do pair work with heritage or non-heritage student ?

Heritage

Non-heritage

Please explain your answer. _____

5. Comment on your experience of having heritage or non-heritage classmates in your Arabic class.

6. What do you consider to be the negative aspects of having heritage speakers in the class?

7. What do you consider to be the negative aspects of having non-heritage speakers in the class?
