

Understanding the inheritors: The perception of beginning-level students toward their Spanish as a Heritage Language program

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Received 15 May 2015; received in revised form 13 October 2015; accepted 20 November 2015

ABSTRACT

EN How do students perceive their Spanish as a Heritage Language (SHL) program at a large southwestern university? Student perceptions of their language classes may be linked to affective needs and motivation (Tse, 2000) and a resolution of the potential mismatch between the perceptions of educators and students can lead to greater engagement and student satisfaction (Beaudrie, 2015). This study reports on the perspective of beginning-level students in 35 interviews conducted by the authors in order to gain insight into how participants conceive of the SHL program. The findings show that the participants respond positively to and comprehend the value of a pedagogical approach that values students' home varieties. They also recognize both the social importance and pedagogical potential of exploring bilingual community practices, such as code-switching. The findings support an approach that fosters engagement with the participants' speech communities as a valuable source of linguistic and cultural input.

Key words: IDENTITY, HERITAGE LANGUAGE EDUCATION, LANGUAGE ATTITUDES, CURRICULUM DESIGN, COMMUNITY-BASED LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION.

ES ¿Cuál es la percepción del programa de español como lengua de herencia por parte de estudiantes de una universidad grande en el suroeste de Estados Unidos? La percepción de los estudiantes en cuanto a sus clases de lengua de herencia podría estar vinculada a la motivación y a las necesidades afectivas (Tse, 2000); asimismo, resolver la posible discordancia entre la percepción de los docentes y la de los estudiantes puede llevar a un mayor compromiso y satisfacción por parte de estos. (Beaudrie, 2015). Este estudio presenta la perspectiva de estudiantes de nivel inicial a través de 35 entrevistas llevadas a cabo por los autores con el fin de comprender cómo conciben los participantes el programa de español como lengua de herencia. Los resultados demuestran que los participantes cuentan con una actitud positiva y comprenden el valor de un enfoque pedagógico que valora las diversas variedades lingüísticas de los estudiantes. Reconocen, además, tanto la importancia social como el potencial pedagógico derivado de la exploración de las costumbres dentro de la comunidad bilingüe como, por ejemplo, el cambio de código. Los resultados apoyan un enfoque que cultiva el involucramiento de los participantes con sus comunidades de habla.

Palabras clave: IDENTIDAD, ENSEÑANZA DE LENGUAS DE HERENCIA, ACTITUDES LINGÜÍSTICAS, DISEÑO CURRICULAR, ENSEÑANZA DE LA LENGUA BASADA EN LA COMUNIDAD.

IT Come viene percepito il programma di Spagnolo come Lingua Ereditaria dagli studenti di una grande università nel sud-ovest degli Stati Uniti? La percezione degli studenti nei confronti dei corsi di lingua potrebbe essere legata ai loro bisogni affettivi e alla motivazione (Tse, 2000); inoltre, risolvere la potenziale discordanza tra la percezione degli insegnanti e quella degli studenti può portare non solo ad un maggiore coinvolgimento degli studenti, ma anche ad un senso di gratificazione degli stessi (Beaudrie, 2015). Questo studio presenta la prospettiva di studenti di livello elementare mediante 35 interviste condotte dagli autori con lo scopo di capire come i partecipanti concepiscono il Programma di Spagnolo come Lingua Ereditaria. I risultati dimostrano che i partecipanti hanno un'attitudine positiva e comprendono il valore di un approccio pedagogico che valorizza le diverse varietà linguistiche degli studenti. Riconoscono, inoltre, sia l'importanza sociale, sia il potenziale pedagogico derivanti dall'esplorazione delle consuetudini all'interno delle comunità bilingui, come ad esempio la pratica di *code switching*. I risultati supportano un approccio che favorisce il coinvolgimento delle comunità dei partecipanti come risorsa preziosa di input linguistico e culturale.

Parole chiave: IDENTITÀ, INSEGNAMENTO DELLA LINGUA EREDITARIA, ATTITUDINI LINGUISTICHE, PROGETTAZIONE DEL CURRICULUM, INSEGNAMENTO DELLA LINGUA BASATO SULLA COMUNITÀ.

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1. Introduction

In a recent examination of the state of the field of teaching Spanish as heritage language at the post-secondary level, Beaudrie (2012, p. 207) found that there has been an expansion of programs. She found that of 422 institutions surveyed, 169 (40%) offered at least one course for heritage learners of Spanish, representing a notable increase compared to findings from 2002 (Ingold, Rivers, Chavez Tesser, & Asby, 2002), which reported only 17.8% of institutions offered SHL courses. The presence of these programs has expanded well beyond the regions of the US with longstanding Spanish-speaking communities, such as the Southwestern US, Florida, New York, and Chicago with programs being found in 26 states by Beaudrie (2012). When examined overall, there is a positive correlation between the size of the Hispanic population in a given university and the availability of SHL course offerings (Beaudrie, 2012, p. 210). While she recognizes that this is a noteworthy success for advocates of SHL, and that this should be commended given the great effort to achieve this expansion, Beaudrie also acknowledges that with expansion, there must also be a concomitant research effort in order to insure high quality education and program implementation.

In this effort to insure quality education, Beaudrie emphasizes research on the student perspective because of its value in informing pedagogical practices and programmatic endeavors. Beaudrie (2012) highlights two themes that surface in research on student perceptions: the foreign-language learning environment is not adequate or appropriate for SHL learner needs, and discrepancies exist between the expectations of SHL students and programmatic offerings. Another salient factor that Beaudrie (2012) highlights is the dearth of scholarly work on SHL learner perspectives available for her to survey (e.g. Beaudrie, 2006, 2009; Beaudrie, Ducar & Relaño-Pastor, 2009; Ducar, 2008; Felix, 2004; Potowski, 2002; Schwarzer & Petrón, 2005). Beaudrie (2012) goes on to issue the following call to SHL practitioners: "Because what researchers and educators believe to be most important may not always coincide with what the students expect and need, *student voices must be incorporated into the design of SHL programs*" (p. 214) [emphasis ours]. The present investigation is an attempt to listen to these voices and the rest of this section highlights other attempts to do so.

A number of investigations in particular warrant further discussion here due to their similarity with the present research in terms of using qualitative data to put SHL student perspectives at the center of pedagogical considerations. One of the earliest attempts came from Krashen (1998): he interviewed three SHL learners (henceforth SHLLs). His data focused on problems that SHLLs faced when interacting in the heritage language within their speech communities and on problems faced in foreign language classes. In the community, his participants recounted admonishment, ridicule, and criticism for their perceived imperfections in the heritage language (henceforth HL). In the foreign language classroom, SHLL language insecurity may be exacerbated by a focus on explicit grammar, which privileges second language learners who have learned prescribed rules without acquiring substantial communicative competency. Krashen's participants reported that native speaker instructors frequently held higher expectations of students with a Latino background. In response to his findings, he proposed the implementation of SHL classes that provide rich comprehensible input not necessarily available in the community; to this end he suggested a focus on free voluntary reading (Krashen, 1998, p. 47).

Perhaps one of the studies that bears the most similarities to the present, although more limited in scope, came from Schwarzer and Petrón (2005) who conducted in-depth interviews with three SHLLs in order to explore their perspectives in both foreign and heritage language classes. Through semi-guided interviews, Schwarzer and Petrón's participants elaborated on core themes in a way that enabled the researchers to conduct an emergent thematic analysis of the students' voices. Participants expressed the importance of cultural ties and family as motivating factors in language development. In articulating the "Perfect Class" (Schwarzer & Petrón, 2005, p. 574), the participants emphasized the futility of explicit grammar instruction while highlighting the utility of developing vocabulary and oral proficiency through a focus on authentic materials and topics. Drawing from the students' perspectives, Schwarzer and Petrón proposed an eight-point set of theoretical principles aimed at informing the creation of effective heritage language curriculum in a way that reconciled student needs and educator goals. Through their eight principles, the authors highlighted the potential of both sociolinguistic approaches and critical pedagogy in promoting heritage language acquisition. Without researching the SHLL perspective, the authors warn, educators risk student disdain that will be expressed through their avoidance of following Spanish classes. However, Schwarzer and Petrón's article is limited in that the principles are theoretical and have not been investigated in classroom implementation.

A more recent qualitative study focusing on classroom discourse from a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective by Showstack (2012) analyzed the way heritage speakers constructed and represented linguistic and cultural identities. Her study found that students constructed linguistic identities by elevating hybrid cultural experiences, but at the same time they questioned the legitimacy of their own linguistic practices. Showstack suggested that HL educators need to raise awareness of hegemonic discourses in order to deconstruct them and to foster more empowering discourses among HL learning communities.

There have also been investigations into the SHLL perspective that draw on a combination of survey and interview data. Through questionnaire data and group interviews Potowski (2002) found that SHLLs were dissatisfied in foreign language classes because of an internalized feeling of inferiority they felt in the face of higher expectations from teachers and a curricular focus on explicit grammar. In conducting a series of interviews with SHLLs in order to complement quantitative findings on language use in a 5th grade dual immersion classroom, Potowski (2004) highlighted the notion of *investment* in the heritage language; if identity investments of SHLLs compete with investment in developing the heritage language, educators will miss opportunities to foster language growth. Beaudrie and Ducar (2005) combined interview and survey data in order to explore the needs of beginning-level SHLLs and found that, despite a lack of advanced oral skills, their participants had identity needs related to the HL, possessed cultural competence, and needed confidence building in a way that justified a beginning-level course in the SHL sequence.

In the first major study to compare SHL student and teacher perceptions of instructional effectiveness, Beaudrie (2015) once again highlights the importance of student perspectives. Beaudrie's primary data collection came from a 25-item survey delivered to 460 students and 9 instructors, which was bolstered by follow up interviews with 10 students and 2 teachers. While there was much agreement between SHLLs and instructors, there were divergent opinions in key areas. For example, students indicated that only Spanish should be used for instruction whereas instructors indicated that Spanglish should also be tolerated. Also, students indicated a preference for explicit grammar instruction whereas instructors preferred inductive grammar instruction. There was also divergence regarding error correction and instructor lectures. Beaudrie (2015), although recognizing that discrepancies may lead to disillusionment, states that:

I do not suggest that teachers should necessarily follow students' preferences solely for the purpose of increasing their level of satisfaction. Rather, I advocate that teachers engage in open dialogue with students on their perspectives on effective practices and address any discrepancies that may arise. (p. 289)

There is much more research on student perceptions in foreign language learner settings (see Beaudrie, 2015 and Brown, 2009 for a more thorough review) and two notable studies come to bear in their relevancy to the present project, Brown (2009) and Tse (2000). In a study similar to Beaudrie's (2015), Brown (2009) collected Likert-scale data by surveying 1,606 students and 49 instructors of nine different languages on the effectiveness of various practices. One of the main findings was that while teachers in the aggregate endorsed communicative language teaching, students were less convinced as to its utility and indicated a stronger preference for explicit grammar instruction. However, Brown does not advocate for using the information in his study to inform curricular modifications, as does Beaudrie (2015). Instead, Brown concludes by suggesting that educators survey students in order to assess their expectations while using the opportunity to explain the efficacy of the methods behind the course implementation to the students.

A qualitative investigation comes from Tse (2000) who examined autobiographical essays from fifty-one participants describing foreign language learning. Tse (2000) identified three prominently featured categories: "classroom interactions, perceived level of success, and attributions of success and failure" (p. 69). As with the present endeavor, Tse argues that the open, unrestricted format of qualitative data allows participants to express views in a richer fashion than in surveys. There were three overarching findings: students did not feel that classes devoted adequate time to oral communication, self-reports indicated that they gained only low levels of language proficiency, and they reported that their own lack of effort was a chief factor in low achievement. Tse found that many students expressed expectations that were more in line with traditional language teaching. She took this as evidence that traditional approaches were more common than thought given the growing popularity of communicative language teaching. Finally, as much of Tse's discussion revolved around the impact of affective factors, some participants reported that in Spanish classes the presence of native speakers or heritage learners caused discouragement.

Given the growth in research on heritage language education, it is surprising that there is not more research that examines the perspective of the heritage language learner. The present work seeks to fill an important gap that exists in the field of Spanish as a Heritage Language through examining the perceptions and beliefs held by beginning-level SHLLs toward the SHL program. We also report briefly on a larger-scale effort to collect qualitative data through semi-guided interviews conducted at the University of New Mexico, entitled *La perspectiva estudiantil* 'The Student Perspective' (henceforth LPE). The following section gives a background of the *Sabine Ulibarri Spanish as a Heritage Language* program and its environs. Section 3 provides an overview of the LPE project and summarizes the different research endeavors. Section 4 focuses on 'Understanding the Inheritors' through 35 interviews with beginning-level students conducted by the authors and describes overarching findings. Section 5 discusses implications and Section 6 provides concluding remarks.

2. Background

The interviews for the present project were conducted on students enrolled in Spanish classes at the University of New Mexico in the 2014-2015 school year by the LPE research team consisting of the faculty coordinator of the Spanish as a Heritage Language program and a group of eight graduate student researchers.

2.1 The state of New Mexico and the University of New Mexico

New Mexico is a somewhat anomalous state in terms of the maintenance of Spanish and demographic trends affecting the Hispanic population. On one hand, New Mexico was the first state in the US in which the proportion of the Hispanic population (46.3%) surpassed the White/Non-Hispanic population, as documented in the 2010 Census (U.S. Census, 2011). Because of the notable presence of Hispanics in the state, and due to its shared border with Mexico, it would appear that New Mexico is poised to be one of the states that most successfully maintains the Spanish language. However, this is not the case. Jenkins (2009) examined census data from 2000 in order to make comparisons to previous census data and found that New Mexico was the southwestern state with the lowest overall rate of both intergenerational transmission of Spanish and language loyalty (the percentage of Hispanics who maintain the heritage language). In his work on the 2010 census, on the other hand, Jenkins (2013) found indications that the sociolinguistic outlook for Spanish had improved for the southwest in terms of language maintenance, but he did not individually look at New Mexico. However, because he examined aggregated data, we can infer that the observed improvement in Jenkins (2013) applies to New Mexico as well. Therefore, we see a situation that will foster many receptive instead of productive bilinguals and that will instantiate the need for beginning-level SHL instruction.

The University of New Mexico main campus maintains a grand total student population of about 28,000 (UNM Registrar, 2015) that is reflective of the state's population in many ways: 46% ($n=9,298$) of the undergraduate population is Hispanic. However, when examining the population of incoming freshmen, this rate rises to 50% ($n=1,579$). While these figures would appear to be favorable to an SHL program, there are many factors that represent significant challenges and obstacles, among them collective misconceptions as described below.

2.2 The Sabine Ulibarri Spanish as a Heritage Language program

The Sabine Ulibarri Spanish as a Heritage Language program (SUSHL) is one of the largest, most comprehensive, and longest-enduring SHL programs in the US with four lower-division levels (Span 111, Span 112, Span 211, and Span 212) as well as two upper-division levels (Span 301 Topics, Span 302 Writing). The SUSHL program is one of the few SHL programs that serves beginning-level students with the Span 111 course. The lower-division maintains a range of 16-21 sections across the different levels, a figure that fluctuates due to various factors. Graduate Teaching Assistants teach all sections.

Because the program serves a broad range of students, from beginning-level students who tend to enter the program with receptive skills to SHLLs who use Spanish in their daily lives, a broad definition is used for recruitment: "SHL learners seek to explore and develop their connection to the Spanish language. Such a connection to the language may come through community, family, or cultural heritage" (Wilson & Martínez, 2011, p. 128).

Student perceptions impact recruitment and misconceptions appear to influence many enrollment decisions leading many potential SHL students to enroll themselves in Beginning Spanish 101 in the Spanish as a Second Language track. Three commonly encountered misconceptions are: 1) students think that Span

111 is more advanced than 101 because of the numerical difference, 2) students are intimidated because they think that all Span 111 students enter the class already proficient in the heritage language, and 3) students enroll in Span 101 because they think they can achieve an easy A for their language requirement. One of the common threads behind these misconceptions is a perception that the student's own heritage variety is fundamentally in need of rectification, which causes the student to pursue what they believe to be 'correct grammar' through enrolling in 101. While the in-house placement exam (see Wilson, 2012) and outreach to advisors have done much to resolve misplacement, there remains a large group of students who come to class in the first week of the semester in need of rectifying a placement or enrollment issue. What is certain is that the need for exploring student attitudes and perceptions of the SUSHL program has become increasingly necessary.

3. La perspectiva estudiantil, 'The student perspective'

The current endeavor, 'Understanding the Inheritors', is part of a larger project entitled *La perspectiva estudiantil*. This section describes the participants, data, and methods shared by the LPE team (we describe the methods of analysis particular to 'Understanding the Inheritors' in 4.3). Furthermore, we provide an overview of the research conducted thus far by the research team: in addition to the principal investigator, there were eight graduate-level researchers on the research team, which has generated five separate investigations to date including the present. With a total of 69 interviews, this is the largest scale effort to compile qualitative interviews with the goal of obtaining the perspective of SHLLs (or, relevant to SHLLs in some cases) to date.

3.1 Data and Methods

All members of the research team were given an interview packet that included consent forms, an interview guide, and a template for interview notes. All interviews were recorded and the interviews lasted from 12 minutes to over an hour. Participants were informed that they could elaborate in Spanish, English, or both in order to honor bilingual code-switching practices. The interview notes served as a resource for identifying the segments of the interviews that were most salient to the individual projects.

There were 16 background questions that all researchers asked their participants in order to obtain biographical information, language history and usage patterns, motivations for taking Spanish, self-assessment of proficiency, and questions regarding identity (see Appendix 1). Following the background questions, each research team conducted semi-guided interviews pertinent to the team's investigation. While targeted data were largely obtained through asking specific questions or prompting the participants in regards to certain themes, researchers conducted the interviews with a dialogic approach in order to give students maximal control in articulating their perspectives. Important themes emerged in places where they were not necessarily elicited. Therefore, interviews were examined holistically.

3.2 Participants and overview of projects

Participants were recruited from an array of Spanish classes according to the goals of the different projects. While most participants were enrolled in lower-division SHL classes, others were enrolled in lower-division Spanish as a second language (SSL) courses or upper-division courses such as SPAN 352 Advanced Grammar. We recruited participants through in-class presentations and all participants were offered extra credit for their participation.

Table 1
Overview of La perspectiva estudiantil

Topic (researchers)	Level	Sex (number)	Total
1a) Beginning SHLL's perspective of the SHL program (Wilson & Ibarra)	SHL 111	F (21), M (14)	35
1b) Assessment of program-specific materials (Ibarra & Poulin)			
2) SHLLs' conception of grammar (Melero-García & Perara-Lunde)	SHL 212	F (10), M (4)	14
3) Language perceptions in Advanced Grammar (Cisneros & Schulman)	Upper-Division, mixed	F (6), M (2)	8
4) Transformative experiences in the SHL classroom (Echternach)	SHL 111, SHL 112, SHL 211, Upper-Division	F (5), M (1)	6
5) Are Brazilian Portuguese speakers better served in SHL or FL classes? (Ferreira de Faria)	SSL	F (4), M (2)	6
	Overall	F (46), M (23)	69

Table 1 demonstrates the diversification in the effort to obtain individualized data sets. In examining the overall group of participants, we see that exactly one third of the sixty-nine participants are male and two-thirds female; this is a reflection of the gender distribution of the student body in the Spanish department as a whole.

Cisneros and Schulman (2015) interviewed upper-division participants regarding their experience in Span 352, Advanced Grammar, as part of an effort by faculty to revamp this course to rectify the fact that L2 learners habitually earn higher grades than SHLLs. They found conflicting views toward standard language ideologies in contrast to the validation of local varieties and proposed teaching language variation. Perara-Lunde and Melero-García's (2015, this issue) work departed from the observation that SHLLs hold complicated attitudes toward grammar. In their study of fourth-semester SHLLs, Perara-Lunde and Melero-García found that their participants generally conceived of grammar as a set of prescriptive rules that would help in acquiring a formal register of Spanish. At the same time, their participants recognized the value in maintaining the community variety of Spanish. Echternach (2015) interviewed participants about transformative experiences and found that many students were inspired by the usage of a personally relevant variety of Spanish, by meaningful connections made with other students, and by discussions of identity. The work by Ferreira de Faria (2014) presents an interesting case and focuses on a growing number of Brazilian students. While all of her participants stated that they chose to be put into the SSL program, they all reported that they wished for more authentic cultural activities and for the type of contextually meaningful, task-based activities that are implemented in the SHL program. The author, a Brazilian Portuguese speaker herself, took a fourth-semester SHL course and found it to be very satisfactory. Finally, Ibarra and Poulin's (2015) work documented attitudes and impressions that students and instructors held towards the program-specific textbook used in Span 111, *Español, Nuestra Herencia, Nuestro Tesoro: Spanish as a Heritage Language* (Gonzales & Gonzales de Tucker, 2009), and towards the *Learn Packet* (Schulman et al., 2014), a collection of task-based activities based on the traditions, celebrations, representative locations, and people of New Mexico. Students appreciated the *Learn Packet* for its cultural content and the opportunity to speak about topics they felt close to, while they liked the textbook for the vocabulary, explanations of structure, and New Mexican context. About one third of students expressed identification ("saw themselves") within the textbook, while the rest expressed a stronger affinity with the *Learn Packet*.

4. Understanding the inheritors

In this section we report on the investigation conducted by the present authors that focuses on understanding the perspective of beginning-level SHLLs. The research question that guided this research is decidedly broad because this is preliminary work and we did not have a set idea as to how the students would respond. Because simply offering an SHL course is a departure from traditional teaching, and because of innovations in the implementation of this particular program, we wanted to see if students held any cogent or widespread perceptions toward their beginning-level courses. Therefore, the guiding question is: How do students perceive their Spanish as a Heritage Language (SHL) program at a large southwestern university?

4.1 Spanish 111: Beginning Spanish as a Heritage Language

The SUSHL program is one of the few programs to offer courses for beginning-level SHLLs that provide instruction to beginners with mainly receptive skills in order to promote the development of oral competency as well as listening, reading, and writing skills. In addition to these linguistic proficiency-based goals, Span 111, like all courses in the SUSHL program, aims to develop cultural competency of the heritage community, critical awareness of issues facing Spanish speakers in the US, and self-confidence in using the heritage language.

One of the noteworthy features of this course is the usage of materials specifically designed for this program and this level. The main textbook, *Español, Nuestra Herencia, Nuestro Tesoro: Spanish as a Heritage Language* (Gonzales & Gonzales de Tucker, 2009) is a custom publication that uses New Mexican culture as a backdrop for instruction and activities. There are many images of important places in the state and readings focus on New Mexican themes including vocabulary from Traditional Northern New Mexican Spanish. In an ongoing effort to provide contextualized and relevant instructional materials for our students, we have developed a packet of task-based activities—the *Learn Packet* (Schulman et al., 2014)—designed to boost vocabulary and oral fluency. As with the textbook, these materials use the heritage culture to contextualize activities.

A second noteworthy feature in Spanish 111 is the attempt to uplift bilingual practices found in the students' speech communities. New Mexico is known for bilingual practices and code-switching represents a bilingual speech mode that is common in heritage language communities (Travis & Torres Cacoullos, 2013). Instead of portraying it as aberrant behavior that needs rectification, we attempt to cultivate a positive attitude toward bilingual behavior as a valuable discourse mode. The final project for the course is called the *Spanglish Scavenger Hunt*, in which students brainstorm on who, where, and when code-switching happens and then follow up on this brainstorming by going into the community in order to overhear, document, and participate in bilingual discourse. We foster the notion that attending to and participating in bilingual behavior can help these beginning-level students in two important ways. First, code-switching is rich in contextual cues because students gain information about the topic of a conversation through segments produced in their dominant language, English, which helps them to understand the ensuing segments in Spanish. Second, while we recognize that intimate code-switching is a sign of a high level of bilingualism, beginning-level students may take advantage of this speech norm in order to use what Spanish they know with interlocutors and revert to elements from the dominant language when needed. We have found this orientation toward bilingual behaviors to be successful in fostering engagement among our students and will return to the topic of bilingual practices below.

4.2 Overview of participants

The 35 participants (21 F, 14 M) in this *Perspectiva de los principiantes* were between 18 and 33 years old, all enrolled in Span 111 over the course of one semester. All except for 2 had lived in New Mexico for at least 8 years. In the rest of this paper we use pseudonyms to refer to specific participants. Table 2 below shows the geographical origin distribution of the participants. While 14 students were from central New Mexico, essentially Albuquerque, 12 were from the northern part of the state, and 7 from southern New Mexico.

Table 2
Place of origin of participants

Place of Origin	N
<i>Central New Mexico:</i>	
Albuquerque	14
Total CNM:	14 (40%)
<i>Northern New Mexico:</i>	
Santa Fe	3
Española	2
Chamisal	1
Los Alamos	1
Pojoaque	1
Taos	1
Las Vegas	1
Abiquiú	1
Gallup	1
Total NNM:	12 (34%)
<i>Southern New Mexico:</i>	
Las Cruces	2
Texico	2
Roswell	2
Artesia	1
Total SNM:	7 (20%)
<i>Outside NM:</i>	
Arizona	1
Colorado	1
Total Outside:	2 (6%)

The next table summarizes the identification labels used by these students to express their group affiliation. In terms of identification with a specific group, many students used more than one label; in the spirit of respecting and adhering to the way students expressed their group affiliation, we included all labels even if some may seem redundant or represented a mix (e.g. *Hispanic and Caucasian*). While one of the most used labels was 'Hispanic', we can see in Table 3 that the identity of students in SHL courses is extremely rich and complex.

Table 3
Identity labels used by participants

Identity Label	N	Identity Label	N
Hispanic	21	Chicana	1
New Mexican	4	Arizonian	1
Hispanic and White	3	Mexican	1
Hispanic and Caucasian	3	Latino	1
White	2	Mexicano	1
African-American	2	All American	1
Mixed	1	Australian	1
Spanish	1	Hispanic American	1
New Mexican Caucasian	1	Mexican-American	1
Anglo-Hispanic	1	Spanish and Irish	1
Caucasian	1	Non-Hispanic White	1
Black and Hispanic	1	Spaniard	1

4.3 Interview themes and data extraction methods: Understanding the inheritors

In addition to the background questions that were common to all iterations of the LPE project, the present investigation focused on questions that had to do with students' perceptions of the SHL program, the program goals, and the student body. Additionally, we prompted participants to compare Span 111 to any previously taken courses and to compare community and classroom usage of Spanish. These research questions were used to encourage the participant to elaborate on the topics highlighted and the ensuing responses were characterized by dialogue between the researcher and the participant. Therefore, while we attempted to elicit targeted responses, we also attempted to give participants as much volition as possible in the interview. All of these interviews were conducted in the last four weeks of the fall 2014 semester. Table 4, below, provides the targeted interview questions relevant to the present study.

Table 4
Interview questions used across the Perspectiva de los principiantes

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- IQ 1: If you were going to describe the SHL program to someone outside of UNM, how would you describe it?
 - IQ 2: In your experience, what do you see as the goals of the SHL program?
 - IQ 3: How would you describe the SHL student body? OR, what do you think makes someone a candidate for the SHL program?
 - IQ 4: Have you taken Spanish in the past? How does this compare?
 - IQ 5: Do you plan to continue? Why or why not?
 - IQ 6: Spanish in the classroom. Does it match what you hear in the community? How do you describe Spanish in the community?
 - IQ 7: General statements about your experience
-

We transcribed the interviews and examined them for salient themes in a manner largely in line with interpretive analysis as described by Hatch (2002, pp. 179-191). The authors discussed the interviews in order to get a sense of the whole set. We then returned to the data to verify whether the themes we discussed bore out in a closer analysis of the transcripts and identified segments that represented these themes. Many of the thematic segments were elicited by the targeted interview questions while other relevant segments

were found in other portions of the data. The segments we identified were entered into appropriately tagged columns of a spreadsheet. We then examined these thematically coded segments in order to identify representative trends as well as outliers. What follows is the first iteration of our endeavor to understand beginning-level SHLLs through qualitative interviews.

4.3.1 Perception of the program

We hypothesized that due to the potential for confusion stemming from institutional mayhem or other factors, many SHL students would not meaningfully understand the program or its goals. Therefore, this section focuses on the data targeted by IQ 1, IQ 2, and IQ 3.

One of the most important findings is that we found that our hypothesis was mostly wrong and that students had a substantial understanding of the program. When asked to “describe the SHL program to someone outside of UNM,” answers varied, but the majority mentioned that they perceived that the program tied heritage language learning and heritage culture together. A representative statement comes from Marcus:

I feel like the heritage class looks not only at the language but the culture itself. A closer look at the traditions... how they are in New Mexico and in the southwestern states, how they differ in Mexico, Central America. So it takes a more broader approach. I feel like it's a little more enriching because of that. You're not just learning a language you're learning more. It's helped me to appreciate my culture a little bit more as well. (Marcus)

This example illustrates that, for this student, the approach taken by the SHL program has been successful in cultivating an appreciation of the heritage culture, which in turn raises motivation to develop skills in the heritage language. Only one student did not highlight the appreciation of culture as part of their perception of the SHL course (James). In terms of motivation driving skills outside of the classroom, eleven participants (31%) explicitly stated that Span 111 had enhanced their ability to communicate with their families or community members. We did not directly ask if participants felt more confident about using Spanish in the community as a result of taking Span 111 and it is likely that more students than indicated perceived increased competence.

A salient theme that arose in describing the program was a sense of community and comfort toward the learning community. Erica states:

I feel it's just like community based, and there's like a lot of opportunities, and a lot of people in this organization. I really like it. It's very just like comfortable and homey, you know. Very Albuquerque. (Erica)

The statement by the participant that the program is “comfortable” was reflected by eight participants in all (23%). One of the main reasons that this comfort level is worthy of highlighting is due to the general finding by researchers that SHLLs do not fare well in foreign language classrooms (as highlighted in Beaudrie, 2012), often due to high expectations on the part of the teacher or criticism of the student’s heritage variety (e.g. Schwarzer & Petrón, 2005). While only one participant mentioned overt criticism of New Mexican speech communities in foreign language classrooms, a lack of validation is evinced through the conspicuous omission of any reports by the participants that heritage language speech communities were legitimized or recognized in previously experienced classes. By way of contrast, all but one participant (James again) perceived that New Mexican and southwestern Spanish language communities were uplifted in Span 111, and this was a recurring theme in participants’ elaboration of the class being comfortable. The way in which Erica used “community based,” “homey,” and “Very Albuquerque” as part of her construction of the course as a comfortable one was representative of the other responses that described the program this way. Because of the community-based approach, and the attention given to affective needs of the students in Span 111, Erica’s response is not surprising and indicates that students have picked up on programmatic orientations. We did not explicitly ask if this class was more comfortable than foreign language classes but can infer that the almost unanimous recognition of the importance of culture implies at least some level of enhanced comfort on the part of almost all students.

Despite lacking reports of overt attempts at eradication of heritage variety norms, three participants reported a focus on monolingual speech-community norms while twelve others (34%) mentioned an overt focus on explicit grammar instruction when describing their previous classes (see below). In elaborating on her perception of Span 111, Cassandra contrasts it to a class she took previously at a community college: “She

[the instructor] was very specific, she had a specific Spanish she was trying to teach us. She lived in Spain so that's what she was trying to teach us was the Spanish in Spain" (Cassandra). In contrast, Cassandra goes on to describe the goals of Span 111:

[To] learn the background of Spanish in New Mexico. That's what we've been doing a lot. To give us a better understanding of the language, learning, really learning the language, incorporating our own traditions and our own ways of trying to learn the language. (Cassandra)

As we see here, the participant does not state that the instructor overtly criticized local speech communities, but, instead, ignored them in favor of a monolingual variety that was relevant to the instructor. Cassandra, who gave indications of having passive bilingual skills upon entering the class, mentioned that because of her enhanced enthusiasm for learning fostered in Span 111 she was currently attempting to communicate more with her grandmother in Spanish. Our data provide evidence that SHLLs feel unengaged or uncomfortable in foreign language Spanish classes and it appears that some of this disengagement comes from a lack of validation or recognition of local speech communities. In Cassandra's case, the perception that the SUSHL program uplifts New Mexican speech communities appears to foster language learning.

In congruency with the participants' efforts to describe the program, when asked to describe the perceived goals of the SHL program there was a great deal of overlap in terms of highlighting cultural and linguistic learning. The theme of uplifting the heritage variety arose once again in responses to describing perceived goals. As Christine reported:

The culture of New Mexico kind of comes through and... using their language already as like... their language is already such a value, and kind of like projecting that, and like growing culturally and growing their language so they understand New Mexico culture and they understand the culture of the language while also learning the language and kind of like getting better at the language. (Christine)

We see that Christine perceives the language of New Mexico to be "such a value" and connects it to the notion of culture. She also highlights connection between language learning and understanding the culture of the language.

In terms of understanding the program, there was only one student who said that he did not know how to describe it. James, a business major, said that he did not know what the SHL program was about. He also stated that he was only taking the class as a requirement and that he did not plan to take any more Spanish classes in the future. However, he did state that he would take more Spanish if it were offered in his field of study. This student's response is illustrative of what must be a small number of students who will not be engaged in the heritage language learning process due to a lack of motivation, instrumental or otherwise, to learn the language. As mentioned above, James is the only participant who did not highlight the cultural aspect of Span 111.

Returning to the theme of identity, one remarkable aspect is the uniform concept that students articulated as to who is identified as a heritage learner for the purpose of enrolling in Span 111 when responding to IQ 3. Because most students in our study claimed identity labels such as *Hispanic* we hypothesized that students would perceive the program as catering to a Hispanic population. However, only one student had an overtly racialized perception of the program, stating that it is "for people of *Hispanic* descent who want to learn the language and is more specific to that type of people, who have a relation to the culture" (Maricela). In contrast, when questioned specifically about the student population in their class, all other participants (except James) tended to indicate the sense of community provided by being around other students with very similar life experiences. As one student (Dario) put it, "being with other heritage speakers gives class a sense of community"; along the same lines, Marissa expressed that "Being with others who share background makes it feel less intimidating, [because we are] all in the same boat." The general idea as to who is an appropriate candidate for Span 111, therefore, centered upon two concepts: growing up with ties to the language and the community, and holding a certain degree of familiarity with the culture of New Mexico. One common characteristic was motivation, with all participants (except James) wanting to learn and speak about the land, the language, the culture, and the traditions in class, as opposed to merely satisfying a requirement. Ariel summarized this student perspective: "[It is about] wanting to communicate and interact with New Mexicans over just getting the credit." At the same time, 17 participants (49%) recognized the value of knowing Spanish for its instrumental value in enhancing employment possibilities.

In all, the participants interviewed held a similar view of the program, which reveals that their instructors are transmitting the orientation and goals of the program to them successfully. These goals are transmitted to the instructors through training and materials provided to them. Therefore, we see that the students go from a conspicuous lack of understanding of the SUSHL program in the recruitment phase to understanding and investing themselves in the program. We must continually strive to communicate these goals to students, as highlighted in Beaudrie (2015). We do so explicitly and implicitly through activities that provide communicative opportunities in a comfortable atmosphere that fosters validation of heritage language communities.

4.3.2 Comparison to other classes

One of the most salient results was a comparison of Span 111 to other Spanish classes, as elicited through IQ 4. All but three participants had taken between 1 and 6 years of Spanish courses previously in middle and high school, or in other type of courses (e. g. summer). Students were asked to tell us about their impressions in comparing the Span 111 course they were taking to previously taken courses. Students articulated that the communicative aspect of the course ("hands on," as Dario put it), along with the cultural aspect that emphasized New Mexican traditions, *fiestas*, celebrations, and places of historical significance helped them become more in touch with the structure and vocabulary of the language. In other words, these New Mexican cultural elements provided a rich background context that appears to encourage communicative interaction about topics students have in common. One student (Christine) stressed the importance of this personalization of the Span 111 course, saying that she felt that it was easier for her as a student to speak about places and events with which she was familiar. Several students perceived the Spanish in their previous courses as not serving a communicative purpose, with one of them (Tracy) mentioning that high school Spanish was "grammar-based" with "no speaking or saying things to each other. There was no communication, just 'academic' Spanish," and another student (Desiree) contrasting that "socializing and interacting gets the flow going." Another difference that students highlighted was the focus on writing in previous courses, through cloze and short answer format, and how that did not seem to help them internalize and retain the language. As one student (Frederick) put it: "[in previous Spanish courses, we] did lots of writing assignments," "only filled out worksheets," and used "fixed context-less phrases.". In the opinion of another student, "high school Spanish was all about writing it" (Melissa). On the other hand, Francisco expressed that Span 111 offered "more conversation over just fill-in-the-blank." Rod, a freshman, gauged his experience in terms of his communicative abilities explicitly, and states that "[Span] 111 ... helped with being able to communicate in Spanish the most."

Students put significant value in the real-life situations that were part of the course, in which they had to use their Spanish to get information from each other and from people in the community (for their final project). Mandy summarized it as having "really learned how to use the language here [Span 111], versus learning vocabulary in high school classes and not having the real-life experience."

In this preliminary examination of the data, it appears that the beginning-level students are appreciative of a course that uplifts their home variety and local culture, and provides them with speaking opportunities. Being mainly freshmen, it was typical to see students who had been placed into Span 111 right after completing one or more years of Spanish courses at the high school level. Twenty participants (57%) mentioned that their previous classes focused on drills of repetition, filling out worksheets, and other passive learning approaches. It appears that the manner of instruction faced by these participants in previous courses made them hungry for a classroom that focused on contextualized communicative and proficiency-building activities. As with Tse (2000), these findings indicate a prevalence of 'traditional' grammar-based teaching. What is more, these 'traditional' classes do not give their students the skills to begin their university studies beyond the beginner level.

4.3.3 Code-switching

As described above in 4.1, we foster a positive attitude toward bilingual practices in Spanish 111 because of its pervasiveness in communities of practice and its potential as a valuable learning tool. It is not surprising that themes of code-switching came to light during the investigative process in response to a variety of prompts, including IQ 6. We did not have prompts directly asking for participants to elucidate on bilingual behavior but systematically encouraged them to do so if they brought it up, which all participants did. In analyzing discourse describing bilingual practices, there were mixed perspectives from the participants: 25 (71%) maintained unequivocally positive views toward code-switching throughout the

interviews, whereas 8 (23%) displayed views that mixed positive and negative evaluations of code-switching. Only two participants held only negative perceptions of bilingual practices. Furthermore, 30 students reported that they used the heritage language regularly outside of the classroom and, of these, eight claimed that they engaged in code-switching. While we did not get an idea as to usage of "Spanglish" in the classroom, it appears that our findings contrast somewhat with those of Beaudrie (2015), who found that students dispreferred "Spanglish" as a classroom language.

Among the students who held a positive view toward code-switching, the notion of this practice as a skill emerged, as in Christine's illustrative response:

I think code-switching is actually so cool. ... Cuz I feel like I'm a very analytical person and I'm just like straightforward. But the fact that people can just like switch back and forth is so cool, I think. *I think it's a really awesome skill to have.* ... If it like helps them get their point across that's even better like. ... That's a unique New Mexican thing that we do code-switching. Like that doesn't just happen everywhere. Very cool. (Christine)

Christine recognizes that code-switching is a skill that helps speakers "get their point across." Or, as Annemarie succinctly put it, "Spanglish makes it easier to communicate."

One of the two unabashedly negative views comes from Austin, a 20-year-old junior from Roswell, NM, who states that "Spanglish seems like a lazy language." This student is an interesting case in many ways as he is symbolic of the wide recruitment effort and inclusiveness of the program. In terms of identity labels, Austin states that he is a "New Mexican Caucasian male." He is in the Army and plans to pursue a military career. In terms of linguistic history, he overheard his father and grandparents speak Spanish because they lived for many years in Perú. Also, Austin stated that he was proficient in Spanish as a child due to the fact that he had a Spanish-speaking nanny from three to eight years of age. In examining the data from Austin, we see that he is very enamored of New Mexican culture and that he responds positively to the highlighting of the state's culture presented in the *Learn Packet* (Schulman *et al.*, 2014). However, while Austin maintains notions of correctness in his attitude toward Spanglish and in other areas (he claims to know instinctively when speakers "speak Spanish the correct way"), he states that he himself does use Spanglish in and outside of class.

Regarding the final project, *The Spanglish Scavenger Hunt*, many participants commented on this project in their interviews despite the lack of a direct prompt. Of the two participants who held negative views toward bilingual practices only one stated overtly that he did not like this project. Fredrick, who describes himself as Anglo-Hispanic and is taking the course for cultural reasons, stated that he had difficulty with the project because "Spanglish is stupid" and he could not find a code-switcher. Although Frederick feels more educated about the topic, he echoes Austin's evaluative term "lazy" as he poses the following: "Why would someone who speaks Spanish fluently already start using Spanglish? It's just being lazy." Therefore, despite our efforts to promote bilingual behavior as a skill and a valuable community practice, some participants will retain a notion of code-switching as a type of deficit.

On the more positive end, three students stated that they had never deliberately paid attention to bilingual behavior before and that doing so compelled them to appreciate it more. In fact, evidence of the effectiveness of the *Scavenger Hunt* in promoting bilingual behavior as a skill and a community norm comes from the finding that eleven participants (31%) used the term 'code-switching' in describing these practices. While we have no indication as to whether or not participants were familiar with the more neutral term 'code-switching' prior to Span 111 as compared to the term 'Spanglish', it remains salient that this term would be used by a large portion of them and it is likely indicative of participants engaging critically with the exploration of bilingual behavior. Erica, who is taking Spanish as a requirement but wishes to pursue it for communicative motivations states:

just like... well we're learning it now, code-switching, just between Spanish English, pretty much just like phrases you just... there's like triggers kind of... a lot of maybe... emotional kind of like when you're angry it just your Spanish comes out. Or it just sounds better in English or in Spanish. (Erica)

In all, participants who come from speech communities where it is practiced held complicated notions toward the practice of code-switching. It is precisely this complicated set of notions that makes it crucial to explore bilingual behavior critically in the classroom as it provides another avenue to encourage (re)contact with their linguistically dynamic speech communities. In addition to fostering critical awareness,

the exploration of bilingual behavior encourages students to use it as a vehicle for gaining competence in the target language, Spanish.

5. Implications

While the present study has obvious implications for the SUSHL program from which participants were recruited, the insights gained here have value for other practitioners of SHL. As mentioned above, one of the differences between Beaudrie's (2015) and Brown's (2009) comparisons of teacher and student perspectives was that Beaudrie called for entering a dialogue with students concluding that "at a time when student-centered education is a centerpiece in education, students' opinions should be a critical component in determining effective pedagogical practices" (290). This call for dialogue must be situated in a context in which SHL programs are proliferating (Beaudrie, 2012) and generating a need for curricular materials, such as textbooks, to aid in this expansion. Yet the search for an appropriate textbook in many cases represents the search for a convenient solution to the dilemma of how to best serve the SHLL population and practitioners run the risk of unwittingly implementing a textbook that presents ideologies that run counter to student experiences. For example, Leeman and Martínez (2007) found that from the 1970s to the late 1990s the ideologies presented in SHL textbooks changed from ones linked to civil rights movements and bringing the Chicano/a communities "in from the margin" (p. 61) to an ideology that highlighted Spanish as a commodity as a world language. Leeman and Martínez also found a persistence of the "standard language ideology," but with modifications. In searches for textbooks for the SUSHL program, we have found that many textbooks published within the last decade had reverted to portraying the standard language ideology through lists that contrasted standardized forms to stigmatized forms attributed to US Spanish speaking communities. Because we were unable to identify SHL-oriented books that solved the dilemma of how to best serve the curricular needs of first-year courses (Span 111 & 112), we have found ourselves trying to fill the void by creating materials specific to the SHL program beginning with *Español, Nuestra Herencia* (Gonzales & Gonzales de Tucker 2009), created by the previous director, and culminating recently with the *Learn Packet* (Schulman et al., 2014). Therefore, we argue that incipient and established SHL programs alike should not rely solely on materials from established publishing companies. Instead, by attempting to understand our learner populations, we can gain insight into how to create materials, or at least activities, that inspire student engagement.

Students bring previously shaped notions of educational expectations with them (Tse, 2000). We have found our participants to be engaged in their SHL courses with an eagerness to explore local speech communities that is partially attributed to the failure of previously taken courses to recognize the validity of local speech communities. For many SHLLs, Span 111 offers new perspectives: it is frequently the first time they are told by an educator that community language varieties are valuable, the first time they critically examine bilingual practices, the first time they see that there are many others in "the same boat" (e.g. Marissa), and, unfortunately, the first time they experience a course that promotes communicative competency over memorization of formal rules. Practitioners of heritage language education can gain valuable insights into the factors that have shaped their student populations through dialogic research.

6. Conclusion

As many SHL practitioners argue that we must teach the formal variety to students, we would remind such proponents that it could go against their student wishes to discard the community variety of Spanish as unworthy of study. We believe that it is possible to promote both the acquisition of formal registers and the maintenance of the heritage variety in a congruent manner. If we listen to the students, we will be more effective in doing this. There is a significant wealth of cultural, social, and linguistic information that is lost in discarding varieties of Spanish considered to be non-standard and undesirable. The perspective taken by an SHL program will have a strong impact on the appreciation that students have toward themselves, their families, and their communities, where they first experienced and may continue to experience contact with the heritage language and culture. After all, heritage language speech communities constitute spaces where the home variety is used as a valuable tool for communication and transmission of the cultural practices and values that constitute part of the essence of who SHLLs are, as their direct inheritors. We find evidence here that for beginning-level SHLLs, reinforcing contact with the heritage language communities is essential so that they may unreservedly access these rich sources of input, code-switching included, as they increase their bilingual range. As in natural learning circumstances, we promote a stance that works from the inner to the

outer spheres. We find evidence here that for this beginner population, students should be rooted in the nurturing environment offered in the community sphere before taking on the trappings of prestige and formalism that will help them attain success in a broader public sphere.

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Appendix

INTERVIEW GUIDE

La Perspectiva Estudiantil: Understanding Spanish language learners

General interview questions

Intro: Go over the consent form. Explain to the participant that this is a project with the purpose of better understanding our student population and that we are looking for sincere, honest answers. Let them know that it will take anywhere from 15 minutes to half an hour. In the first few minutes, we want to put the students at ease.

- Do you have questions before we get started?
- How are you doing today?
- How is your semester going?

Background: The next questions need to be asked in a fairly regularized manner as they may serve as explanatory variables in some of the upcoming research. As in teaching class, good guiding transitions help the process ("I'm going to ask you some background questions now in order to help us put this interview into context.") On the research notes, you may refer to these questions as GEN 1, GEN 2, GEN 3, etc...

1. Where are you from? Is this the same place you grew up?
2. How old are you?
3. What language(s) did you speak with your family growing up?
4. Let's talk about who speaks Spanish in your family? Father? Mother? Siblings? Paternal/maternal Grandparents? Cousins/Uncles/Aunts?
5. With whom do you speak the most?
6. Who have you heard speak the most Spanish?
7. Who have you learned the most Spanish from?
8. Do you use Spanish in your daily life? Please tell me about this.
9. What classes/levels of Spanish have you taken before this semester?
10. What year of study are you in? Freshman, sophomore, junior, senior?
11. Why are you taking this class this semester?
12. What are your strengths and weaknesses in Spanish?
13. Why is it important to you to learn/speak Spanish?

Identity: Thank the student for the previous info and let them know that you are going to ask questions about identity.

14. What identity labels do you use to describe yourself?
15. Are there labels that you use in some contexts but not in others?
16. In what situations do these identity labels come up?

Research questions: In the rest of the interview, please refer to the specific questions in your portion of this research. On the research notes, refer to these questions as RQ 1, RQ 2, RQ 3, etc...

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