

Language and Heritage

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Abstract— The research will be focusing on Language culture and heritage. The "heritage language" (a concept used to refer to first, native language of immigrant parents in a new immigration destination) is a case in point for what can be said deemed a language loss for second generation immigrants. The research will presents a study on Spanish adult language learners.



1 INTRODUCTION

Language is well embedded in culture and heritage. The acquisition of a First Language (L1) or Second Language (L2) is a particularly challenging experience for learners, parents, instructors and policy makers. If anything, learning L1 or L2 is accompanied by a host of value-loaded beliefs and cultural conventions. The challenge of language acquisition becomes more so for second generation immigrants. Brought up in a cultural context, usually far distanced from original one, second generation immigrants are under pressure to learn a "new" language spoken by parents and forebears for generations in home countries and only at home in new immigration destination. The "heritage language" (a concept used to refer to first, native language of immigrant parents in a new immigration destination) is a case in point for what can be said deemed a language loss for second generation immigrants. By acquiring a new language, second generation immigrants are subject to linguistic and cultural cross-current influences in new immigration destination.

2 Study on Spanish adult language learners

In an interesting study performed on Spanish-speaking, second generation, adult language learners in U.S., participants are shown to exhibit differential linguistic patterns in language acquisition (Montrul, 2005). Predictably, L2 learners who learn English in early childhood (before age 5) exhibit more fluency and, more significantly, an increased loss of specific linguistic patterns in Spanish (namely, unaccusative-

ty) compared to L2 learners who acquire English later on after puberty (Montrul). These findings show, if anything, how early exposure to different cultural / linguistic influences is apt to not only change L2 acquisition pace and pattern but also pace and pattern of heritage language loss. The implications for future heritage language learners are, indeed, broad. For one, heritage loss – primarily linguistic but also fundamentally cultural – is a challenge for emerging generations of second (and subsequent) generation immigrants who, over years, assume a diluted identity in a "home" suspicious of ethnic, cultural and color differences.

3 Heritage Schools

In response, a growing number of what is commonly referred to as "Heritage Schools" is offering evening or weekend classes for second generation immigrants. The classes are, primarily, interactive and are focused on cultural conventions. In contrast to conventional language acquisition (LA) classes, heritage schools offer language instruction based on role play and vignette strategies. In so doing, "revival" of specific linguistic patterns (if dormant over years) or development of one or more patterns (if lost because of early childhood acquisition of L2) is performed based on immersion and interactivity and hence significance of culture in LA.

Tapping into potentials of Heritage Schools, emerging instruction strategies of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) increasingly show how gaps in LA can be bridged by incorporating patterns exhibited by heritage language learn-

ers (Valdés, 2005). In so doing, a double benefit can be reaped from heritage language learning. First, heritage language learners become active participants in LA process by sharing, consciously, used linguistic patterns. Second, by adopting specific linguistic patterns exhibited by heritage language learners in actual classroom learning settings, more insights can be driven for understanding LA processes across different generations of immigrants and, more practically, developing more informed integration policies for immigrants based on better understanding of cultural backgrounds of immigrant communities.

4 conclusion

To wrap up, language and heritage are intertwined. The case for heritage loss (by speaking different languages in and out of home) cannot be overemphasized for first and second generation immigrants. Notwithstanding a growing body of research referring to "loss" in heritage language, more future research projects need to be performed in order to gain further insights into LA mechanisms and, not least, maintain an invaluable cultural capital across generations: heritage.

References

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- [2] Valdés, Guadalupe. "Bilingualism, Heritage Language Learners, and SLA Research: Opportunities Lost or Seized?" *The Modern Language Journal* 89.3 (2005): 410-426. *Wiley Online Library*. Web. 7 April 2016.