

“I USED TO ONLY SPEAK SPANISH”  
AN ANALYSIS OF HERITAGE LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE THROUGH THE  
LANGUAGING AND LITERACY PRACTICES OF FOUR SPANISH HERITAGE  
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BY

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## ABSTRACT

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### “I USED TO ONLY SPEAK SPANISH” AN ANALYSIS OF HERITAGE LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE THROUGH THE LANGUAGING AND LITERACY PRACTICES OF FOUR SPANISH HERITAGE SPEAKERS

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Heritage language speakers, those who have or claim a connection with the language of their ancestors, have become a group of interest in the United States, especially since programs to serve this population were initiated four decades ago thanks to the advocacy of grassroots organizations. Still, the reach of those programs is minimal and the lack of federal policies providing educational services for this group are harming the chances for heritage speakers to develop and maintain proficiency in their home languages. For so long the policies and practices in the education field in the United States restricted the use of home languages at school in hopes that children would acquire literacy skills in English more effectively. Such policies reflect the dominant discourses enacted by the mainstream in the U.S., where language ideologies are characterized for emphasizing anglonormativity, monolingualism, and the use of a monoglossic lens. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the factors that affect heritage language maintenance among Spanish heritage speakers, by looking at the support, or lack thereof, that they receive at home, at school, and in their community for the development of their heritage language. This study analyzed the thoughts and practices of four adolescent Spanish heritage speakers using a language identity framework that focused on how sociocultural factors affect their investment into maintaining their heritage language. Key findings point to positive perceptions about the heritage language and parents' engagement in teaching or reading in that language as key contributions to language maintenance.

*Keywords: heritage language, heritage speakers, language ideologies, language identity, language investment, language maintenance*

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In the United States, despite being such a diverse country where more than 300 different languages are spoken (Heineke & Davin, 2020), the number of heritage language speakers has decreased over time. This decrease is due in part to intergenerational language loss (Gürel, 2017). Around 22% of the U.S. student population speaks a language other than English (Carreira & Kagan, 2018). Notwithstanding, most education is conducted in English, and only 2% of U.S. schools offer bilingual education (Leonard et al., 2020). To further exacerbate language loss, most bilingual programs are often limited to the elementary grades, denying many heritage speakers the opportunity to develop literacy skills in their heritage languages beyond fifth grade (Heineke & Davin, 2020). Meanwhile, for those who cannot enroll in a bilingual program due to its lack of availability, the opportunity to learn other languages is only available through elective courses, mainly in the secondary levels. The problem with this approach is that not all the languages that are present in communities around the country are offered (Carreira & Kagan, 2018; Fuller & Leeman, 2020).

Based on current projections, in 50 years, one third of the U.S. population will be composed of immigrants and their children (Carreira & Kagan, 2018). Moreover, due to the continuing demographic changes, there is a possibility that by 2042 the U.S. White majority will become a minority (Fuller & Leeman, 2020). According to data from the 2019 U.S. Census, 18.5% of the country's population identified as Hispanic or Latinx, becoming the second largest ethnic group in the nation. In the state of Texas alone, 39.7% of the population identifies as Hispanic or Latinx (U.S. Census, 2019). This means that almost half of the state population connects their identity to a Hispanic or Latin American country.

In connection to the ethnoracial changes in U.S. demographics, there has been an increase in languages spoken and the number of heritage language speakers. Undoubtedly, Spanish has been and remains the second most spoken and studied language in the country (Fuller & Leeman, 2020; García & Alonso, 2021). It is important to note that this language is also historically tied to the U.S. from the colonization of the Louisiana territory by Spanish conquistadors and the annexation of other territories, such as the states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California after the Mexican American war (Fuller & Leeman, 2020). For this reason, Fuller and Leeman (2020) refused to call Spanish a foreign or minority language. They argued that considering that 41 million people speak the Spanish at home, based on estimates from the American Community Survey in 2017, it is a de facto second language and part of the fabric of the country (Fuller & Leeman, 2020).

Heritage language speakers, those who have or claim a connection with the language of their ancestors or home country (Leonard et al., 2020), are becoming a group of interest in the United States for scholars studying the linguistic dynamics and literacy acquisition processes of these multilingual individuals, as well as their language acquisition and development journeys. Research in this area seeks to develop theory in this emerging field of research (Polinsky, 2018). Consequently, the relevance and dearth of research regarding heritage language speakers supports the need for the current research study.

Heritage speakers are a very heterogeneous group, which represents a problem when trying to define them (Benmamoun et al., 2013). In a broad sense, a heritage speaker could be anyone who has a cultural or ethnic connection with a language without being proficient in the heritage language. This is what Polinsky (2018) called an overhearer heritage speaker. That is, an overhearer is someone who is in contact with the language, may understand some of it, but is not

able to produce it (i.e., write it or speak it). However, according to a narrow definition of the term, a person can only be called a heritage speaker if they grew up learning the language and have some proficiency in it (Benmamoun et al., 2013; Polinsky, 2018). In fact, heritage language speakers vary widely on their levels of language proficiency, their background characteristics, and their attitudes towards the cultures attached to their heritage language (Fuller & Leeman, 2020; Valdés et al, 2008; Wiley, 2001).

When families settle outside their homelands, they often become minority or immigrant language speakers in their host community (Canagarajah, 2013). Then, their children born in the new community and the following generations are those who are generally identified as heritage speakers. There is also the case of speakers of indigenous languages, whose languages became a minority language during the process of colonization and domination (Weber & Horner, 2014). Regardless of whether the language is an immigrant or indigenous language, they both face the risk of becoming endangered (Weber & Horner, 2014), because they are being ignored or neglected by the mainstream, who uses and prioritizes communication and dissemination of information in the dominant language for all official and unofficial affairs.

### **Status of Heritage Languages and Their Speakers in the United States**

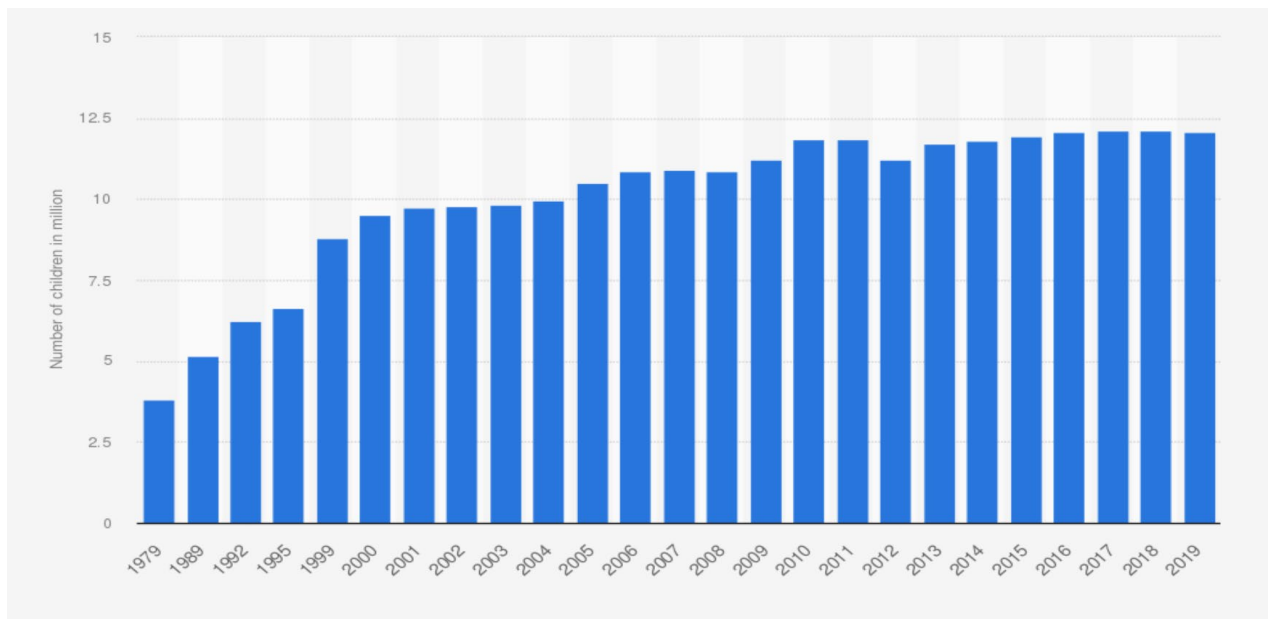
It is difficult to accurately quantify the number of heritage speakers and languages present in the United States. Data from the American Community Survey 2009-2013 reported 380 possible languages or language groups within the United States, but since this data was collected from a sample, it cannot be taken as a comprehensive list or as an accurate representation of all languages spoken in the United States (Heineke & Davin, 2018). Fuller and Leeman (2020) also critiqued how the U.S. Census is exclusionary and limits the accurate reporting of home languages by giving respondents the space to only list one home language

when there are households where more than one language other than English could be spoken. This is relevant because having more accurate data is necessary to promote more discussions among stakeholders, that lead to policies to better serve the student population identified as heritage speakers.

Figure 1.1 below shows data on student home languages for the United States. This snapshot shows that 12.08 million children spoke a language other than English at home in 2019.

**Figure 1.1**

*Number of Children who Speak Another Language Than English at Home in the United States From 1979 to 2019*



*Note.* Numbers are expressed in millions for children 5 to 17 years old. From America's children: Key national indicators of well-being, by U.S. Census Bureau, and Childstats.gov, 2021, (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/476745/number-of-children-who-speak-another-language-than-english-at-home-in-the-us/>). Copyright 2021 by Statista.

Since the U.S. population keeps diversifying, one might anticipate that these numbers will increase through time, especially if immigration keeps increasing and heritage languages continue to be transferred intergenerationally. The bad news though, is that only 3.8 million of those learners have access to a bilingual education program, of which 75.6% participate in a Spanish-English dual-language program (Leonard et al., 2020). As a result, these numbers suggest that the current education system is not appropriately serving students with a diverse background.

### **Heritage Language as an Asset**

There is well documented research on the benefits of multilingualism (Babino & Stewart, 2017; Reese & Goldernberg, 2006). Some of them include advantages associated with cognitive development that translate to an overall better academic performance (Cummins, 2001; Krashen, 1996). Furthermore, multilingualism is also connected to the promotion of metalinguistic awareness that facilitates the acquisition of additional languages, divergent thinking, good socio-emotional health, and even economic gains (Baker, 1993; Bialystok, 2001; Canagarajah, 2013; Cook & Singleton, 2014; Cummins, 2001; García & Kleifgen, 2010; García & Nández, 2011; Leonard et al., 2020). Heineke and Davin (2020) added greater multicultural awareness and open-mindedness to this list, which is in no way comprehensive of all the benefits of being multilingual.

For many years, the policies and practices in the educational arena in the United States restricted the use of home languages at school in hopes that children would acquire literacy skills in English more effectively (Fuller & Leeman, 2020). Nonetheless, Cummins (2001) and other experts in the field of second language acquisition (e.g., Cook & Singleton, 2014; Krashen, 1996) have reiterated that when children enter formal education with a good mastery of their



heritage language, their chances of developing literacy in the school language of instruction at a faster pace are higher. A study conducted by a team of Kansas University researchers found that emergent bilinguals, whose home language was Spanish, could develop better writing skills in English than monolinguals due to their bilingual instruction in both Spanish and English (Peng et al., 2022). This study also showed the adverse effects of not offering bilingual education programs to heritage speakers, and highlights how this is not a priority in the United States, which falls behind all other developed countries on the promotion of multilingualism.

### **Language Loss or Attrition**

Language loss among heritage speakers is a very common phenomenon (Johnsen, 2021; Polinsky, 2018; Tse, 2001). Like any muscle of the body that is not exercised, when language is not being used there is a risk of losing the proficiency skills that were previously acquired. Educators have been impressed by how quickly children from households where languages other than English are spoken acquire English, but at the same time, some researchers have found that these speakers start to lose their heritage language skills at a similar speed (Leonard et al., 2020). Research suggests that it can only take 3 years for a child to lose their ability to communicate in the heritage language from the moment they begin school (Cummins, 2001). This phenomenon is exacerbated during adolescence, when many bilingual programs are discontinued and the dominant language takes primacy for heritage speakers, including in the home environment (Heineke & Davin, 2020; Weber & Horner, 2014).

Multiple studies have found a higher probability of language shift or language loss among second and third generation heritage speakers (Babino & Stewart, 2017; Cohen & Wickens, 2015; Fuller & Leeman, 2020; Geerlings et al., 2015; Johnsen, 2021; Leonard et al., 2020; Worthy et al., 2016). This occurrence is influenced by the speakers' linguistic

environment, language ideologies, and the framing of minority languages in the broader society (Ortega, 2020; Weber & Horner, 2014). Some specific factors such as prejudices, stereotypes, stigma, and discrimination associated with minority languages and certain marginalized cultural groups, have been found to inhibit interactions in the heritage language, and as a result, contribute to language loss (Beaudrie et al., 2019; Kaveh, 2018; Reese & Goldenberg, 2006).

### **Language Education Context in the United States**

Historically, language policies in the United States have prioritized English instruction, and as a result they have perpetuated and institutionalized monolingualism (Heineke & Davin, 2020; Weber & Horner, 2014). Despite the existence of federal policies like the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 and the Native American Languages Preservation Act of 2006, which support the use of other languages in the education context, most classroom language practices are subtractive in nature (Heineke & Davin, 2020). Moreover, policies like the No Child Left Behind Act reinforce the privileged position of English, and marginalize other language practices at schools (Menken, 2008; Menken & Solorza, 2014; Weber & Horner, 2014).

Heritage language education was introduced in the 1970s in the U.S. through a movement led by educators who supported Spanish language instruction that was differentiated to respond to the specific needs of Spanish heritage speakers (Beaudrie, 2020; Carreira & Kagan, 2018). Regrettably, heritage language courses are not widely available in the country and there is no official federal or state policy supporting or promoting this type of programs. Some bottom-up initiatives, like the Seal of Biliteracy (see Colomer & Bacon, 2020; Heineke & Davin, 2020), have been put in place in an attempt to push against monolingualism. Notwithstanding, while many states have implemented this program, only a few can attest to its success.

This language policy summary illustrates that there is still much research needed to support a language education that is equitable for heritage speakers and that allows them to maintain their language and cultural heritage. Language ideologies, educational policies, and pedagogical practices, as well as curriculum, often limit bilingual students' possibility to develop literacy skills in all their languages (Ducuara & Rozo, 2018; Weber & Horner, 2014; Worthy et al., 2016). It is surprising that in a country like the United States, where more than 300 languages are spoken, multilingual instruction is not mainstreamed in the country's educational system, while multilingualism seems to be the norm in most places around the world (Canagarajah, 2013; Carreira & Kagan, 2018; Heineke & Davin, 2020).

Benmamoun et al. (2013) posited that especially in the context of the United States, language exposure at home does not necessarily translate into children becoming bilingual. Thus, instruction, or at least access to literacy resources at school, in the students' heritage languages might be a necessary practice to increase students' chances of remaining proficient in their heritage language(s). Depending on the language policies implemented in schools, the ideological constructions enacted by the school personnel, and the instructional practices adopted by teachers, heritage language speakers could increase or decrease their proficiency skills in their heritage language, regardless of whether students are participating in a bi/multilingual education program (Keh & Stoessel, 2017; Leonard et al., 2020; Randolph, 2017; Valdés et al., 2008).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the factors that affect heritage language maintenance among adolescent Spanish heritage speakers. I investigate this by analyzing the support, or lack thereof, that the students receive at home, at school, and within their community for the development or maintenance of their heritage language. The research for

this study entails case studies of four adolescent high school students who identified as Spanish heritage speakers, with the goal of analyzing which practices and perspectives inform their decisions about language use, language learning, and the value they assign to each language that is part of their repertoire.

My own multilingualism and past work with heritage speakers (Duran, in press) influence this study as well. At the time of the study, I was a high school world languages teacher who has taught Spanish and French to heritage speakers of both languages and to additional language learners. The fact that I am multilingual and regularly maneuver with my languages on a daily basis, helps me relate to the practices enacted by the participants of this study.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the concern of heritage language maintenance, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Spanish heritage speakers maintain their proficiency in the heritage language?
  - a. What role do language ideologies play in heritage speakers' decisions about heritage language maintenance and use?
  - b. How do sociocultural, economic, and political factors influence heritage language speakers' language use practices?
2. How do schools, families, and the community support Spanish heritage speakers towards the maintenance and development of their heritage language skills?
  - a. What norms or policies are implemented at home and at school that affect language maintenance?
  - b. What resources are Spanish heritage speakers provided to help them develop their literacy skills in their heritage language at home, school, and community?

## **Significance of the Study**

This study attempts to highlight some potential explanations for heritage language loss or maintenance in the context of the United States, and more specifically the state of Texas, where a significant amount of the population identifies as Hispanic or Latinx. It will help fill the gap in research to explain societal factors that affect heritage speakers' investment into language maintenance in the context of the United States. Some researchers and experts in the field of heritage languages and its speakers already highlight the lack of empirical studies about heritage language speakers and how these speakers have developed and maintained their language proficiency skills all the way to adulthood (see Benmamoun et al., 2013; Polinsky, 2018).

Benmamoun et al. (2013) pointed out that a vast body of research reveals how “bilingual speakers in Europe tend to end up with stronger grammatical command of their two languages, including the minority language, compared to their counterparts in the United States” (p. 10). They add that:

The reasons for these differences are likely to be found in general attitudes towards bilingualism and multilingualism, language policies, and language practices and ideologies within the immigrant communities in Europe compared to the United States, as well as socioeconomic status and level of education of heritage language speakers in the two locations. (Benmamoun et al., 2013, p. 10)

Thus, this study aims to illustrate how those factors play a role in informing heritage speakers' decisions about language use and successful maintenance of the heritage language. Language policies and ideologies are indeed different on both sides of the Atlantic, but more so in the United States when compared to the rest of the world. The emphasis on monolingualism and the valorization of mainstream culture over diversity in the U.S. invites a critical analysis of

language ideologies and the role they play in shaping heritage speakers' identity. As a result, this study is not only significant, but necessary to transform discourses about linguistic diversity and inform educational practices for heritage speakers.

### **Operational Definitions**

I will use the following relevant terms, which I define below, for this study.

De facto bilingual education: Situation in which an individual receives their formal education in a language different from the language spoken at home but receives academic support in their home language through the home or community (Guzman, 2020).

English-medium schools: Schools where the language used for instruction is exclusively English, with the exception of foreign language courses (Fuller & Leeman, 2020).

Heritage language: A heritage language, also found in the literature as ancestral language (García, 2009; Weber & Horner, 2014), is a language different from the dominant language in a given social context (Abreu Fernandes, 2019). In the United States, despite not being an official language per se, English is the dominant language, and all other languages are considered heritage or minority languages (Leonard et al., 2020; Torres & Turner, 2017). Weber and Horner (2014) distinguished between two types of heritage languages, indigenous language (e.g., Native American languages, such as Navajo and Choctaw) and immigrant language (e.g., Spanish in the U.S.).

Heritage (language) speaker: A language speaker who has a link to either an indigenous language or an immigrant language (Weber & Horner, 2014).

Language ideologies: A set of beliefs and perceptions about language that affect one's treatment of the language and behavior towards the people who speak it (Weber & Horner, 2014).

Language investment: A learner's commitment to learning a language (Norton, 2000).

Language maintenance: The accomplishment of a language speaker of keeping or improving their skills in a language that is in a situation where it might be expected to be endangered due to the hegemony of a dominant language (see Deumert, 2011).

Latinx: Pan-ethnic identity based on a cultural, ethnic, or racial background connected to a Latin-American country. This ethnoracial identity is often linked to Spanish, which constitutes the racialization of the language (Fuller & Leeman, 2020).

Minority language: Is any language that is not the dominant language in a specific context (Benmamoun et al., 2013). Other terms used in the literature include home language and weaker language (Polinsky, 2018).

Monolingual: People who only possess active knowledge of one language (Polinsky, 2018).

Multilingual: A person with proficiency skills in more than one language. For the purpose of this study all heritage speakers will be considered bilinguals, although the range of proficiency varies widely from mere receptive ability to full fluency (Benmamoun et al., 2013). It is also important to distinguish between simultaneous and sequential bilinguals. The former develops proficiency skills and are exposed to two or more languages simultaneously. While the latter, learns one language first and others later in a sequential order (Montrul, 2008).

Language proficiency: Is the ability to understand or produce in a language at some level or capacity. Among the factors that affect proficiency levels are the amount of time the language is spoken, whether the person receives formal education in the language, and the age the person was when the person acquired the language (Polinsky, 2018).

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Language is central to human consciousness and cognition (Polinsky, 2018). It is also a social practice connected to a person's culture and identity (Leonard et al., 2020; McKinney & Norton, 2008; Norton, 2000). Language is used to communicate, make meaning, and is thus necessary for learning (Babino & Stewart, 2020). Because language is embedded in all social transactions, it determines the path that someone will follow in life, as well as the challenges and opportunities they might face. Polinsky (2018), for instance, stated that language knowledge has been associated with social mobility.

Children are exposed to language from birth, and it is in the home environment that they have the opportunity to acquire it (Polinsky, 2018). Generally, children will be exposed to the same language they hear at home in other environments. Nevertheless, due to the constant flow of migration, many children are socialized to a language at home that is different from the one that is dominant in their community (Canagarajah, 2013; Johnsen, 2021). Just to cite an example that is relevant in the context of this study, about 20% of U.S. residents speak a language other than English at home. This number will continue to increase as the nation keeps experiencing extraordinary periods of growth through immigration (Babino & Stewart, 2020; Carreira & Kagan, 2018).

It is immigrants and their children who by and large speak languages other than English in the U.S. (Carreira & Kagan, 2018). A vast majority of immigrant parents recognize the value of staying connected to their homelands through language. As a result, they implement language policies at home that respond to intergenerational communication needs, cultural preservation, and to prepare their children to be more competitive in the future. For example, Hernando-



Lloréns and Blair (2017) found in their study that Mexican parents were invested in developing their children's bilingualism and biliteracy because of their intentions of returning to Mexico. However, a consistent issue is that heritage language use keeps being constrained to the privacy of the home environment, which works in detriment to the potential development of language productive skills for heritage language speakers (Polinsky, 2018).

While some indigenous and immigrant languages have completely disappeared (Polinsky, 2018), other languages may face the same risk due to a decreasing number of speakers. Some scholars argue that even widely spoken languages, like the case of Spanish in the U.S., face this challenge because it continues dissipating every time it is passed to a new generation (Fuller & Leeman, 2020; Tse, 2001; Weber & Horner, 2014). The problem is that there is a lack of action on the part of decision makers aimed towards the preservation of such important assets. This might be explained by power dynamics and language ideologies that have a great influence on how languages are perceived, and therefore, on how policies are enacted and the resources that are dedicated for that purpose (Blackledge, 2000; Babino & Stewart, 2020).

It is not a secret that heritage language speakers tend to lose their communicative skills, often acquired in early childhood, once they begin formal education (see Johnsen, 2021). This is especially the case if a speaker does not have a strong literacy foundation in the heritage language (Fuller & Leeman, 2020). Oftentimes, this happens unintentionally, while other heritage speakers make an informed decision of letting go of the heritage language to prioritize acquisition of the dominant language (Cohen & Wickens, 2015).

The purpose of this chapter is to explore research on how heritage languages are affected by different social and political dynamics when seen through a critical lens. It also presents what other researchers have found through the study of heritage language speakers and becomes a

foundation for answering the research questions of this study. Below I discuss the theoretical framework used for this study as well as the previous theories and research related to heritage language speakers.

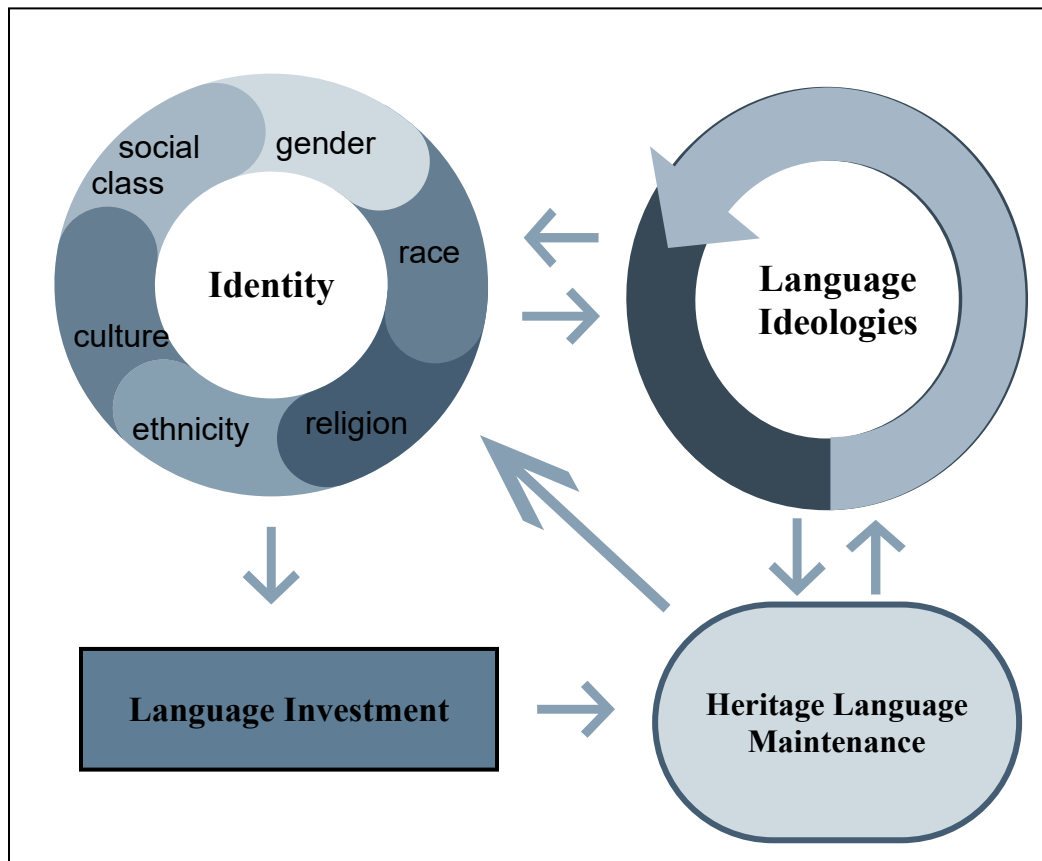
### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is guided by sociocultural theories, more specifically language ideologies and language identity theories. Social discourses about language influence language ideologies, which shape a person's identity and decisions around language practices. Given the relevance of the role that adopted ideologies and language identity play for heritage language speakers' investment into maintaining their heritage language, this study is rooted within a language identity theory using Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) proposed framework for studying identity. This identity analysis framework focuses on linguistic interactions as a product of discourse and sociocultural factors (Ali, 2021; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Thus, the data collected was analyzed looking into the interactional effects of language use and the language identity adopted by the participants for their heritage language maintenance efforts.

Figure 2.1 below is a logic model (Yin, 2018) that I created to represent the interconnection between language ideologies and identity, the factors that influence them, and how they have an effect in heritage language maintenance for heritage language speakers.

**Figure 2.1**

*Influence of Language Identity and Ideologies on Heritage Language Maintenance*



In this model, language ideologies are represented by a revolving arrow because of their ever-changing nature. That is, the ideas that constitute a person's set of beliefs about language are shaped by internalized discourses and can change at any time. Moving to the left side of the model, identity is another circle that is affected by language ideologies and vice-versa. Since identity is seen as fluid and can be changed through interaction, as Ali (2021, p. 431) explained, “these facets of identity are embedded in each other and not necessarily separable.” In this figure, only a few facets (e.g., gender, race, social class, etc.) were represented for illustration purposes. Nevertheless, the whole spectrum of a person's identity must be considered. Then, if

the different sociocultural factors and interactions that shape the learner's identity help create a positive perception of the heritage language this will produce the agency or investment that the learner needs to fulfill their heritage language maintenance goal. At the same time, heritage language maintenance affects a person's language ideologies and identity. As a result, heritage speakers' decisions and investment into learning or maintaining the language can change throughout their lives. For example, a Spanish heritage speaker who has lost proficiency in the language can detach from the Hispanic or Latinx ethnic identity and thus not invest more resources into trying to recover that cultural capital. Notwithstanding, the opposite might also happen, where they want to reconnect with their ethnic identity and thus invest into relearning the language, like in Hsieh et al.'s (2020) study, where some Asian-Americans felt bad for losing the language and wanted to relearn it.

### **Language Ideologies Theory**

Language ideologies are defined in Song's (2019) study as "conceptualizations about language shared by members of a group for rationalizing or justifying their way of using language" (p. 255). Language ideologies are internalized ideas about languages, speakers, and discursive practices that are often charged with stereotypes and prejudices (Polinsky, 2018; Weber & Horner, 2014). Language ideologies that define a correct use of a language shadow the practices of linguistically diverse students such as heritage speakers (Ortega, 2020). For instance, several studies that analyzed language practices among Latinx, have found that some heritage language speakers felt insecure not only when speaking the heritage language in front of monolingual English speakers, but also when speaking in the presence of native speakers, because they felt they were being judged on the correctness of the language, which is also a social construction (Pascual y Cabo et al., 2017; Worthy et al., 2016).

When it comes to Spanish heritage speakers in the United States, they have to constantly negotiate their identity in the different environments in which they interact (i.e., home, school/work, community) as well as the way they express themselves in front of others, especially in the heritage language. Children from immigrant families find themselves often contesting socially ascribed identities that their families, friends, teachers, employers, and society in general have assigned to them based on origin, cultural background, beliefs, appearance, or language practices (Fuller & Leeman, 2020). What heritage speakers learn about how they are perceived and the expectations that those around them have for them, shape their identity and impact their decisions about language. For instance, if a parent tells a heritage Spanish speaker that they have a strange accent when they speak Spanish, this heritage speaker might lose motivation and stop speaking Spanish all along because of that comment. Ali's (2021) study presented a similar type of situation, where heritage speakers were being teased by other heritage speakers and family members because of their accents and for practicing translanguaging and code-mixing.

### **Language Identity Theory**

Drawing from sociocultural linguistics theory that ties together language, culture, and society, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) built their framework of language and identity around the following five principles:

- First, identity is the product of linguistic and other semiotic practices;
- Second, identities encompass macro-level demographic categories, local cultural positions, and changing roles;
- Third, identity relations emerge in interactions;
- Fourth, identities are intersubjectively constructed, and;

- Fifth, identity is in part intentional, in part habitual, in part a negotiation, in part a construct of others' perceptions, and in part a product of larger ideological processes and structures.

In summary, these principles establish that identity is a social and cultural phenomenon, and as such, is constantly changing. In the same manner, Norton (2000) discussed how identity is a socially situated construct that affects language acquisition and investment. In the context of analyzing identity in language and literacy education, McKinney and Norton (2008) posited that:

The foregrounding of identity in language and literacy education has led to a much more sophisticated understanding of language learners that locates them in the social, historical, political, and cultural context in which learning takes place and explores how learners negotiate and sometimes resist the diverse positions those contexts offer them.  
(p. 192)

In another study, Darvin and Norton (2014) concluded that sociopolitical factors such as social class and access to educational opportunities played a significant role on learning outcomes for a group of immigrant students. These findings are supported by Krashen's (1996) review of several quantitative studies that showed a significant effect of socioeconomic status on the academic achievement of emergent bilinguals.

This dynamic approach to identity allows researchers and educators to critically analyze the decisions that multilingual students make about their languages. Many studies within the second language acquisition field have used this theory, with a particular focus on emergent bilinguals and their journey towards English acquisition (McKinney & Norton, 2008; Menken, 2013; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Norton, 2000). However, studies that use this approach to

investigate how heritage speakers construct and negotiate their heritage identities and how this influences heritage language maintenance are scarce (see Ali, 2021).

### **Language Investment Theory**

Norton (2000) and McKinney and Norton (2008) explored the connection between identity and language learning with reference to motivation or language investment. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital, they argued that language learners can have less or more motivation to learn the language depending on the value they ascribe to it. That is, if learners perceive that they will acquire certain symbolic or material resources from learning the language they will be more invested, because they see a potential return to their investment, such as membership to a group or better job opportunities (Norton & McKinney, 2011). This provides another lens to analyze heritage language maintenance.

It is a general assertion that being multilingual is beneficial; however, it is important to investigate whether heritage speakers see value in learning and maintaining proficiency in their heritage language, especially for how they envision their future selves and whether they can capitalize on the benefits of being bilingual. Now that I have established the theoretical framework, below I discuss some seminal scholarship about heritage language speakers and heritage language maintenance that inform the relevance of this topic and highlight the need for this study in the field of literacy and education.

### **Heritage Language Speakers**

Heritage language speakers are those who speak a native or home language that is different from their community's dominant language (Abreu Fernandes, 2019; Beaudrie, 2020; Kwon, 2017). This group faces a difficult decision throughout their lives. That decision is whether to maintain and develop their heritage language skills or to forgo the heritage language

and just focus on the dominant language of the community where they live. Their decision is affected by the environment that surrounds them and a variety of socio-economic and political factors (Keh & Stoessel, 2017; Reese & Goldenberg, 2006; Sevinc & Dewaele, 2018; Velázquez, 2017). The reality is that many children and adults who are born within families where the language spoken at home is different from the dominant societal language seem to be losing proficiency skills in their heritage language (see Cohen & Wickens, 2015). As a result, many heritage language speakers lose the opportunity to reap the many benefits that have been associated with the maintenance of a heritage language and multilingualism, including cognitive, social, and economic gains (Babino & Stewart, 2017; Reese & Goldenberg, 2006), although the economic benefits might be contested (see Gándara, 2015).

According to Cohen and Wickens (2015), one factor that determines whether a person can be called a heritage language speaker or learner is the language practices that they enact in their everyday lives. In the context of the United States, Torres and Turner (2017) defined heritage language speakers as “either individuals from homes where a language other than English is spoken or individuals with in-depth exposure to a language other than English” (p. 837). Thus, regardless of whether the person can communicate in the language or not, the fact that they are constantly exposed to it can determine whether they are considered heritage speakers. Heritage language speakers have also been positioned in a continuum of categories based on the status of the language they speak in the majority language community and their mastery of the language (Keh & Stoessel, 2017).

Polinsky (2018) provided some examples of the terminology that has been used to label heritage speakers, such as balanced versus unbalanced bilinguals, productive versus receptive bilinguals, and the continuum of acrolectal, mesolectal, and basilectal speakers. This last



classification positions heritage speakers in a category based on what they are able to understand and produce in comparison to baseline speakers of the language. That is, acrolectal speakers' language skills are the closest to the baseline, the first-generation immigrant speakers of the language who learned it in the country of origin, while basilectal speakers are on the opposite end of the continuum, that is, those who learn the language outside of the homeland (Polinsky, 2018).

When heritage language speakers begin attending school their literacy skills in the heritage language might be at different points in the spectrum of linguistic development (Carreira & Kagan, 2018; Leonard et al., 2020; Ortega, 2020). For example, some might speak the language, but do not know how to write it; some might be at advanced proficiency level knowing how to write it, read it, speak it, and comprehend when listening; but some might just comprehend some of it, but are not able to produce it at all (Leonard et al., 2020; Polinsky, 2018). Notwithstanding, previous research has shown that those who can process information in more than one language tend to develop more flexible thinking, which is essential for problem solving. An important body of research has also found that multilingual students tend to outperform monolingual students in various cognitive functions (Leonard et al., 2020). Still, an anglonormative, monolingual, and monoglossic perspective is what prevails in the United States (Babino & Stewart, 2020; Weber & Horner, 2014). Below, to continue analyzing this issue, I present certain intricacies related to the benefits of heritage language maintenance and effects of heritage language loss, both discussed extensively in the literature.

### **Benefits of Maintaining a Heritage Language**

Various research studies report that speaking a heritage language helps promote personal and cultural identity, as well as to preserve important family relationships and to build social

capital (Abreu Fernandes, 2019; Keh & Stoessel, 2017; Leonard et al., 2020; Norton, 2000; Pascual y Cabo et al., 2017; Velázquez, 2017). Additionally, if heritage language speakers manage to become proficient in both the majority and the minority language, they can also reap the economic benefits of bi/multilingualism (Reese & Goldenberg, 2006), such as stipends, bonuses or a higher pay rate. While all the above are associated with the successful maintenance of the heritage language, losing a heritage language is linked to negative social, emotional, cognitive, and educational development effects (Babino & Stewart, 2017; Keh & Stoessel, 2017). Below I discuss the connections between heritage language maintenance with culture and identity, socio-emotional health, and perceived economic gains. An argument about the cognitive benefits of maintaining the heritage language will be presented later in this chapter.

### ***Culture and Identity***

Heritage language speakers often find themselves between two worlds but feel like they do not belong to either (Leonard et al., 2020). They often have to assimilate to the mainstream culture while dealing with their home cultural values, which might be completely different. As Geerlings et al. (2015) study showed, some narratives of self are linked to cultural and linguistic identities. Weber and Horner (2014) added that “all the languages or varieties that we use have both instrumental and identity functions” (p. 82). Norton (2013) defined identity as “the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how that person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 4). When discussing the relationship of language and identity, she then contended that a person’s investment into a language depends on the resources that are anticipated as a result of acquiring such cultural capital (Norton, 2000, 2016).

Going beyond Norton's definition, a person's identity is not only affected by self-perception, but also on how others perceive them. Thus, Weber and Horner (2014) distinguished between two types of identities, that is, achieved and ascribed. On one hand, the achieved identity is how you see yourself. On the other hand, an ascribed or imposed identity is how people see you. Ascribed identities are important because they affect heritage speakers' decisions about language use. In multilingual settings, an individual might feel tied to more than one language and cultural identity. Multilingual youth have an agility to use their linguistic repertoire to represent their language abilities to be ascribed the identity that they desire. Sometimes, they do this by language-crossing or code-switching (see Weber & Horner, 2014, p. 91).

Leonard et al. (2020) proclaimed that the acquisition and maintenance of a heritage language not only helps heritage speakers to build their identity, but also to develop a connection with their ancestry. Similarly, Jaumont (2017) posited that there is a higher motivation for heritage speakers to learn the language when it is attached to cultural traditions that help foster a sense of belonging to that particular heritage group.

In Kwon's (2017) research study, the mothers of Japanese and Korean heritage speakers considered that maintaining the heritage language was necessary to keep their children connected to their culture. They thought this knowledge was required because despite living in the United States they maintained a strong connection to their home culture by frequently traveling to their homelands to visit family for extended periods of time (e.g., all summer break). Building on this argument, Pascual y Cabo et al. (2017) found in their study that community engagement with other speakers of the heritage language made participants (i.e., Spanish heritage speakers) reconnect with their Hispanic identity. In another study, Anderson-Mejías (2018) indicated that after finishing a Spanish class as a heritage language course, heritage language students

expressed their desire to further explore and compare different Hispanic countries' cultures as a way to help them connect with their Hispanic identity. The students also expressed a desire for more interaction and the creation of a Spanish language community.

### ***Socio-Emotional Health***

Many heritage language speakers feel insecure when speaking in public (Pascual y Cabo et al., 2017). In Pascual y Cabo et al.'s (2017) study, participants believed that in their homes there would not be any judgments on the way they spoke the language because they were in a familiar space. However, when speaking their heritage language in public they feared being judged by others because they did not know if they were speaking the language correctly. To avoid judgment and ethnic identification many heritage language speakers shift to the majority language and culture. In an empirical research study Geerlings et al. (2015) found that heritage language use starts to decline from early to late adolescence for heritage language speakers, and the significance of this trend is even higher for the Spanish speaking group when compared to Asian adolescents. This realization calls for more research to analyze the effect of cultural identity among different ethnic groups and whether that influences the value attributed to heritage language maintenance.

Research that compares heritage speakers to non-heritage speakers in the language learning classroom shows how the needs, perceptions, and expectations of both groups differ (Torres & Turner, 2017). Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (2016) highlighted one important distinction between heritage language learners and non-heritage students. They found that besides the evident difference of language usage habits, there are important socio-affective variables that will manifest differently on heritage language speakers and second language learners. They posited that efforts towards achieving legitimacy as users of the language, judgements about the

linguistic norms due to the different varieties, and obstacles to interaction, including social inhibitions and anxiety, are elements that cause more concerns among heritage speakers.

Opposite to general perception, heritage language learners experience high levels of anxiety and face insecurities in the language classroom. In an experimental research study of Chinese heritage speakers taking heritage language classes in college, Xiao and Wong (2014) found that although heritage language learners are generally less anxious in the language classroom when compared to non-native speakers, they do experience some level of anxiety given the general perception and expectation that because they are heritage language speakers their performance needs to be better. More than 40% of the participants in this study experienced some level of anxiety in the language classroom, especially when they had to perform reading and writing tasks (Xiao & Wong, 2014). In this regard, more research using a qualitative approach could be used to dig deeper into the causes producing that type of anxiety among heritage speakers.

Equally important, in a research study of Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands, Sevinc and Dewaele (2018) found that anxiety was also prevalent in the daily lives of heritage language speakers when they had to communicate with people outside of their familial circle. Their findings also revealed that anxiety levels differed between generations and varied depending on the context in which any of their languages had to be used. For instance, it produced more anxiety for first-generation immigrants to speak the majority language in the new country, the Netherlands. While for the third generation, who was more fluent in the majority language, levels of anxiety were higher when they visited their grandparents' home country and had to speak their heritage language. All of this goes back to perceived societal expectations that heritage language speakers have.

### *Economic Advantages*

Bilingualism is often associated with better paid jobs and employment opportunities (Leonard et al., 2020). Thus, it makes people wonder why many heritage speakers do not capitalize on this asset that would guarantee a better socio-economic status by just developing literacy skills, or at least oracy, in a language that heritage speakers have access to as a birthright. The reality, though, is that it is not that simple. In fact, Gándara (2015) asserted that many research projects on this topic showed that bilingual people earn less than monolingual people in similar jobs. This might be attributed to the dominance of English in some important enclaves of government and the overall economy. She further explained that most research about the benefits of bilingualism in the job market has been focusing on the advantages of learning English for non-native English speakers in the U.S. market. She also denoted that the job market has evolved and became quite strained in the last decades, and how, in a market characterized by high youth unemployment, the priority for bilingual speakers was no longer on getting paid more, but on getting or retaining jobs based on language skills (Gándara, 2015).

In a different study, after conducting regression analysis to find out whether students' bilingual proficiency has an impact in their earnings, Agirdag (2013) found that “balanced bilingual students earn significantly more as adults at the beginning of their career than those linguistic minorities who were dominantly proficient in English only” (p. 449). Notwithstanding, it is important to note that Agirdag was talking about balanced bilinguals, who by Polinsky's (2018) definition have advanced proficiency in both their heritage and the dominant language.

It is undeniable that a significant number of heritage language speakers want to maintain their first language. They recognize the value it has for them in all aspects of life, but more so for preserving their cultural identity (Gollan et al., 2014; Sevinc & Dewaele, 2018; Velázquez,

2017). They also understand that the majority language is necessary to survive and communicate in the community where they now belong (Cohen & Wickens, 2015; Pascual y Cabo et al., 2017). For this reason, maintaining the heritage language becomes a challenge in which the different social, political, and economic factors play an important role. Consequently, Beaudrie et al. (2019) suggested that heritage language speakers need to become critically aware about their heritage language, which involves positive behavior towards maintenance and advocacy for the heritage language.

### **Heritage Language Loss**

Some studies carried out in this field have a particular focus on investigating what factors contribute to developing proficiency in or maintaining a heritage language (Gollan et al., 2014), while others' center of attention was on explaining heritage language loss or attrition and language shift. Cohen and Wickens (2015) defined heritage language attrition as “the loss of one’s ability to communicate with one’s own family and by extension, the loss of one’s own culture” (p. 11). Although this definition sounds a little radical, there is truth in what it states.

Researchers who explore heritage language loss and its consequences agree that losing a heritage language can create a socio-emotional burden on an individual (Cohen & Wickens, 2015; Keh & Stoessel, 2017; Torres & Turner, 2017). This phenomenon affects family interactions and integrity, language development, educational performance, and social communication practices. Thus, to counter these negative effects, some researchers suggest that heritage language maintenance practices and policies must be prioritized to promote and develop programs that best serve heritage speakers (Fuller & Leeman, 2020; Leonard et al., 2020).

### ***Factors Influencing Heritage Language Loss***

In their work about community context for literacy development, Reese and Goldenberg (2006) argued that language behavior cannot be studied in a vacuum without considering the feelings of fear, the subordination, or discrimination experienced by minority language speakers. They asserted that legislation from the past that banned bilingual instruction and practices, such as being punished for using a minority language in schools, is an example of a factor that has contributed to subtractive language ideologies, which then have translated into heritage speakers' decision to renounce their heritage language.

Beaudrie et al. (2019) added that minority languages are often devalued in the eyes of the public in the majority culture. They also indicated that the sociopolitical relationship between the majority and minority language influences this perception, especially when the majority language is the only one receiving a legitimate status. For example, Kaveh (2018) explained how the political tensions between the United States and Iran have caused a wave of discrimination against Iranians, to which they have responded by not self-identifying as Iranians in public, and that involved not using their native language. These types of circumstances have been proven to alienate the use of heritage languages exclusively to the safe environment of the home (Reese & Goldenberg, 2006).

Heritage language loss has become so common in the United States that some languages are at risk of becoming endangered in this country (Weber & Horner, 2014). For many heritage speakers, the dominance of English in their lives has resulted in language shifts. Leonard et al. (2020) declared that for native speakers of other languages receiving instruction only in English has come at the expense of losing their heritage language. Thus, the lack of bilingual programs and the adoption of pedagogical practices that do not welcome the use of home languages in



English-medium schools is another contributing factor to heritage language shift or loss. The ideal scenario is for heritage language learners to have access to bilingual education programs that are tailored to respond to their specific needs (Canagarajah, 2013; Carreira & Kagan, 2018; García, 2009; Tse, 2001). As Tse (2001) argued, the implementation of such programs has been shown to reverse heritage and indigenous languages loss. However, the few that are available in the United States have been possible through families' and communities' activism (Carreira & Kagan, 2018; Jaumont, 2017); while policymakers at the federal level keep failing at creating national policies that benefit multilingual students and guarantee equity for this marginalized group of the population.

### ***Effects of Language Loss on Heritage Language Speakers***

Many researchers who explored heritage language loss and its consequences agreed that losing a heritage language can emotionally and socially affect an individual (Cohen & Wickens, 2015; Keh & Stoessel, 2017; Torres & Turner, 2017). Leonard et al. (2020) pointed out that heritage language learning helps children with identity formation. They added that the “loss of a heritage language is shown to harm students’ sense of identity and belonging” (Leonard et al., 2020, p. 23), and provided some examples on how some adolescents experienced mental health issues because of this situation.

Some adult heritage speakers who have experienced language loss tend to associate it with discomfort and ethnic dissociation (Hsieh et al., 2020). That discomfort is generated by feeling disconnected from other people who have the same ethnic background and have managed to maintain their proficiency in the heritage language. Many heritage speakers often feel embarrassed by identifying with a racial group because they do not speak the language. As a result, to avoid these uncomfortable situations and to connect with their heritage identity, some

heritage speakers decide to take courses of their heritage language in college (Carreira & Kagan, 2018).

In the same manner, as reported in Hsieh et al.'s (2020) study, some parents expressed feelings of guilt and regret for not being able to transfer their cultural values to their children due to language loss. They also expressed a concern for weakened family relationships due to language barriers (e.g., grandchildren not being able to talk to their grandparents). In the same study, others declared experiencing social isolation for not being able to participate in activities that required the use of the heritage language (Hsieh et al., 2020). These stories are reflected in many other studies as the journey and struggles of many heritage speakers, who have experienced language loss.

### **Heritage Language Literacy Development**

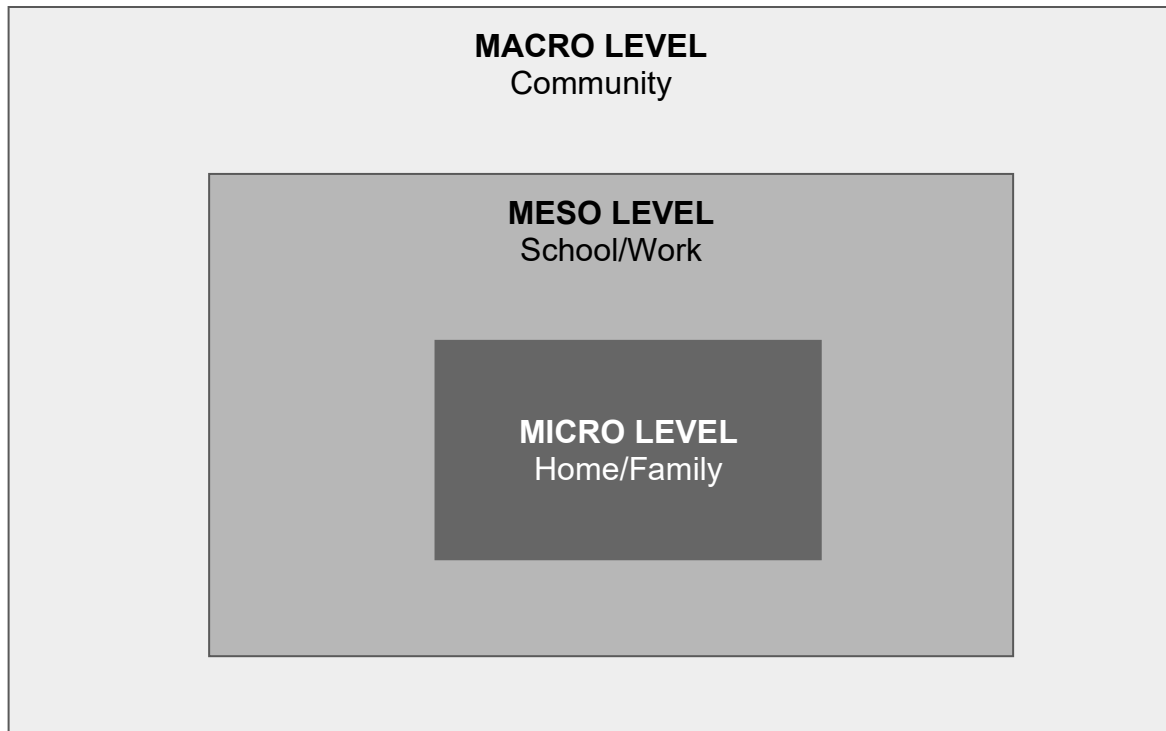
Family involvement in the process of heritage language transfer has considerable implications regarding heritage language maintenance (Abreu Fernandes, 2019; Gollan et al., 2014; Kaveh, 2018; Kwon, 2017; Sevinc & Dewaele, 2018). The literature also suggests that educational institutions, from preschool programs all the way to college, play an important role in promoting practices that are pivotal for the development of proficiency in the heritage language (Carreira & Kagan, 2018). Last, but not least, perceptions that heritage language speakers have internalized due to social pressures, as well as their ability to integrate with their heritage language community, affect heritage language speakers' attitudes, and commitment towards maintaining the heritage language.

To facilitate analysis, literature and research findings in these three relevant areas have been organized within three levels as illustrated in Figure 2.2. The micro level refers to language and literacy practices enacted in the home or family environment. The meso level mainly

analyzes the reality of heritage speakers in the school or formal education environment. Finally, the macro level concentrates on community interactions and initiatives.

**Figure 2.2**

*Environments Shaping Heritage Language Speakers' Literacy Development*



### **Heritage Language Maintenance at Home**

Many families who have migrated internationally find themselves in a crossroads where they have to decide whether to fully acculturate into the receiving community or make efforts to maintain their family culture and identity in the new country. In this regard, most immigrant families share an understanding that preserving their cultural identity, which includes their heritage language, is a priority (Canagarajah, 2013; Kwon, 2017). They also believe cultural

values and traditions need to be transferred to the following generations to maintain a connection to their home country (Hsieh et al., 2020).

Heritage language speakers acquire the oral language system in their first language, which becomes a strong foundation for literacy development (Polinsky, 2018). It is through parents' interactions with children in the heritage language that the latter get to learn the structure of the language and to produce utterances that embed meaning. Parents become teachers of language, and their classroom is their home. Thus, they implement strategies for helping their children acquire what they understand is an important part of their identity (Abreu Fernandes, 2019).

### ***Families' Language Ideologies***

In Kwon's (2017) study on the beliefs of Asian immigrant mothers about their children's heritage language maintenance, the participants shared the strategies they use to help their children learn and increase their proficiency in the heritage language. For these mothers, maintaining the heritage language was necessary to keep their children connected to their culture. More importantly, it was a necessary skill to communicate with their extended family members still living in their home country, who did not speak any English. The lengths to which these Korean and Japanese mothers would go to help their children learn and increase proficiency in the language went from simple exposure at home through authentic literary resources to enrolling their children in school in their home countries during summer break.

This, however, did not guarantee that all their children would respond equally to such strategies. The findings suggested that results on using those strategies were mixed. In families with multiple children with access to the same resources and where the same strategies were used, one sibling succeeded in becoming proficient in the heritage language, while the other did

not achieve the intended skills level in the heritage language (Kwon, 2017). Nevertheless, there are other external factors into play including the child's intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for learning and maintaining the heritage language.

Conversely, Kaveh's (2018) research showed that when parents stop using the heritage language at home, due to the child's preference for the dominant language, it causes less exposure to the heritage language, and might result in a language shift or developing unbalanced bilingualism. Kaveh found that despite having a strong belief in the promotion of bilingualism, some parents who participated in the study stated that they would do whatever is best for their children's success. As a result, they would support language shifts, and let their children lose their heritage language at the expense of learning the majority language, which they argued was the one that they needed for school and social integration in the new community.

When immigrant parents decide that it is more important for their children to learn the majority language because it will facilitate acculturation, as well as a better academic performance and the potential for a better job opportunity in the future, they are indirectly contributing to heritage language attrition or loss (Sevinc & Dewaele, 2018). At the same time, those discourses are often adopted by their children and reproduced into the following generations, who might not even get any exposure to the language. In this regard, Cohen and Wickens (2015) found that many second generation-immigrants considered the majority language the main pathway to academic success and as a result prioritized its use over the heritage language.

Cekaite and Evaldsson (2019) studied multilingual play of diverse immigrant children in a Swedish preschool and emphasized that young children's heritage language interactions with peers and caregivers contributes to the rescaling of their heritage language. These researchers

confirm that adults, in particular, play an important role in reinforcing the value of speaking the native language even when they do not have any proficiency in it. In line with some of the findings from other studies cited in this section, they argue that if adults enact practices for the promotion of heritage language use in the environment that children play and communicate it can translate into a better chance of language maintenance in young children (Cekaite & Evaldsson, 2019).

### ***Home Literacies and Language Exposure***

Researchers studying family language policy for heritage language maintenance focused their attention on language use at home and how parents and other family members reinforce or undermine those policies (Abreu Fernandes, 2019; Kaveh, 2018; Kwon, 2017). Kaveh (2018) argued that extensive research on this topic has established how language practices at home are a good predictor of heritage language maintenance. In her research about family language policy of Iranian American families living in the Northeast of the United States she showed that there is a positive correlation between children's level of proficiency in the heritage language and family strict policies for using only the heritage language at home. In an experiment that intended to measure the number-of-speakers effect, Gollan et al. (2014) found that the ability to recognize words in the heritage language is improved if there are more constant interactions between a heritage language speaker during their early childhood with a broad number of speakers of their heritage language, which during those years would likely be family members or caregivers.

These findings are corroborated by other recent studies. For instance, in a case study about the heritage language practices between mother and child, Abreu-Fernandes (2019) revealed that adopting a family policy like “one parent one language” in a multilingual family encourages heritage language learning and the development of language learning strategies.

However, she pointed out that an adopted policy of using a language consistently by itself does not necessarily guarantee heritage language maintenance. She added that an understanding of the linguistic features to be taught to the child is necessary, which is more difficult to accomplish since most parents are not trained as language teachers. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the findings of this case study were possibly influenced by the socioeconomic status of the participants. That is, the parents were multicultural/multilingual, highly educated, upper middle-class individuals, and the mother was a foreign language teacher, factors that might have affected the findings, which cannot be generalized because of their specific characteristics.

Some research studies highlight how levels of proficiency in the heritage language tend to be higher for the oldest child compared to younger siblings, regardless of whether there is a strict family language policy (Keh & Stoessel, 2017; Kheirkhah & Cekaite, 2018; Kwon, 2017). Kheirkhah and Cekaite (2018) studied this topic and found that older siblings help their younger brothers and sisters socialize and learn the heritage language, but at the same time might contribute to language shift. By the time the younger siblings start acquiring language, the older child has already been exposed or has learned the majority language, and they tend to communicate to the younger siblings in that language. Moreover, once younger siblings start socializing outside of their homes (i.e., through formal schooling) there is a tendency for siblings to interact with each other only using the language spoken at school, and they only try to speak the heritage language when parents are present or involved in the conversation (Babino & Stewart, 2019).

When it comes to the effect that keeping in touch with members of the extended family has on heritage language maintenance, the relationship seems to be positive. A case study that focused on analyzing the language practices of three German American adult siblings throughout

their lives highlighted how maintaining communication with their parents and members of the extended family in the home country was necessary to keep their German language skills (Keh & Stoessel, 2017). Conversely, when children have low exposure to the heritage language at home and do not speak it with family members there is potential for heritage language loss (Kaveh, 2018).

Working on intergenerational transfer of cultural values and language skills requires additional personal effort and the need of a network of confounding factors, such as formal instruction in the heritage language, as well as access to learning resources, which would contribute to this goal. Something that deserves attention is that in most research studies discussed in this section the participants possess a similar socio-economic background (i.e., middle- or higher-income families, with well-educated parents), which might have contributed to their decisions and access to language maintenance resources (e.g., paying for private language lessons, traveling to home country, etc.). Therefore, more studies that include lower-income and less educated parents are needed to know to what extent the findings discussed here would be applicable to a wider and more diverse population.

Previous research findings suggest that parents need to make an intentional choice to adopt and implement a family language policy tailored for their particular needs and language maintenance goal if they want their children to acquire the heritage language and become bilingual. The policy will likely involve an exclusive use of the heritage language, as well as promoting reading and writing in such language at home (Abreu Fernandes, 2019; Kaveh, 2018; Keh & Stoessel, 2017; Kwon, 2017; Murillo, 2012). The findings of the studies analyzed in this section suggest that heritage language maintenance in the home environment is something that should not be considered in isolation. There are many social, economic, and political factors at



play that also influence heritage language maintenance. Even when families have the resources and use effective strategies for language maintenance, the results can be both, positive and negative.

### **Heritage Language Education**

In the United States, the field of education has been characterized by a lack of policies that support heritage language maintenance. What has been accomplished to support heritage speakers and children of immigrant families, such as bilingual programs, has been the product of extensive advocacy campaigns by grassroots organizations led by parents (Colomer & Bacon, 2020; Fuller & Leeman, 2020; Jaumont, 2017). However, there is a scarcity of policies that promote heritage language instruction or its inclusion in the curriculum and assessment at the federal or state level. The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 is the only federal policy that recognizes the disadvantages faced by language minority students and allocated funds for bilingual programs (Texas Education Agency, 2010). Notwithstanding, the priority of this and many other policies has always been to help students gain knowledge of the dominant language and not necessarily to promote biliteracy. In the same manner, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 only reinforced the primacy of English language proficiency through the provision of funds to states for assisting children with acquiring English proficiency and mastering academic content (Weber & Horner, 2014).

In the past, schools in the United States forced native speakers of other languages to only use English in order to assimilate students and force them to use the dominant language, while students who kept using their native languages were punished (Fuller & Leeman, 2020; Murillo, 2012). Educators, maybe unintentionally, promoted the misconception that if children continued to use the heritage language at home they would not perform well academically, and their

English acquisition would be lagging (Murillo, 2012). Such practice made many immigrant parents prioritize the use of English and harmed any attempts to maintain heritage languages and their transfer to future generations.

Many studies have shown that bilingual students tend to outperform monolinguals in many tasks that go beyond language (Babino & Stewart, 2017; Cummins, 2001; Krashen, 1996; Leonard et al., 2020) and attitudes towards bilingualism have evolved through time.

Notwithstanding, majority language hegemony prevails in educational institutions and everyday pedagogical practices (Babino & Stewart, 2020). Consequently, many heritage speakers confirm that after constant exposure to the majority language in schools their abilities to express themselves in the dominant language have surpassed their ability to communicate in the heritage language (Cohen & Wickens, 2015; Hsieh et al., 2020).

In the same manner, the misplacement of heritage speakers due to monolingual assessment practices, the lack of proper instruction, and the absence of progress monitoring in terms of the development of their heritage language skills, have led to heritage language attrition even in heritage speakers who were fully proficient during their early childhood (Hsieh et al., 2020). As a result, the role of schools on heritage language maintenance is strategic and distinctive. Below, there is a discussion on how different types of programs affect heritage speakers based on the practices enacted by the different educational stakeholders implementing them.

### ***Multilingual Programs***

Immigrant families tend to believe that multilingual programs are the panacea to the heritage language loss problem. Sadly, that is not the case. Murillo (2012) declared that despite receiving state funding for the implementation of bilingual programs, school districts in Texas

promote instruction aimed at English monolingualism. Heineke and Davin (2020) also described bilingual programs as deficient in terms of promoting bilingualism and stated that they are subtractive in nature, because they only use students' home language as a medium to gain English proficiency.

Dual language programs, as argued by Babino and Stewart (2017), fail to foster an environment where students' cultures and languages are mainstreamed to a point that guarantees bilingualism/multilingualism, instead of an eventual shift to the majority language. In particular, these researchers found that a group of bilingual (Spanish-English) students in a dual language program had a preference for using the dominant language in all types of settings despite being Spanish their native and first language. They argued that students viewed English monolingual staff in the school as the people with power (e.g., the school's principal and counselors) and automatically associated speaking English with success and status, especially because the monolingual Spanish speakers in their lives do not have the same level of authority or prestigious positions.

These researchers also pointed out that some school practices, such as the consistent use of English for the dissemination of information to students and parents, might have also influenced the students' shift to the majority language. Although they have access to both their languages at school, these students limit the use of the heritage language to the home environment, which goes against dual language programs' philosophy of promoting biliteracy (Babino & Stewart, 2017).

In the United States most dual language or bilingual programs do not continue beyond the elementary grade levels (Colomer & Bacon, 2020; Heineke & Davin, 2020; Polinsky, 2018). Afterwards, the choice of language courses for heritage speakers is often limited in most schools

to regular world languages courses, AP language courses, and occasionally, a heritage language class. Other times, when identified as heritage speakers, either at the middle or high school stage, counselors and teachers recommend a placement test so students can either test out of a language course or be placed at a higher level based on their proficiency. The problem with this process is that this type of testing does not pay attention to the specific language needs of heritage speakers, who often end up being misplaced.

Another topic of consideration regarding multilingual programs is the assessment of their effectiveness in promoting heritage language maintenance or biliteracy. Kirss et al. (2021) studied the success factors of multilingual programs and reported that “strong multilingual schools carried the enrichment ideology in their schools so that the presence of students of various cultural backgrounds was not seen as a problem but as an opportunity” (p. 16). Successful programs were also characterized for welcoming the use of students’ home languages and the inclusion of their culture in school activities. They equally emphasized that parents’ involvement, school adoption of a culturally responsive approach, the use of authentic materials, and the attention paid to prejudice reduction were among the factors that guarantee success in program implementation (Kirss et al., 2021).

If given the opportunity, heritage speakers are very likely to enroll in programs and classes tailored to respond to their need and desire of keeping and improving their literacy skills in their home language. They often want to master a high level of skills in the standardized version of their heritage language that would translate into a sentiment of accomplishment (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 2016); while at the same time guaranteeing more opportunities for their professional future (Kwon, 2017).

### *Heritage Language Programs*

Heritage language programs in the United States started about four decades ago with a push by teachers for courses tailored specifically for native Spanish speakers, because they understood that traditional foreign language courses did not meet the needs of heritage language speakers (Beaudrie, 2020; Jaumont, 2017; Polinsky, 2018). As the student population keeps diversifying and growing, so does the number of heritage language courses that are being offered in schools and higher education institutions (Beaudrie, 2020; Carreira & Kagan, 2018; Polinsky, 2018).

Teaching a heritage language class is a challenging task. Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (2016) stated that when teaching heritage speakers, there are specific factors that need to be considered. Among those are the levels of proficiency of students, the different varieties of the language present in the classroom, the amount of exposure and usage that heritage speakers have, and their engagement in literacy events. For example, in their analysis of the needs, perceptions, and expectations of Spanish heritage speakers they found that this group was especially concerned with attaining better skills in writing, which is similar to Xiao and Wong's (2014) findings with Chinese heritage language learners, and Torres and Turner's (2017) with Spanish speakers.

Heritage language teachers often try to teach a standard or academic version of the language. This is often faced with resistance from heritage language learners who consider that the language variety they speak is more appropriate or who have learned variations to the linguistic norms of the language (Randolph, 2017). Another challenge teachers of heritage speakers face, is the adequate creation of cultural competence through language instruction (Anderson-Mejías, 2018) for second and third generation immigrants. This might be particularly overwhelming for those teachers who are not native speakers of the language (Randolph, 2017)

and those who have never experienced the culture of the heritage language being taught. Furthermore, Beaudrie et al. (2019) suggested that heritage language speakers should not only receive instruction about language, but also on the contextual factors that affect their heritage language and the majority language relationship in the place where they live so they can become more critically aware of how that interaction affects the development of their cultural identity.

A study that explored the insights of heritage Spanish speakers, who took online Spanish classes, highlighted how important interaction is for heritage language students (Anderson-Mejías, 2018). Through the analysis of end-of-course evaluations Anderson-Mejías (2018) focused on how these learners perceived their specific language learning needs. The results indicated that heritage language students wanted to explore and compare different Spanish cultures and the varieties of the Spanish language. They also expressed a desire for more interaction and the creation of a language community, something that the online environment limited for them. That need for interaction is very characteristic of language learning and use.

It has also been widely documented by research that heritage language learners taking language classes need to be seen through a different lens when compared to additional language learners (e.g., Anderson-Mejías, 2018; Randolph, 2017; Torres & Turner, 2017; Xiao & Wong, 2014), and the teaching approaches used for this group need to also be different in order to respond to their specific needs (Beaudrie, 2020; Cekaite & Evaldsson, 2019; Kirss et al., 2021; Leonard et al., 2020; Randolph, 2017).

### ***English-Medium Schools***

Immigrant children and heritage speakers who attend English-medium schools understand that they need to learn the majority language to be successful academically, to complete schoolwork, and socially, to interact with their peers (Cohen & Wickens, 2015). If

these students do not find classmates with whom to speak their heritage language at school, they will eventually lose interest in maintaining the heritage language because they might not find it useful for their social and academic goals. Furthermore, in some cases when immigrant children are instructed to prioritize exclusively the acquisition of the majority language, a language shift becomes imminent if there are not mechanisms in place to help them develop their heritage language proficiency (Babino & Stewart, 2017; Cohen & Wickens, 2015; Keh & Stoessel, 2017).

It might sound counterintuitive to think that English-medium schools can help promote heritage language maintenance. However, it is important to remember that bilingual programs and heritage language courses are not widely available in the United States and do not encompass all languages spoken by the different heritage speakers' communities. Thus, the implementation of additive instructional strategies that welcome the languages of students in the classroom despite being a class taught in the dominant language is probably the best option for the underserved heritage speakers that do not have access to other types of programs.

In Keh and Stoessel's (2017) study one of the participants stated that despite attending an English-medium school she had a teacher at school that supported her biliteracy development by providing resources to use in and outside of school in her heritage language. This study shows that supporting heritage language speakers requires teachers to take a stance of affirmative action to promote language diversity and the use of minority languages in academic sites, such as García et al.'s (2017) proposal of using translanguaging practices in the classroom to enhance the language and cognitive skills of heritage speakers.

As stated above, heritage speakers attending English-medium school might have the opportunity to study their heritage language and acquire literacy skills in it by taking the language as a foreign language course, if their school offers it. However, pedagogical approaches

for teaching heritage speakers must be different to those used for regular language learners (Pascual y Cabo et al., 2017; Xiao & Wong, 2014). Teachers of heritage speakers need to understand the socio-affective variables that come into play when teaching this population, and in response adopt a curriculum and teaching strategies accommodated to their specific needs (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 2016; Kirss et al., 2021).

The literature suggests that to better serve heritage speakers in English-medium schools it is imperative that schools stakeholders promote and implement additive practices that include and enhance the development of heritage or minority languages in this important setting (Heineke & Davin, 2020; Valenzuela, 1999). First, perspectives need to shift about the hegemony of the majority language in the classroom, especially when it is considered the only legitimate language of instruction. Second, necessary support and resources need to be offered by teachers of the different subject areas when heritage speakers are new to the country, thus in the process of learning the majority language. In this particular context, Garcia et al. (2017) suggested that teachers must allow students to use their full linguistic repertoire to complete class activities. They supported the use of practices such as translanguaging, code-switching, and code-mixing to allow heritage language learners to demonstrate their skills by not being limited by a skill that they have not completely developed (i.e., proficiency in the majority language).

In summary, depending on the practices adopted by teachers in academic institutions, either additive or subtractive, heritage language speakers could increase or decrease their proficiency skills in their heritage language (Keh & Stoessel, 2017; Randolph, 2017). At the same time, lack of access to resources that help develop the heritage language proficiency is a major contributor to the majority language becoming the dominant one and heritage language loss for heritage speakers (Cohen & Wickens, 2015).



## **Heritage Languages in the Community**

At the community level it becomes even more challenging for heritage speakers to enact practices that promote language maintenance. For immigrants who speak a minority language it is often difficult to juggle between their native language and learning the majority language. In their work about community context for literacy development, Reese and Goldenberg (2006) argued that language behavior cannot be studied in a vacuum without considering the feelings of fear, the subordination, or discrimination experienced by minority language speakers. They asserted that past legislation that banned bilingual instruction and practices in schools are examples of policies that have contributed to a subtractive language ideology, and thus, to resistance from heritage speakers to use the language openly in public.

Beaudrie et al. (2019) added that minority languages are often devalued in the eyes of the public in the majority culture. They indicated that the sociopolitical relationship between the majority and minority language influences this perception, especially when the majority language is the only one receiving a legitimate status. For example, as explained before with Kaveh's (2018) U.S. and Iran example, political tensions between two countries can influence language use practices. These factors have been proven to alienate the use of heritage language exclusively to the home environment, where heritage speakers might feel is safe to use it (Reese & Goldenberg, 2006).

Weber and Horner (2014) and Weekly (2020) critiqued how the education of multilingual children in their mother tongues or heritage languages has been excluded from the mainstream education system. As a result, many community organizations (e.g., churches, community centers, ethnic groups' association, etc.) who promote and recognize the importance of the preservation of heritage languages have created small heritage language schools or offer courses

in their centers that heritage language speakers would attend after school or during weekends to receive formal instruction in the language (Weber & Horner, 2014). Nevertheless, not all communities implement this type of initiative and some languages are consistently left out (Carreira & Kagan, 2018). Weekly (2020) and Borowczyk (2020) attributed this problem to ideological constructions and the status of the minority language in the wider society.

The findings of this literature review illustrate how heritage language maintenance is influenced by the overall investment that the family, educational institutions, and society in general place into the heritage language speaker. The family as the first socializing environment for acquiring and developing the language plays a pivotal role. The adopted home language policy and the number of interactions that children have with family members who speak the heritage language will have an impact in language maintenance (Abreu Fernandes, 2019; Kaveh, 2018; Keh & Stoessel, 2017; Kheirkhah & Cekaite, 2018; Kwon, 2017). Then, when children go to school, they will constantly use language, but this time it will more likely be the majority language rather than the heritage language.

Babino and Stewart (2017), Cekaite and Evaldsson (2019), Cohen and Wickens (2015), Randolph (2017), and Valenzuela (1999) conducted research with heritage language speakers in school settings and concluded that subtractive practices that privilege the use of the majority language in educational institutions are causing language shifts among heritage language speakers. Finally, it is equally important to consider societal perceptions on the use of heritage languages. Researchers who studied this context noted that prejudices, stereotypes, and discrimination associated with particular minority languages and cultural groups inhibit interactions in the heritage language and as a result contribute to language loss (Beaudrie et al., 2019; Kaveh, 2018; Reese & Goldenberg, 2006).

## **Research Gaps**

This literature review shows that there is a lack of research in the field of heritage language maintenance that focuses on the study of adolescent Spanish heritage speakers and the practices influenced by their identity and language ideologies, as shown in Figure 2.1, and discussed in this chapter. In the context of the United States, where the Hispanic and Latinx population is the largest immigrant group, it is concerning that professionals in the field of literacy and language have not paid much attention to this topic. Moreover, research that uses a critical approach by questioning language ideologies and practices, using socio-constructivist approaches is scarce.

Table 2.1 below summarizes the most relevant and recent research studies that have focused on heritage language speakers. A quick review of this table will gather support for the need of this study, since it might provide important insights for families, schools, education policymakers, and other stakeholders with a special interest on this topic.

**Table 2.1***Relevant Existing Research on Heritage Language Speakers*

Research Study	Research Question(s)	Participants/ Methodology/ Data	Findings
Cohen, J., & Wickens, C.M. (2015). Speaking English and the loss of heritage language. <i>The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language</i> , 18(4), 1-18.	1. How and in what ways do the students respond to the focus of Learning in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom? 2. What role do these perspectives play on their views of English and Spanish broadly?	3 adolescent immigrants high school students (long term English learners)  Case study  Five semi-structured interviews	For these heritage speakers English played a very important role, academically and socially. English surpassed their ability to communicate in Spanish (e.g., they had difficulty translating between languages).  They recognized that there was a need to enhance and maintain their heritage language.
Babino, A., & Stewart, M. A. (2017). "I like English better": Latino dual language students' investment in Spanish, English, and Bilingualism. <i>Journal of Latinos and Education</i> , 16(1), 18-29.	This study investigates the language preferences of a group of fifth graders that attend a Spanish-English one-way dual language program.	Mixed methods  Surveys and interviews	The researchers found that the children preferred to use English socially and academically, although their first language was Spanish. In part, this was due to perceptions that English speakers were better positioned role models for the children, and English was prioritized at school.

Research Study	Research Question(s)	Participants/ Methodology/ Data	Findings
Keh, M. L., & Stoessel, S. (2017). How first is first? Revisiting language maintenance and shift and the meaning of L1/L2 in three case studies. <i>International Multilingual Research Journal</i> , 11(2), 101-114.	Investigate the relationship of languages within one individual and the respective weight those languages carry for the individual during phases of his or her life. The effect of teacher support in schools on language maintenance and shift.	3 bilinguals (German-English), adult siblings from a German/Polish family that immigrated to the U.S. in 1951. 1. Angelika (71) - born in Germany 2. Margarete (65) - born in Germany 3. Peter (64) - born in the U.S.  Case study	All three subjects indicated a preference for English use unless they were visiting Germany or when having contact with family. German was replaced by the majority language. Participants used code-mixing (i.e., the use of both languages at once), as a way of avoiding the loss of their heritage language. Presumably subtractive language learning environments may not always result in subtractive bilingualism. In terms of attitude, they felt that their heritage language was a reason to feel pride and was part of their identity. The maintenance of the heritage language among the 3 siblings followed different patterns.
Pascual y Cabo, D., & Prada, J. (2017). Effects of community service-learning on heritage language learners' attitudes toward their language and culture. <i>Foreign Language Annals</i> , 50(1), 71-83.	Examine the effects of participation in a community service program of Spanish heritage language learners and their attitudes towards their language and culture.	A total of 42 Spanish learners were divided into two groups: those who participated in the community service project and those who did not  Mixed methods / Survey and students' reflections	Initially participants reported that HL used was mostly confined to the house (i.e., a private environment). They also said that they do not feel comfortable speaking it in public, although it was their language of preference (and they do have a very positive attitude towards Spanish). After the CSL participants gained confidence in using their heritage language in new contexts outside of the home. The CSL reinforced the value of bilingualism and biculturalism.

Research Study	Research Question(s)	Participants/ Methodology/ Data	Findings
Torres, K., & Turner, J.E. (2017). Heritage language learners' perceptions of acquiring and maintaining the Spanish Language. <i>International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism</i> , 20(7), 837-853.	<p>1. How Hispanic heritage language speakers perceive learning the Spanish language and the extent to which the Spanish language was seen as being part of their ethnic identity?</p> <p>2. How Hispanics heritage language learners (HHL) identity-related-perceptions affect their thoughts and feelings about learning the underlying grammatical and linguistic rules of the Spanish language?</p>	<p>11 college Hispanic heritage speakers with different levels of proficiency</p> <p>Case study</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews</p>	<p>Participants' perceptions of their Spanish language background had an impact on their Spanish language learning experience.</p> <p>Lack of formal education experiences in Spanish was the main impediment for the participants to obtain an advanced level of Spanish proficiency.</p>
Sevinc, Y., & Dewaele, J.M. (2018). Heritage language anxiety and majority language anxiety among Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands. <i>International Journal of Bilingualism</i> , 22(2), 159-179.	This study examines language anxiety that occurs in immigrants' daily lives when speaking the heritage and the majority language, both in their host country and during visits to their home country.	<p>116 participants (76 females, 40 males; 45 1st generation, 30 2nd generation, and 41 3rd generation)</p> <p>Statistical data analysis / Likert scale questionnaire</p>	Statistical analyses revealed that heritage language anxiety and majority language anxiety were prevalent in immigrants' daily lives, and that levels of both forms of anxiety differed across generations, and in different daily life situations.

Research Study	Research Question(s)	Participants/ Methodology/ Data	Findings
Cekaite, A., & Evaldsson, A. C. (2019). Stance and footing in multilingual play: Rescaling practices and heritage language use in a Swedish preschool. <i>Journal of Pragmatics</i> , 144(2019), 127-140.	How preschool children use heritage languages for spontaneous, entertaining, and instructional purposes during the otherwise monolingual preschool practice?	A group of preschool children between the ages of 3-6 years old.  Case study / Ethnography  Video observations and a conversation analytical approach	Young children's ludic multilingual peer interaction and stance taking on a micro-interactional level contributed to the momentary rescaling of heritage languages in an otherwise monolingual majority language discourse. The children's multilingual ludic practices were marked by hybridity in affective and metalinguistic stances, characterizing the dynamic linguistic and social potentials of this multilingual preschool setting.
Abreu Fernandes, O. (2019). Language workout in bilingual mother-child interaction: A case study of heritage language practices in Russian-Swedish family talk. <i>Journal of Pragmatics</i> , 140 (2019), 88-99.	The study focuses on the organization and accomplishments of a variety of so-called home language lessons.	One multilingual (Swedish -Russian) family Russian mother and Swedish father, both proficient English speakers and their 3 years old twin children.  Case study / Ethnography  15 hours of video recordings	Realization of language policy in bilingual families relied not only on parental input and language choice, but also on the position of the child as a speaker and learner vis-a-vis the parent and ways in which the child was invited to put the target language into use.

It is important to note that heritage speakers often become subjects of studies that do not focus on their experiences as heritage speakers, but rather on their performance as students in bilingual programs. That is why seminal studies that include heritage speakers, but focus on their English acquisition process, were excluded from consideration for Table 2.1. The existing research specifically on heritage speakers is limited, since this is a relatively new field of research (Polinsky, 2018). Meanwhile, most research has been conducted in Europe, a locus very different from the United States characterized by a very forward approach regarding multilingualism.



## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to create an understanding of how heritage language speakers are able to maintain proficiency in their heritage language through an analysis of language ideologies and sociocultural factors that affect their identity, and thus influence their decisions about language (Ali, 2021; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Darvin & Norton, 2014; McKinney & Norton, 2008; Norton, 2000). In this chapter I explain the methodology used to answer the research questions: How do Spanish heritage speakers maintain their proficiency in the heritage language? And how do schools, families, and the community support Spanish heritage speakers towards the maintenance and development of their heritage language skills?

Before I explain the research's design and describe the methods used to analyze the data, I start this chapter by discussing a pilot study that motivated this research, and the implications for the current study, followed by my positionality and role as a researcher. Then, I address the different data collection and analysis steps I took to complete this study.

#### **Pilot Study**

In a pilot study conducted last year with one bilingual student, English and heritage Spanish speaker, I collected and analyzed data with the purpose of trying to understand which factors affected this specific student's decision about language learning and use. For this case study, the student was questioned about his language ideologies and practices, using a semi-structured interview protocol. Other data collected included student's artifacts produced in the AP Spanish 5 class, participant observations, and a picture that was used for photo elicitation (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Glaw et al., 2017). Then, the data was analyzed through two cycles of descriptive coding (Miles et al., 2014) using the NVivo software for qualitative data analysis.

From this analysis, a relevant set of topics was generated and categorized, which then helped to connect preliminary findings to the particular research questions of that study. Similar patterns from previous research studies that connect heritage language maintenance to cultural identity, family, perception on the advantages of using the language, and access to language resources, were reiterated. While trying to answer the question of what factors enhance or inhibit heritage language maintenance, the data suggested that family language practices, the need for communication in a common language, and the establishment of language use rules at home had a significant influence on the level of heritage language development and the commitment of the heritage speaker to maintain proficiency in the language. For instance, this student stated that speaking Spanish was important because his grandmother from Honduras does not speak any English. He added that he wanted to maintain a good relationship with her and for that reason he needed to maintain his ability to speak in the language.

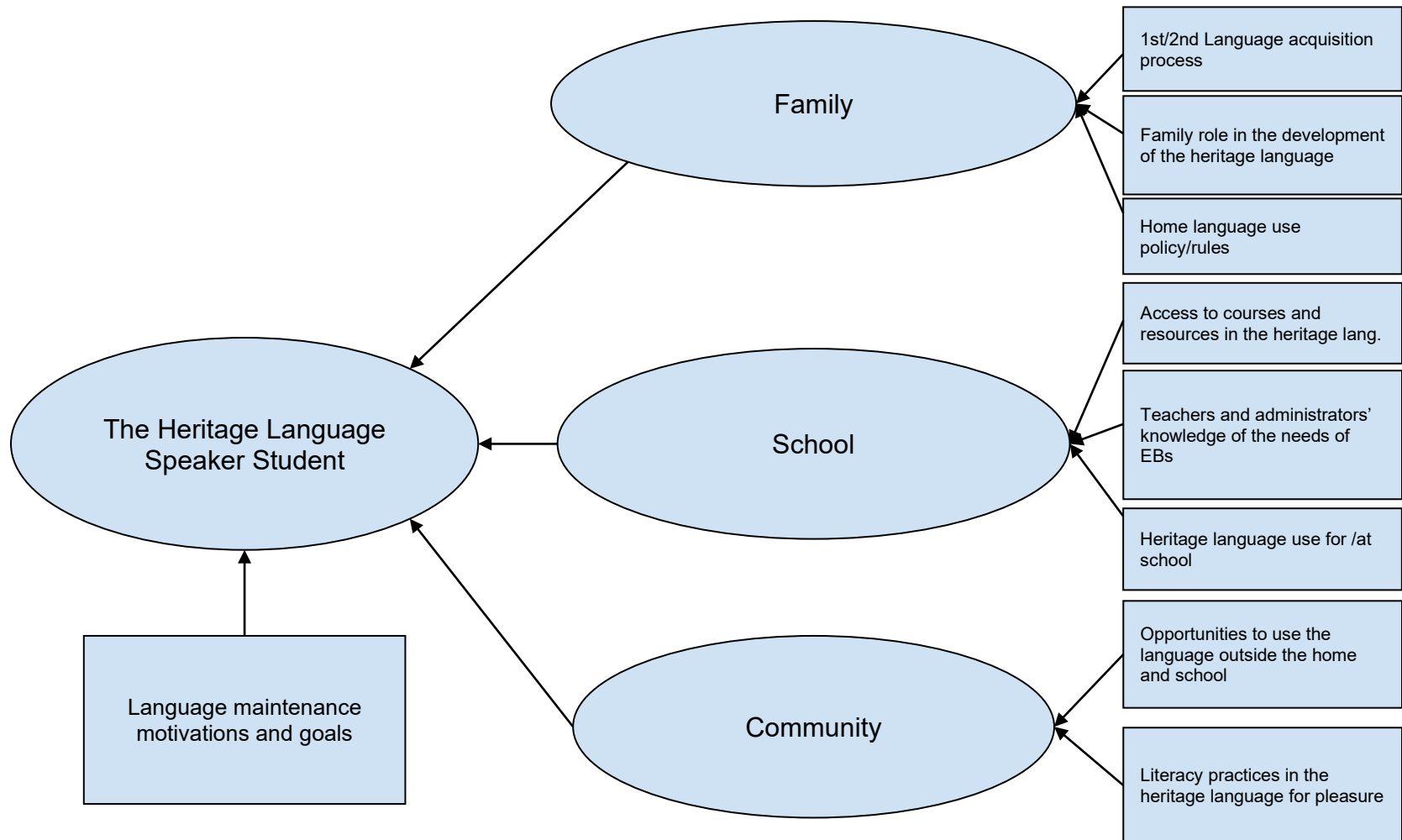
This pilot study findings also showed that the availability of resources at school, such as having access to courses for heritage language speakers and the support of teachers who use authentic heritage language materials in the classroom, can motivate students to develop their literacy skills in the heritage language and thus increase the chances that the language will be maintained. Another element that was expressed twice during the interview was the perceived advantages about labor market opportunities because of being bilingual. Finally, when answering questions about experiences that shaped his ability to maintain his heritage language, the student mentioned the opportunity to be able to communicate with his family, as well as having friends, teachers, and classmates with whom he could speak the language.

Figure 3.1 below displays a visual summary of the findings of this pilot study. The middle circles represent the same three environments that were presented in Chapter 2 (i.e.,

family, school, and community). The rectangles on the right are connected to the three levels and name the elements that were identified through the data analysis as potential factors that affect heritage speakers' decisions about language practices.

**Figure 3.1**

*Factors That Influence Heritage Language Maintenance for a Spanish Heritage Speaker*



### **Implications for the Current Study**

One of the main goals of this research study is to inform different types of stakeholders, including but not limited to policymakers, researchers, educators, families, and heritage speakers themselves about the intricacies of being a Spanish heritage speaker in the context of the U.S. and reflect on the participant's journey towards heritage language maintenance. I feel a moral obligation to investigate this topic because of my role as a former teacher of students who are heritage language speakers, and to help inform instructional practice to better serve this growing segment of the student body everywhere in the United States.

I have seen how some heritage speakers struggled to maintain their proficiency skills in their home or first language. Many of them ended up taking language courses along with second language learners to develop literacy skills in their heritage language, which created some challenges for language teachers. As a former world languages teacher with a diverse background, I always advocated for the inclusion of multilingual instructional practices and the accessibility of multilingual and multicultural resources in the classroom, so that all students could enhance their proficiency skills in all their languages. At the same time, I want to believe that I contributed to a potential shift in their language ideologies to a more positive perspective of their cultural heritage and their languages. This is something that all educators should do, because it is a matter of social justice. Thus, this topic was studied with hopes that its discussion and therefore the findings of this study can ignite a revolution on language education policy in the United States, to better serve heritage speakers and promote multilingualism.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Due to my two roles, as teacher and researcher, I have knowledge of the environment and context in which the current study took place as well as of the participants, since three of them

were my students and the other one was a student in one of my colleagues' classes. On the other hand, I also understand the theories that inform my research, and the obligation I have as a practitioner in the field of education to understand what the best practices to avoid compromising this study's findings are and contribute to the scholarship that aims to support heritage speaker students and the educational community as a whole.

Going into this study I possessed a unique perspective as both an insider and as an outsider. As a high school teacher, I was positioned as an insider because I was in constant contact with heritage speakers in my world languages classes and my practices impacted them directly. Moreover, not only was I a world languages teacher at the secondary level, but I am a fluent speaker of three languages, so I identified as a multilingual person and I used my full linguistic repertoire with my students, the same way that I allowed them to use theirs in my classroom.

My native language is Spanish, and I learned English and French later through formal schooling and by attending specific language institutes for each of them, so I am what Polinsky (2018) would call a sequential language learner. The participants of this study are Spanish speakers, something that I have in common with them, in addition to our connection to the Hispanic or Latinx culture that is associated with the language. However, although the participants of this study and I had that in common, I do not find myself in the same situation as them because I am not a heritage language speaker who had to live the challenge of maintaining a language by being immersed in a society that privileges English and characterized by a dominant monolingual ideology. Thus, in that sense I am an outsider.

Another thing I have in common with the participants is that we are immigrants, although with some relevant differences. I am a first-generation immigrant to the United States and my

participants are second or third generation immigrants. As a result, our immigrant experiences are not fully comparable.

### **Research Design**

Since I am taking a holistic approach to analyze the phenomenon of heritage language maintenance, by privileging the voices of the participants, the design being used for this research project is a qualitative multiple-case study (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) defined case studies as “an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context” (p. 18). Case studies are prevalent in education research because unlike quantitative methodologies, they focus on processes and the context in which they take place rather than outcomes and variables (Merriam, 1998), which is what I am doing, by analyzing the phenomenon of heritage language maintenance while taking into consideration the context in which it is happening for the participants.

The rationale for choosing to perform a multiple case study was to have the opportunity to conduct a cross-case analysis following a theoretical replication of cases with contrasting conditions (Yin, 2018) and to compare the findings of each individual case to previous research on this field (see Babino & Stewart, 2019). What this means is that I used a sample of cases that includes heritage language speakers who are at different points in the continuum in terms of their heritage language development or proficiency levels. This allowed me to analyze findings using a theoretical replication of contrasting cases (Yin, 2018) that considered differences in terms of language practices, exposure, and access to resources.

Yin (2018) further stated that multiple case studies tend to be stronger than single case studies. While Miles et al. (2014) also argued that multiple cases add confidence to findings. Thus, this approach helps to produce compelling evidence (Yin, 2018) of what is affecting

heritage language maintenance among heritage speakers. Equally important, I considered including various forms of data sources in my research design and provided rich descriptions of the findings, a process that is characteristic of qualitative research methodologies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Yin (2018) stated that case selection in a multiple-case study should follow a replication logic. He further argued that case selection should be led by characteristics that can best provide answers to a study's research questions. As a result, for this multiple-case study, participants were recruited by first determining if they fulfilled the main selection criteria. That is, they are Spanish heritage speakers attending the same high school. Participants were identified through teacher-student interactions in the classroom and by sharing the recruitment announcement in two other world languages classes. Once students were identified they were asked to participate in the research study, and after receiving permission from them I proceeded to contact their parents, inform them about the research study, and obtain their consent.

### **Participants**

The population considered for this study consists of four adolescent Spanish heritage speakers, currently attending high school (grades 9th-10th). A diverse group of participants with differences in age, gender, levels of language proficiency, and exposure to the heritage language were recruited, to analyze whether those differences affected their experiences and decisions about heritage language use. Additionally, one parent/guardian for each student participant was also required to participate in the study to collect relevant information about language practices at home and to cross-analyze the data, which added depth to some of the findings. Parents' participation in the study happened in the form of a questionnaire that was sent home and that



they needed to complete and through some informal observations of their interactions with their participating students at the school.

Yin (2018) posited that the number of cases in a multiple-case study should be determined having the purpose of replication in mind. If the goal, like in this case, is to analyze contrasting results (i.e., why some students might be more successful than others at maintaining their heritage language), then four cases can provide sufficient evidence of what is happening across the board, and remove the vulnerability of the findings of a single case study. Although it would have been ideal to study more cases, it would have been challenging and unrealistic given this study time constraint (Miles et al., 2014). Thus, having more than four cases could have complicated the logistics of data analysis and extended the time frame that was predetermined for concluding this study.

The sampling strategy used for the current study was comparable case selection (Miles et al., 2014), which basically implies selecting cases based on the same relevant characteristics. In this case, it was on the criteria that participants needed to be Spanish heritage speakers, using the broad definition presented in Chapter 1, which includes everyone who has a cultural or ethnic connection to the language regardless of language proficiency (Benmamoun et al., 2013). I initially recruited five participants, but then decided to exclude one of them because the data collected from that participant was not enough to compare to the other four participants.

### **Data Collection**

The key instruments for data collection used to respond to this study research questions were a short survey, three semi-structured interviews, participant observations, a parent questionnaire, and field notes. Furthermore, member checking is also considered a data collection instrument because it produced additional information that was relevant to discuss the

findings of this study. Data collection for this study took a period of 4 months with most of the information collected during the months of April and May, and member checking happening in the month of July. Before describing in detail how I used each instrument, I present a list of each data source and a corresponding description for each of them in Table 3.1 below.

**Table 3.1**

*Study Data Sources*

Data type	Description
Language use and exposure survey	Short survey that participants completed in the format of a Google Form that included 12 short answers and multiple-choice questions.
1st Interview	This interview focused on collecting information about heritage language learning, exposure, and
2nd Interview	This interview focuses on access to resources and the use of language outside of the home/family environment.
3rd Interview / photo elicitation	This interview is a brief photo-elicitation conversation about memories of language use. Students also shared the picture they showed me during our conversation.
Parent/Guardian questionnaire	This was an open-ended questionnaire with a total of 10 questions that a parent or guardian completed either in English or Spanish. The questions revolved around family language practices and language maintenance ideology.
Formal participant observations	Notes were taken about the languages used by participants during social interactions outside of the classroom (i.e., lunch time, club meetings, etc.). Each participant was observed at least once for a period of 30 minutes.
Field Notes	Notes taken during informal observations and random conversations that I had with the participants at different times once data collection started.
Member checking	After analyzing and coding all my data, I emailed participants and requested to call them to review certain pieces of information. Two of them agreed to talk to me on the phone and the other two responded to the follow-up questions through email.

### *Language Use and Exposure Survey*

First, the four participants completed a short survey with questions about their personal, cultural, and linguistic background. The 12 survey questions (see Appendix A), mainly multiple choice and short answer questions, were typed into a Google Form and sent to the participants via email. The participants' responses to the survey questions were reviewed immediately and used as an additional mechanism to confirm that they indeed fulfilled the heritage Spanish speaker criteria. The first part of the survey asked questions about basic demographic information like name, age, and grade level, while the second part asked questions about what languages they spoke at home and with friends, and whether they received any education in Spanish. Table 3.2 below presents some basic information about the participants that was collected through the survey and during the first interview.

**Table 3.2**

#### *Participants' Background Information*

Participant	Gender	Age	Grade	Heritage	Self-rated Spanish proficiency
Julia	female	15	10th	Mexican	Advanced
Jorge	male	16	10th	Salvadoran	Advanced
Sofia	female	14	9th	Mexican	Advanced
Kevin	male	15	9th	Filipino/ Mexican	Intermediate

*Note.* A pseudonym has been assigned to each of the participants. Regarding the grade levels, there were only freshmen and sophomores in the school during the time of the study because it was the high school's opening year.

## *Interviews*

Three semi-structured interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) were conducted with each participant. While all interviews touched on similar themes around heritage language identity, language practices, and beliefs about language, they differed in the level of details and reflection required from the participants as well as in the leading research question. For instance, the first and third interview questions were more focused on finding out the participants' language identity and ideologies, while the second interview focused more on access to resources and language practices. The purpose of having three interviews was to allow participants to reflect on their answers from one to the other, while providing me some time to analyze their responses and be able to ask follow-up questions on the next one. Moreover, to remain close to the data, I transcribed all interviews.

The interviews were conducted in English, but sometimes the participant or I switched to Spanish to better explain ourselves. They took place inside a school classroom either before school, during lunch, or after school, based on the participants' time preference. Table 3.3 below shows the duration of each interview (in minutes and seconds) for each of the participants. The interviews' questions for the first, second and third interview can be found in Appendices B, C, and D, respectively.

**Table 3.3***Interviews' Duration*

Interview	Julia	Jorge	Sofia	Kevin	Total time
First	10:04	9:59	7:18	12:50	40:11
Second	10:55	14:22	7:40	7:49	40:46
Third	3:00	3:12	2:44	3:49	12:45
TOTAL	23:59	27:33	17:42	24:28	1:33:42

As it is evident in Table 3.3, the times for the third interview were shorter compared to the previous two. This is because I used a photo elicitation technique (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Glaw et al., 2017) where the purpose was to generate thoughts from a picture that the participants chose to represent their heritage language. Clark-Ibáñez (2004) argued that using photographs during interviews is a useful tool to expand on questions and they provide a unique way for participants to express dimensions of their lives. Thus, for that interview they had to respond to just a few leading questions and provide their unique interpretations of the images they chose.

***Observations***

The participant-observations were conducted with the purpose of obtaining information on certain language practices, behaviors, and decisions about language use. All observations took place during the school lunch time, while participants ate lunch, interacted with classmates, and participated in school extracurricular activities (e.g., club meetings, sports, games) at school. Observation times were scheduled for thirty minutes for each participant, and they did not know when I was going to observe them. The observation protocol in Figure 3.2 is a snapshot of how notes were taken during observations. The complete protocol can be found in Appendix E.

## Figure 3.2

### *Observation Protocol*

<p>Observation of: Jorge</p> <p>Date: 05/16/2022</p> <p>Place: School (D) Hallway</p> <p>Description of the setting: During <u>Megalunch</u> (1 hour lunch period) students are allowed to eat in the collaborative spaces of the two school main hallways. Those spaces have flexible sitting furniture that includes tables, armchairs, rolling chairs, etc. Students are also allowed to go to the gym or participate in other activities such as club meetings, recreational games, and so on.</p> <p>Time: 12:35 - 1:05 pm</p> <p>Language(s) used: Spanish and English</p>		
Observations notes	Personal Interpretations	Triangulation
I greeted Jorge and his friends in Spanish when I encountered them in the hallway during lunch time.	Jorge responded to me in Spanish which might be a sign that he feels confident about speaking Spanish in public.	During the 2nd interview Jorge confirms that he is more confident speaking Spanish.
Jorge eats lunch (a sandwich) with three friends. One friend is from Puerto Rico, and the other two are from Mexico.	Jorge prefers to hang out with Hispanic/Spanish speaking friends during lunch time. On other occasions I have seen him with the same group of friends.	During our member checking conversation Jorge states that he has been friends with them for a while. He added that he would speak Spanish with them, but not necessarily with other Spanish speakers.

### *Parent/Guardian Questionnaire*

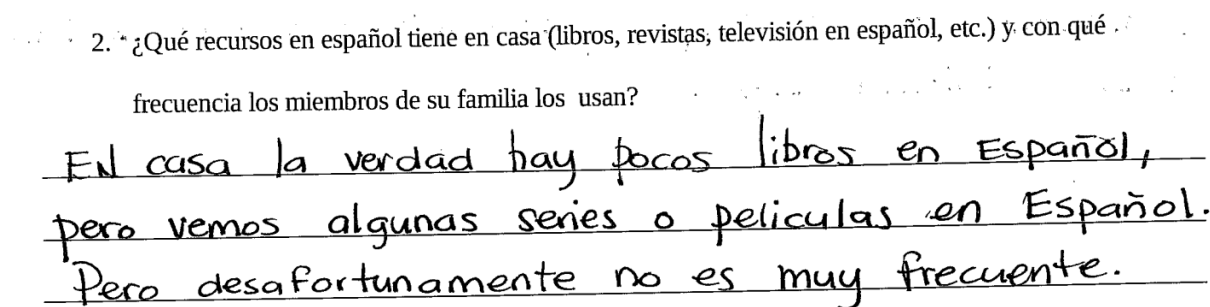
A questionnaire (see Appendix F) was sent home with the participants for their parents or guardians to respond to a set of questions about the heritage language learning journey of their children, language(s) used at home, and ideologies about languages. Findings from previous research points to family involvement in the process of heritage language transfer as one of the main factors that influence acquisition and retention of the language, while the same goes for formal education (Carreira & Kagan, 2018; Leonard et al., 2020; Ortega, 2020; Weekly, 2020). Thus, with the data from the parent questionnaire I partially answered Research Questions 2.a

and 2.b (i.e., language rules implemented and the resources available for heritage speakers at home) and got some useful insights for responding to Questions 1.a and 1.b (i.e., the consideration of socio-economic and political factors that influence language ideologies).

Two copies of the questionnaire were sent home, one in Spanish and one in English. That way, the parent or guardian could choose to respond in either language. Of the four questionnaires, three were returned in Spanish and one in English. Figure 3.3 shows an excerpt of the parent/guardian questionnaire for one of the participants' mothers.

### Figure 3.3

#### *Excerpt From Sofia's Parent/Guardian Questionnaire*



*Note.* Translation of the excerpt: What resources in Spanish do you have available at home (books, TV in Spanish, etc.) and with what frequency do members of your family use them? At home the truth is that there are a few books in Spanish, but we watch some series or movies in Spanish. But unfortunately it is not often.

### *Field Notes*

Throughout the research study I took notes of behaviors and interactions that I observed of the participants during class or other activities in which they were involved. For instance, one day I heard Julia talking in Spanish to her mother, who was dropping her off in front of the

school. In another instance, I heard Jorge speaking in Spanish to a classmate when I walked into that classroom without knowing he was going to be in there. Thus, given the purpose of this study, these were language use observations that happened outside of the formal observations but still deserved to be included in the data analysis. Table 3.4 below shows a snapshot of the field notes of Julia.

**Table 3.4**

*Excerpt of the Field Notes of Julia*

Observation notes	Triangulation
I heard her speaking in Spanish to her mother one morning during drop-off.	During the first interview she mentioned that she always speaks in Spanish to her parents.
When she and I are alone she would speak to me in Spanish, but when other people were around, she would speak in English.	She mentioned in the second interview that out of respect for other people she would speak in a language that everyone can understand.
She wrote a goodbye note completely in Spanish to me. This shows her mastery of writing in the HL.	This reinforces her mother's statement that she teaches her daughter Spanish grammar, and Julia's self-assessment as an advanced Spanish speaker/writer.

### ***Member Checking***

After the first cycle of coding, I identified pieces of information that I needed to revisit with the participants one more time, due to inconsistencies during triangulation or for clarification purposes. Thus, I created a list of questions specific for each participant and contacted them through phone calls and emails. During each conversation I took notes of their answers and went back to the original instruments to make notes about the information that was either confirmed, missing, or clarified.



## **Data Analysis**

The data analysis was conducted through two cycles of descriptive coding (Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2013) using the NVivo software. During the first round I used some a priori codes based on findings from previous research, such as Spanish interactions with family and language preference. However, there were new codes created during that first coding cycle that emerged from the data, like the in vivo code “I used to only speak Spanish” that was stated by Sofia during her first interview.

The first cycle produced a total of 28 different codes (see Appendix G for a complete list with descriptions). Then, during the second cycle, those codes were organized into overarching categories or themes, which provide a synopsis of the data findings that will be presented in the next chapter. In Table 3.5 below each column title represents an overarching theme that emerged from grouping the different codes in NVivo. Once grouped the levels of relationship among codes was established. For example, in the fourth column (i.e., Heritage Language Maintenance) the Spanish language interactions code is a parent to the Spanish interactions with family and Spanish interactions with friends’ codes. Thus, for clarity purposes indentation is used in Table 3.5 to show hierarchy and relationships among the themes.

**Table 3.5***Overarching Themes and Codes*

Cultural Identity	Heritage Language Ideology	Heritage Language Learning	Heritage Language Maintenance	Language Practices
- Spanish language as identity	- Language preference - Benefits (of keeping the HL) - Beliefs about other languages and multilingualism - Feelings about Spanish use - English is more important	- Formal instruction in the HL - Intergenerational language transfer - Guardian knowledge of the HL - “I used to only speak Spanish” - Literacy practices in the HL	- Heritage Language Proficiency - Exposure to Spanish through travel - Resources - Spanish language interactions - With family - Translates/translanguages - With friends - Use of Spanish at school - Heritage language loss	- Language(s) used at home - Speaks both Spanish & English - Speaks only English - Speaks only Spanish - Translanguaging

**Data Validity and Research Ethics**

Validity and reliability are standards that attest to the quality of the conclusions of a particular study. Miles et al. (2014) argued that the conclusions drawn from data must be tested for their validity. That is, their confirmability, sturdiness, and plausibility (Miles et al. 2014). To make sure that the results of this study are deemed valid and trustworthy, data was collected using multiple sources, also known as triangulation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles et al., 2014). At the same time, member checking was used to guarantee that participants could confirm information and that the way the data is being presented is an accurate representation of what they have said. Additionally, I followed a holistic and careful documentation of the process from

data collection, analysis, and representation of findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Miles et al., 2014), which creates confidence that the conclusions being drawn in this study are a product of the effective implementation of the research methodology.

Reliability deals with the consistency of a measure being used and the extent to which a research instrument has the same results when used consistently (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A strategy that was used in this study to approach issues of reliability was peer review (Miles et al., 2014). My advisor looked at the data, the coding, and the findings and checked for any type of bias or potential unreliability issues.

### **Study Timeline**

As previously stated, data collection and analysis for this study took a period of 4 months with most of the interviews and observations happening during April and May, since those were the months that school was still in session. Then, member checking took place in the month of July after I completed the first cycle of coding. For member checking I had to communicate with participants through email and by phone because I had limited contact with the participants during the summer break months. Nevertheless, I was able to even have multiple interactions with the participants and the data they provided was very rich. Table 3.6 below shows a summary of this study timeline.

**Table 3.6***Research Timeline*

Dates	Research Step
April 2022	IRB and school district research approval
April - May 2022	Recruitment and data collection
June - July 2022	Data analysis
July 2022	Member checking (via phone and emails) and more data analysis
August - September 2022	Final analysis

Upon conclusion of data collection, I gave each student a set of four young adult novels in Spanish and wrote a thank you note for them and their parents/guardians. This was done as a gesture of appreciation for their time and the contributions made to this research study. It was also a way to keep promoting the development of their literacy skills in the heritage language.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

Heritage language maintenance is not an easy task, especially when it requires balancing language practices and accessing sufficient resources to maintain the language proficiency in an environment that might not be conducive to that goal (Babino & Stewart, 2020; Valenzuela, 1999). The purpose of this study is to investigate how the ideologies, language practices, and other external factors influence heritage language speakers' chances of maintaining their heritage language. The research was conducted using a multiple-case study framework, for which four high school students were observed and interviewed to collect data. Additionally, one parent/guardian for each student participated by completing a questionnaire with open-ended questions about language ideology and family language practices.

In this chapter, I present the narratives of the four participants in this study by describing their observed language practices, their heritage language learning and maintenance journey, as well as their language ideologies and how they connect to their languaging decisions. Then, I present a cross-case analysis, highlighting common themes among the participants by comparing their experiences.

#### **Narratives**

The language experiences and practices enacted by the participants throughout their lives are important to discuss the findings of this study. Thus, these narratives will contextualize the study through the projection of the participants' voices by recounting their stories. The narratives include a short description of the participants to create an image of who they are. Then, these descriptions are accompanied by an explanation of their language practices and their heritage language learning and maintenance journeys, finalizing with a rendition of the participants'

beliefs about languages. Exploring these experiences will help answer the research questions and shed light on the reasoning behind the findings.

### **Julia: An Introvert, but Very Involved Simultaneous Bilingual**

Julia is a 16-year-old high school sophomore who is very proficient in both English and Spanish. She was born in the United States, but her family origins and experiences living abroad trace her heritage back to Mexico. Julia is very involved in school. She is a member of the school orchestra and is very dedicated with her studies. She is also a member of multiple clubs, and most days during lunch time (i.e., 1 hour), she is either attending club meetings or attending tutorials for a class.

She is a merit student who has been recognized by teachers and school administrators for her academic accomplishments. Both of Julia's parents are college graduates and understand the importance of a good education, something they have instilled in their daughter. Julia is the oldest of three girls and holds the weight of being a good role model for her two younger sisters.

### ***Language Practices***

As previously stated, Julia is a multilingual speaker who can fluidly communicate in both of her languages, English and Spanish, and can switch easily between them. She is also in the process of acquiring a third language, French, for which she was taking level 1 classes in high school. When asked about how proficient she thought she was in her heritage language she stated that she can use the language “pretty well” and people tell her that she has a good grasp of the pronunciation of words in Spanish.

Nevertheless, at school she rarely speaks Spanish. During two formal observations that I conducted of her, one during a French club meeting and the other while she was participating in an open mic activity in the choir room during lunch time, the main language she used was

English, and only if I interacted with her in Spanish she would respond in Spanish. When asked if she had friends in school who spoke Spanish and to whom she would speak in the language she responded:

Yeah. And well, now, I only know like a few people. And we're not like that close, but in my old school, we like, I had more friends that were Hispanic. And I think sometimes we would like, say a few words in Spanish when we couldn't think of the word in English, but, the like, and just in general, we would speak English.

Julia was a student in one of my level 1 French classes and she would only speak Spanish to me when I asked her questions in Spanish during class, French Club meetings, or in the school hallways, but I never heard her speaking Spanish to two other Spanish heritage speakers who were in her same class. I believe that she only responded or talked to me in Spanish because I initiated the conversations in Spanish, but it was evident that she hesitated to respond. This might have something to do with her belief that out of respect for other people who do not speak the language, she would rather speak in English at school. She said to me, "I don't know where I got this, but I think personally that it seems like rude to speak in a language that everyone else doesn't understand." The only exception she mentioned is when the other person only knows Spanish. She recalled a time when she was little and there was a new girl in her class who only spoke Spanish. She explained to me:

I do remember in preschool, um, there was this one girl who only spoke Spanish in my class and so I remembered thinking that I really wanted to speak Spanish with her. And I felt happy that I could speak with her because she couldn't talk with anyone else, so I thought it was really, really cool.

At home and with family, Julia's language practices look different. For instance, I once heard her talking to her mother in Spanish during the morning drop-off at school. I noticed the same after a school award ceremony, where Julia and her mother approached me, and we had a full conversation in Spanish about Julia's overall performance in my class and at school. Julia's mother stated that they have opted to speak Spanish at home because they are convinced that it would represent a great opportunity for their daughters to speak two or more languages. She also stated that it was recommended by Julia's pediatrician.

Julia also recalled that the language preferred at home has always been Spanish, but there was never an explicit rule that her parents tried to enforce. She said:

It's just kind of a norm, but not an expectation to speak Spanish to them [her parents]. But it's just me, like, I know, my mom always tells me 'You can speak in English. Like just speak to me in English. I understand', but I just, I don't know... Sometimes I just feel like with them I always speak Spanish though.

At the end of the school year Julia wrote me a goodbye letter in Spanish that showed how proficient she is in the language despite not continuing her formal schooling in Spanish. Her use of grammar was better than some native Spanish speakers who have been my students in the past. I think this has a lot to do with her mother's emphasis on teaching her grammar.

Through member checking, I asked Julia if she had a chance to read the 4 young adults' novels in Spanish that I chose for her after we finished the interviews, and she told me she read all of them. That was 3 months ago at the end of the school year, and I was pleasantly surprised that she took some time during her summer break to read in Spanish. This also reflects how invested she is in continuing to develop her literacy skills in the heritage language.



### *Heritage Language Learning and Maintenance*

Julia learned Spanish simultaneously with English. Her mother says that she wanted Julia to learn both languages because she knew it was going to be important to have better opportunities in the future. Both her parents went to college in Mexico and are fully proficient in Spanish. Julia had exposure to Spanish since she was born through family talk and her parents also read to her in Spanish. When it was time for Julia to start formal schooling, Julia's mother was persuaded into enrolling Julia in the dual language program, with the argument that it would help her in the future because she would have a bilingual education and be literate in both languages. After 2 years in the program, Julia passed the English proficiency test and her mother wanted to take her out of the dual language program because she perceived that teachers only wanted her daughter in the program to keep the program running and not for the benefit of her child.

After she was removed from the dual language program, Julia's mother then continued to teach Spanish to Julia and her other children at home. Additionally, the whole family attends Mass in Spanish and she also used to attend summer camps from church where activities were conducted in Spanish. For her, it is so common to use Spanish in church events that she connects her religion to her heritage language. In one of our interviews, she stated:

My religion is Catholicism, and even though like, the Catholic religion is like, many languages, it's like worldwide, but I often like to attend Mass in Spanish and stuff. So like, I know, a lot of prayers in Spanish as well.

Moreover, despite not being enrolled in a Spanish class, Julia expressed her willingness to continue to learn more Spanish through reading. She also told me during member checking that she was going to take the Spanish placement test offered by the school.

### ***Ideologies and Outside Influences***

Julia and her mother both acknowledge that speaking multiple languages is beneficial for future opportunities. Julia also understands the importance of language maintenance because of a research project that she completed for her professional communication class, for which she chose the topic of languages. She understands that language loss implies more than just the disappearance of a language. When asked about her project, she explained it to me like this:

It was like how there's a lot of languages in the world, but the world is like, becoming smaller, and like, only a few languages might survive. Yeah, but, um, but I think that that's not necessarily a really good thing. And I found that like, it's, it's much better to be able to, like, keep those languages, even the ones that like, don't have written language out there. It's really important to like, be able to document those because they really like different languages show different things like different important, ... And also, like medicine and things like that. Even those things like are within the language and you can't always like, translate things. So, I just thought that was cool.

Julia referred to the general perception of society when they hear someone speaking Spanish and attached the discrimination tag to it, but she also recognized that the public perception about multilingualism or people speaking Spanish in public is becoming more positive.

### ***A Picture Is Worth More Than a Thousand Words***

When asked about a place and a memory that reminded her of her heritage language Julia mentioned her grandparents' house in Monterrey, Mexico. She said that when she goes to Mexico, she definitely speaks Spanish, but she also stated that her own home here in the United States also reminds her of Spanish.

I then asked Julia if she could show me a picture that represents what Spanish would look like. She took her phone out and searched on her phone photo gallery, then she showed me the picture shown in Figure 4.1. She then proceeded to describe it to me. She said:

This is when we went to Querétaro, which is like the place where my grandma was born. And, and yes, so they have a house there and then they also have one in Monterrey, and so sometimes we visit both of them. This is just like a beautiful decoration, like a.. Um... yeah, they are really a lot of these in that place, so like we took a bunch of pictures with them. And then, also we have seen baile folklórico. And it is so pretty. I love it so much!

**Figure 4.1**

*Picture of Julia's Grandmother at a Public Park in Querétaro, México*



This made me realize how much Julia connects her heritage language with the cultural background of her family. How much she enjoys visiting Mexico and getting to spend time with her grandparents. Thus, for her family and her home both represent her heritage language.

### ***Summary of Julia***

Julia has a good command of Spanish. She said that native Spanish speakers have complimented her for her Spanish proficiency. Her mother has played an important role in the intergenerational language transmission. Julia's mother stated that she wants her children to be fully bilingual and that she explicitly teaches them grammar. In her family, they also have a preference for speaking Spanish at home, since English can be used anywhere else. Despite her good command of the language, Julia uses Spanish in spaces or circumstances where she feels comfortable using the language, for instance with family and friends of the family, and when no other options are available, like when someone only speaks Spanish. She wishes to have access to more resources in Spanish, such as books, so she can continue to increase her vocabulary in the language, since she says her family uses the same words and phrases all the time when they speak the language.

### **Jorge: A Spanish Dominant Speaker who Acquired English as a Second Language**

Jorge is a 16-year-old high school sophomore, who was born in Texas but spent most of his childhood living in El Salvador with his parents and sisters. Jorge prefers to speak Spanish and to hang out with friends who also speak or at least understand Spanish. He is currently very fluent in English and can navigate both languages with ease, but this was not always the case. In El Salvador, he received his formal education in Spanish, but he attended an English school on the weekends for 2 years in order to learn the language. His parents made this decision because they knew that he was going to move to the United States at some point and attend school here.

Jorge has been living with his grandmother and her husband since 2016, while his parents and sisters still live in El Salvador. The reason he is the only one living in the United States is because he is the only one who was born here, while his two older sisters were born in El Salvador. Moreover, Jorge shared with me that his parents decided to send him to live with his grandmother because it was becoming very dangerous for a boy his age to stay in El Salvador due to the gangs and because they wanted him to have better opportunities in the future.

He travels during school breaks to El Salvador. Since he is in my French 1 class, I remember that after Christmas break, we had a conversation about his recent visit to El Salvador and the things he did there. He also would tell me that he would go during summer breaks and how much he would enjoy visiting his country.

### ***Language Practices***

Jorge feels very confident about his knowledge of Spanish and quite comfortable with using the language in different spaces. At school, Jorge uses Spanish with staff and classmates. One day, I came to his eSports class without knowing he was going to be there, and I heard him speak in Spanish to one of his classmates who is also a friend that I have seen him hang out with regularly during lunch time. I noticed that most of Jorge's friends at school self-identify as Hispanic (i.e., from Mexico, Venezuela, and Puerto Rico). Some of them are fully fluent in Spanish, like Jorge, but others are losing their skills in their heritage language. Jorge told me that he prefers to speak Spanish with his friends. However, because some of them are forgetting it, they sometimes have to speak in English. Jorge explained to me how one of his best friends has been losing his heritage language:

I have one friend that he doesn't speak Spanish at home anymore. And he kind of forgot about the Spanish. Not fully, he still knows a little bit. But, um, in middle school I used to

speak with him only in Spanish, or almost only in Spanish, and now it's only English, because he forgot a lot.

At home the only language that is spoken is Spanish. His grandmother stated in the parent/guardian questionnaire that Spanish is the language she grew up speaking and that it is the language that everybody speaks in her house. Moreover, Jorge and his grandmother keep in contact with their relatives in El Salvador by phone or by traveling when they have an opportunity, and in these instances, Jorge always communicates in Spanish.

### ***Heritage Language Learning and Maintenance***

Jorge acquired Spanish through full immersion and formal schooling in El Salvador. Although he was born in Dallas, Texas, he almost immediately moved to El Salvador after birth, where he grew up and attended elementary school. Once he moved back to the United States to attend middle school, he exclusively spoke Spanish at home because everyone in his household prefers to speak only Spanish. He also has had the opportunity to travel to El Salvador to visit his family during summer breaks every year.

His background and experiences are what probably makes him prefer Spanish over English. Jorge possesses various privileges that not all Spanish heritage speakers in the U.S. have. The fact that Spanish was his first language and the language he received instruction the first years of his formal education, have contributed to the effective development of literacy skills in the heritage language. Many heritage speakers in the U.S. have not lived the same experiences or had the same opportunities that Jorge has had. Many just have some exposure to the spoken language at home because some relatives do not speak the majority language, but they do not have the privilege of traveling to places where the language is widely spoken.

In order to maintain his skills in the language, Jorge thinks that he just needs to keep relationships with Spanish speakers. He does not believe that he needs to take any more courses in Spanish because he has learned enough already. He expressed to me:

I feel like I already practice Spanish enough to not forget at all. And I don't, I don't feel like I would forget Spanish even if I don't speak with friends or family anymore because I still like, listen to music or watch videos or watch movies.

Jorge's constant exposure to Spanish makes him confident that he will not lose his skills in the language. His access to different resources like music and other types of media in Spanish, as well as having contact with other speakers of the language on a regular basis may contribute to language maintenance.

### ***Ideologies and Outside Influences***

Jorge sees speaking Spanish in public as something natural. This might come from his confidence and how comfortable he feels speaking the language. However, for classes, he believes it is better to learn everything in English because that is the language in which he will be assessed. He gave me the impression that he does not believe that knowledge is transferable between languages. In one of our conversations, he mentioned how not only the content was a little different in El Salvador, but how the teaching was different, he said to me “I think it was different because it's a different type of teaching that is used here.” When asked to be more specific, he added:

Well, in El Salvador I remember that it was like only one teacher, for like every, almost every subject. And then, besides how different the language was, like teaching, I think it was a little bit easier for me because I already knew the language and then also having to learn stuff for like math, and it also learning a lot of English. It was a little bit harder.

When Jorge enrolled in middle school in the U.S., he had to take an English as a second language (ESL) class. He told me that he was in that class for almost 2 years, then in seventh grade, he tested out. During member checking, he also mentioned that he made good friends in that class since there were other Spanish speakers with whom he was able to communicate and make connections when he arrived.

Through my observations, I noticed that Jorge tends to gravitate towards other Spanish speakers at school. However, he only speaks Spanish with those who are friends with him. For example, there are other Spanish speakers in the French class he was taking with me, but he never interacted with them in Spanish. When I asked him about this behavior during member checking, he told me that since they were not his friends, he just preferred to speak in English to them so there were no confusions or misinterpretations.

When asked about continuing to improve his skills in Spanish, he said that it is more important to learn English right now. I then asked him to elaborate why it would be more important and he answered: “because I would feel like it will be more useful in the future.” Being more specific, he cited job opportunities.

When he was asked whether he thought it was important to transfer the heritage language to the next generation he responded, “That would be important so like, the like, the culture won't die and stuff like that.” This statement showed me that Jorge understands that there is a connection between culture and language, and that he cares about the transfer of cultural values to the following generations.

### ***A Picture Is Worth More Than a Thousand Words***

When asked to show me a picture that represented Spanish for him, he quickly showed me a picture of his family shown in Figure 4.2 below. He said “in this picture is almost my



whole family, this is my dad, my mom, my sister, and that's me. In this picture my other sister is missing, but it is because she has a disability.”

**Figure 4.2**

*Picture of Jorge and His Family at a Park in El Salvador*



He then explained why it represents his heritage language:

It would represent Spanish because in this specific place (points to the picture) is called Alegría, which means joy in English. And we always like to come to this place specifically because of all the environment, all the food. We always feel very happy being in that place, and also the weather is like very nice, you can see it's kind of high, it's kind of a mountain I think, so the weather is very nice and it has very good views. And we always like to go to that place.

When asked if every person in the picture spoke Spanish, he confirmed that all of them do. During this conversation he also referenced his memories of spending Christmas in El Salvador with his family at his parents' house. Consequently, Jorge seems to connect Spanish to his memories of family gatherings and traditional cultural celebrations.

### ***Summary of Jorge***

Jorge is a Spanish heritage speaker who received formal education in Spanish in El Salvador. Jorge's family speaks exclusively Spanish, and he perceives Spanish as part of his identity, along with his preference for speaking in Spanish, listening to music in Spanish, and spending time with a primarily Latinx group of friends. Given his proficiency in the language, he feels that he does not need to take any courses to improve or further develop his skills in Spanish. Meanwhile, he considers it is very important to continue learning English, which he sees as a need for success in the future.

### **Sofia: An Assertive Sequential Bilingual who Acquired Spanish First**

Sofia, who prefers to be called Sofi, is a very sassy 14-year-old high school freshman and the youngest participant in this study. Sofi's parents both have a Mexican background. Her mother was born in the U.S., but lived in Mexico for many years, and her father was born and raised in Mexico, so both are dominant Spanish speakers. Sofi remembers that Spanish was the first language she learned, and she is confident in her proficiency in the language. She recalls that she learned English by participating in a PreK program and by watching Disney shows in English.

At school, Sofi is a very outgoing teenager who hangs out with some of the popular students. That is, she is friends with cheerleaders and athletes. In fact, she is an athlete herself. She plays on the school soccer team, as well as on a club soccer team outside of school. Fashion,

make-up, and traveling are common topics of conversation for Sofi and her friends during class, which tells me that those are things that she is really interested in. During one of my observations, I saw her watching a make-up tutorial video on YouTube. She would also talk to me about clothes or make-up that she shopped for online and even show me pictures of those items during class. Moreover, she talked to me multiple times about her family trips to Mexico during the school year.

Sofi's parents speak Spanish as their first language, and English as a second language, so that makes Sofi a second-generation heritage speaker. She has a younger sister who lives in the same household, and two older siblings from her father's side who live with their mother. She told me that compared to her siblings, she is the only one who could be considered a fluent Spanish speaker. She explained to me that her two older siblings only speak English because they have not lived much with her father and their mother only speaks English. On the other hand, while her younger sister lives in the same household as her, she has struggled to maintain her proficiency in Spanish. Sofi explained to me that this is because she has dyslexia and she had a hard time learning English when she started formal schooling. As a result, their family agreed that they should prioritize English for her. This has given Sofi's younger sister a *carte blanche* to use mostly English at home and everywhere else.

### ***Language Practices***

Sofi experiences some type of language divide when it comes to her language practices. It is like she lives in two separate worlds. At school she barely speaks Spanish, while at home, unlike her younger sister, she is discouraged from speaking English. She says she does not have friends at school who speak Spanish so that is the main reason she does not speak the language at school. Nevertheless, she mentioned that a teacher provided an opportunity for her to make a

presentation in Spanish. She explained, “We are doing this project in English, and I had to read this letter in Spanish as like for extra credit.” She told me that her teacher did not know Spanish but encouraged her to present in Spanish. “The project was about the history of the Mexican American borders, and we had to make scenarios as if we were the countries,” she explained to me. Other than this instance, I have only heard Sofi speaking in Spanish to me and no one else at school. During the school year, I was able to see her often because she usually hung out with friends in front of my classroom during the one-hour lunch most days.

At home though, the fact that her maternal grandmother lives with her family, who for the most part speaks Spanish, kind of forces her to use Spanish at home. Sofi's mother wrote in the parent/guardian questionnaire: “En nuestro hogar hablamos español la mayoría del tiempo, porque mi mamá la abuelita de Sofi vive con nosotros y ella no habla muy bien el inglés” [In our home we speak Spanish most of the time, because my mom Sofi's grandma lives with us and she does not speak English pretty well]. As a matter of fact, all four of Sofi's grandparents speak Spanish and she is able to sustain conversations with them in that language. In one of our conversations, I asked her how she knew so many details about her grandparents' lives and she said that they liked to talk a lot and that she has had long conversations with them in Spanish. Sofi's other three grandparents do not live in the same household as her, but they live in nearby cities, like many other relatives.

Additionally, Sofi talked to me about her family translanguaging practices. She stated, “We kind of like, we call it like Spanglish in my house. To where we, like, are talking Spanish, but then we put English in there.” Also with her younger sister, she mentioned that with her, she will speak mostly in English, but say some words in Spanish every now and then.

### ***Heritage Language Learning and Maintenance***

Sofi is a Spanish heritage speaker who remembers that Spanish was her first language. She said that she learned Spanish first and that Spanish was the only language she used when she was younger. She says she attributes this to her grandmother being her main caretaker when she was growing up and to being exposed to other caregivers who only spoke in Spanish to her. She also recalls that they read in Spanish to her and that sometimes her grandmother would ask her to write reports in Spanish about the things that she remembered from the readings.

Although she has only attended formal schooling in English, Sofi feels comfortable with the level of proficiency she has in her heritage language. When I asked her if she would ever take Spanish classes in the future, she responded: “I will continue using it, but I don't think I will continue to take classes for it.” When I asked her why she would not continue taking classes to learn Spanish, she answered, “Because I feel like I have a good understanding, and I rather spend that class on something else, or like another language that I don't know.” She, however, admits to struggling with knowing where accents go when writing in Spanish.

### ***Ideologies and Outside Influences***

Sofi thinks that society has a positive perception about Spanish speakers. She told me, “I think here in the U.S. is very open, and a lot of people know Spanish, and people are very open with it. I would like, say maybe here in Texas, Spanish would be the second most used language.” This shows how aware Sofia is about language practices in her community. When we were discussing whether it was beneficial for a person to be bilingual, Sofi said, “Yes, when it comes to, like, job interviews and stuff like that, more things are open, because you can communicate with other people.” She also mentioned how many small business owners in her community and in the downtown area are Hispanic.

In fact, her dad owns a restaurant that serves Mexican and Tex-Mex food in her town's downtown area. This has twofold implications for her language practices. On the one hand, the fact that her dad is also a Hispanic small business owner motivates her family to support those types of businesses and go more frequently. On the other hand, on the occasions that she visits those businesses, she might continue to be exposed to the language outside her home because this is another environment where she can hear it and use it.

### ***A Picture Is Worth More Than a Thousand Words***

Sofi constantly referred to her family trips to Mexico when asked about where she used Spanish. When asked how often she goes to Mexico she said, “Um, we go to Cabo every February,” and she mentioned this is a vacation trip they started making every year since 2019. Her mother also referenced travel to Hispanic countries as a way to maintain and improve language skills. She responded on the parent questionnaire, “Yo pienso que es viajar y estar en lugares que hablan español” [I think it is traveling and being in places where Spanish is spoken]. She then added, “Mis hijas por ejemplo cuando llegamos de México así sea por 4 o 5 días llegan hablando español todo el tiempo” [My daughters for instance when we return from Mexico even if it is for 4 or 5 days they return speaking Spanish all the time].

Sofi shared the picture in Figure 4.3 while explaining to me that it was important for her and her family to remember the name of this place because that is a restaurant that they liked a lot in Cabo, so that is the reason she had that picture on her cell phone. Then, I asked her why she chose that picture and how it represented Spanish to her. She articulated that the sign is in Spanish, that the place is in Mexico where Spanish is the spoken language, and how there was *papel picado* in the picture, which is a cultural reference to Mexico and Hispanic culture.

**Figure 4.3**

*Picture of the Restaurant “Jardín Secreto” Signboard in Cabo, México*



### ***Summary of Sofia***

Sofia learned Spanish thanks to the literacy teaching of her grandmother, who was her main caregiver and would only speak and read to her in Spanish. Sofi is very proud of being bilingual and she asserts that she is quite proficient in Spanish. In fact, she affirms that she is the most proficient in the language compared to her siblings who prefer to speak in English. At home, Sofi's parents prefer that their children speak Spanish, especially since her grandmother lives with them and she knows little English. Sofia, states that a weird dynamic takes place at home where they mixed languages, what she calls “Spanglish.”

### **Kevin: An Ethnically Mixed Heritage Spanish Speaker**

Kevin is an ethnically mixed 15-year-old and very dedicated high school student. Kevin's father is Filipino while his mother is Mexican. When asked about his ethnicity, he says he is mixed but culturally he identifies more as Hispanic because of his close ties with his mother's family. Nonetheless, he notes that people do not see him as Hispanic. He stated, "Because of my appearance, I'm more Pacific Islander, so it's just easier for people to know me as Asian instead of Hispanic, but I consider myself both--mixed." Kevin is an only child, and currently he lives with his mother and stepfather, who does not speak Spanish.

Kevin is also very involved in extracurricular activities and a devoted student at school. He is a member of the school UIL Science Club and the Cross Country and the Track and Field school teams. He takes many advanced classes and says that he almost does not have time in his schedule for continuing to take Spanish as a world language in the following school year. Especially, because he planned to take other advanced classes and prefers to take some specialized courses in the field of engineering. He seems to be very sociable because he often spent lunch time with a big group of classmates or friends. During my observations, I noticed that he does not stick with a particular group and rather navigates among different groups during lunch time.

#### ***Language Practices***

Kevin is an English dominant heritage speaker. He recognizes that his level of proficiency in Spanish is not ideal, and that he struggles with communicating in the language. He said that he can sustain some basic conversations, such as ordering food or asking for directions. He has seen how useful the language can be for communicating with other speakers of Spanish. He gave an example of how his mother can communicate with construction workers who are



dominant Spanish speakers or to get better directions on how to get to a place in a Hispanic neighborhood.

His mother stated in the parent/guardian questionnaire that she is the only Spanish speaker at home and for that reason there are no conversations in Spanish in that environment. Kevin remembers that his mother made some efforts to teach him Spanish when he was little. During our conversations, he made references to his grandparents as “mis abuelos” and to his mom as “mi madre.” In this regard, he said, “My mom taught me both English and Spanish when I was young, but then she kind of dropped the Spanish a little later.” It was probably difficult for his mother, being the only parent who knew the language, to try to teach him and enforce the use of Spanish at home since it was important for Kevin to also communicate with his father, and then with his stepfather, whom neither speak the language.

### ***Heritage Language Learning and Maintenance***

As previously stated, Kevin recalls his mother trying to teach him Spanish when he was little. In fact, his mother used to be a middle school, high school, and college Spanish teacher in the U.S., but she left the profession when he was born. On the parent/guardian questionnaire, Kevin's mother confirmed that she was trying to raise Kevin to be fully bilingual like her parents did with her, by speaking to him and teaching him some Spanish before he started formal schooling. Then, she also confirmed that Kevin was exposed to both English and Spanish during that time because Kevin's father did not speak Spanish. She then made a comment about having failed on language transfer, stating, “I have not done a good job at passing on the language but I do feel it's important to be bilingual or learn more than 2 languages.” This perspective has probably influenced Kevin's own view about bilingualism and his desire to become proficient in his heritage language.

Kevin is the only one of the four study participants who is taking Spanish as his language class in school. He says that he can still remember some of what his mother taught him and that it has been helpful for his Spanish classes. Nevertheless, he recognizes that he is not as proficient as he would like to be in the language. He adds that he does not feel confident speaking Spanish in public. He noted, “In public? Um, I feel a bit embarrassed, but I wouldn't do, I don't think I would do so bad. Like I could order, possibly order food, or like ask for directions maybe.” He acknowledges, though, that he should be able to do more with the language, and he is willing to continue taking courses in high school and in college to keep increasing his proficiency in the language.

### ***Ideologies and Outside Influences***

Kevin wants to improve his skills in Spanish because he believes it will be beneficial for him to become fully bilingual. He said to me, “I, obviously at this school, I am taking Spanish currently, and I'd probably do it in college.” In addition, although he recognizes the benefits of being proficient in Spanish, he does not see it as a priority at the moment. He told me:

I would like to become fully literate, but I don't know if I have the time to do so because I have a lot of clubs and extracurriculars I wanna do, but I would really like to do so, so I can communicate with my relatives really easily and go to Spanish speaking countries and be able to like travel alone, not needing a tour guide or a translator of something. That would be fun.

Despite the perceived benefits that he mentioned, Kevin is not planning to take Spanish next school year. He is currently taking level 2 of Spanish, which is enough for him to get the required world language credits. He said to me that he would like to continue into the next level,

but due to schedule limitations, he would rather take other courses that he is more interested in at this moment.

He believes that the general perception of society about Hispanic people is positive. However, he also said, “I do see on the news and like from, um, from people talking that people treat some Hispanic communities lower.” He even gave examples about accents and origin, stating that Spanish from Spain might have a higher acceptance than the Spanish from Mexico. This suggests that he understands how society has prejudices about certain groups based on origin or language practices (see Lacorte & Magro, 2022; Martín Rojo & Pujolar Cos, 2020; Rosa & Flores, 2017).

### ***A Picture Is Worth More Than a Thousand Words***

When I asked Kevin to show me a picture of something that represented Spanish to him he showed me the image in Figure 4.4 below, which is a picture of what he described as a Mayan whistle that he got on a vacation trip to Mexico, when he visited the pyramids. He explained to me why this represented his heritage language:

I got it there like when I was there we went to like the temples and there were some natives there and they made these cool handmade things and just like the environment there, they only speak Spanish. And it's like the cool culture of the past and like, this is apparently something where it built something else old Spanish culture from back then. That just reminds me of it, and it's one of the few things I have.

When he showed me the picture, I was going to tell him that the Mayans did not speak Spanish. However, I stopped myself because I wanted him to give me his interpretation with no interference. The fact that he mentioned that it was from a visit to Mexico and that all the sellers were speaking Spanish to him while trying to sell the souvenirs creates a connection to the

language. Nonetheless, I cannot deny that I was expecting him to show a picture of someone from his mother's side of the family or just his mother, since that represents his closest connection to the language.

**Figure 4.4**

*Picture of a Whistle That Kevin Got When He Visited Mayan Temples in Cancún, México*



***Summary of Kevin***

Kevin is the only one of the four participants who has a mixed heritage, being his mother of Mexican descent and his father of Filipino descent. He identifies as Hispanic even though most people consider him Asian due to his looks. His mother, a former Spanish teacher, tried to teach him Spanish during his early childhood, but then gave up. He does not consider himself to

be fully proficient in Spanish but thinks he can manage to communicate in certain situations that require him to speak the language such as asking for directions or ordering food. He was taking level 2 of Spanish as a class in school and plans to continue to take courses if his schedule permits now in high school, and later in college.

### Cross Case Analysis

Each of the cases analyzed in the narratives section above illustrates various experiences of heritage language learning and maintenance. Nevertheless, through the analysis of the data, some similarities became quite evident. Before I begin denoting the common themes among participants, I present some background information about them in Table 4.1, which aggregates data in one place to generate a better understanding about some factors that might have affected the participants' success towards heritage language maintenance.

**Table 4.1**

*Participants' Heritage Language Use Information*

Participant	Age	<i>De facto</i> bilingual education	Languages used at home (present)	Language exposure experiences
Julia	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Early childhood: Learned to read and write in Spanish with her mother.</li> <li>- PreK - 2nd grade: Dual Language program in Spanish and English in the U.S.</li> <li>- 3rd - 10th grade: English-medium schools in the U.S.</li> </ul>	<p>Spanish with parents</p> <p>English with younger sisters</p>	Travel to Mexico to visit grandparents

Participant	Age	<i>De facto</i> bilingual education	Languages used at home (present)	Language exposure experiences
Jorge	16	- Kindergarten to 5th grade: Attended school in El Salvador in Spanish - English as a second language: Some classes on the weekends for 2 years in El Salvador. - 6th - 10th grade: English-medium schools in the U.S.	Spanish with all family members	Travel to El Salvador to visit his family during Summer and Christmas break
Sofia	14	- Early childhood: Reading and writing in Spanish taught by her grandmother. - PreK - 9th grade: English-medium schools in the U.S.	Spanish with parents and grandmother  English with younger sister	Travel to Mexico for vacation trips and to attend family events
Kevin	15	- Early childhood: Reading and vocabulary in Spanish taught by his mother who is a former Spanish teacher. - Kindergarten - 9th in English in the U.S. - Took level 1 of Spanish as a foreign language in middle school, and level 2 in high school	English with parents  Is an only child	Travel to Mexico for vacation trips and to visit family

*Note.* Since only one participant was in an official bilingual education program for 3 years, I consider their *de facto* bilingual education (Krashen, 1996). That is, how the participants' families and the school together have contributed to their bilingual literacy education.

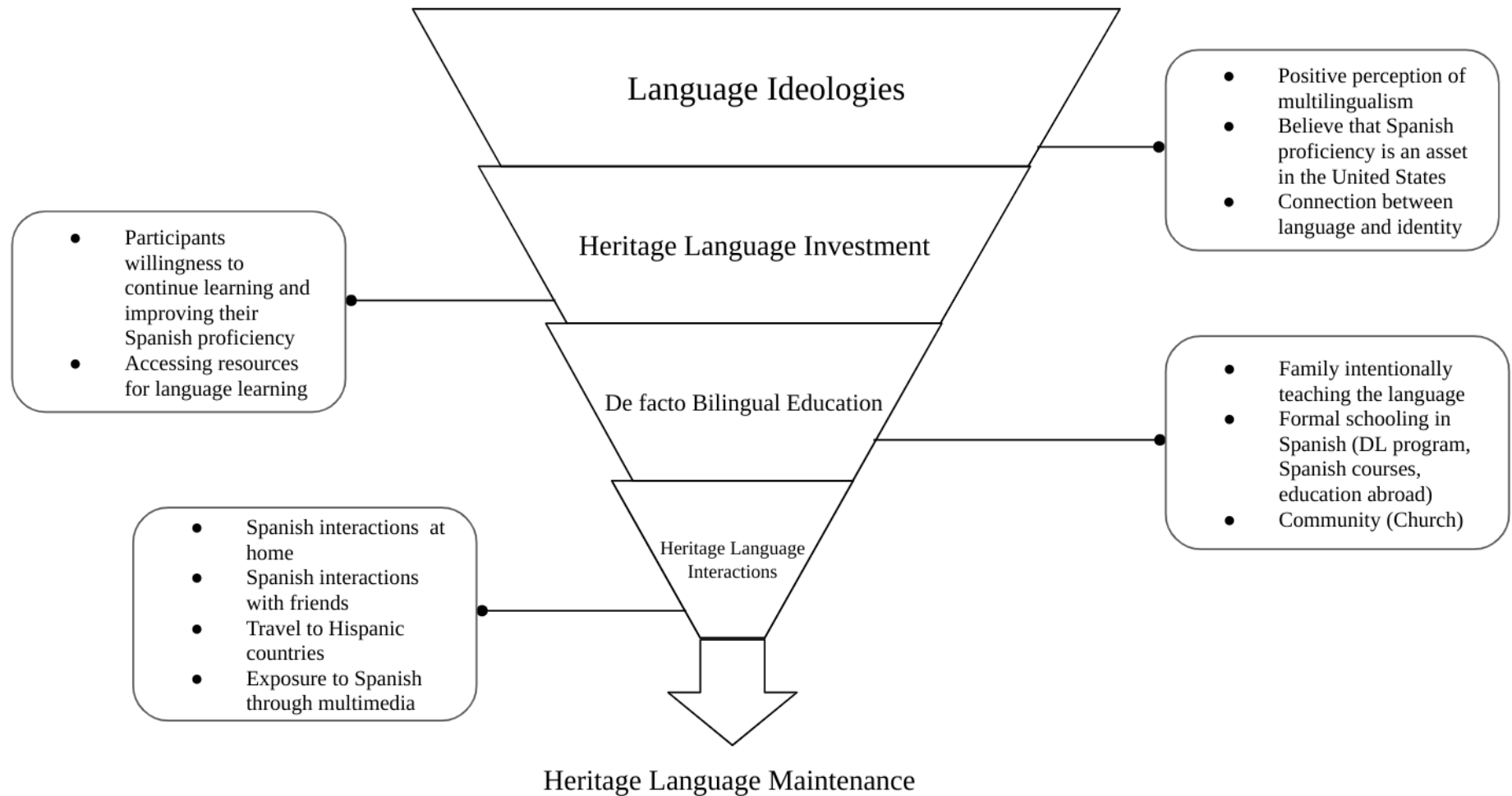
Responding to Research Question 1 (How do Spanish heritage speakers maintain their proficiency in the heritage language?), Table 4.1 illustrates that the *de facto* bilingual education that they received from their early childhood and through adolescence has influenced their

journey towards heritage language maintenance, which is a topic that will be further discussed below. Additionally, when it comes to the role that family plays on this matter, constant exposure to the heritage language at home as well as the need of using it to communicate with some family members, become other variables to consider while answering Research Questions 1 and 2 (How do schools, families, and the community support Spanish heritage speakers towards the maintenance and development of their heritage language skills?).

Figure 4.5 represents a summary of the findings on this study through a qualitative logic model (Yin, 2018). The inverted pyramid shows the overarching themes or factors articulated by the participants and their families when discussing heritage language development and maintenance. Each upper level, starting with language ideologies, affects the following one going down, which in the end, leads to heritage language maintenance. The boxes linked to each level lists concrete examples of how those core factors or themes are represented for the participants.

**Figure 4.5**

*Influential Factors for Heritage Language Maintenance*





## Language Ideologies

A person's perceptions or set of beliefs about language affect their decisions about language learning, use, and maintenance (Norton, 2000). In this study, all four participants and their guardians perceived that maintaining the heritage language and being bilingual was a promise for better opportunities in the future. They believe that being multilingual is an asset and inheriting a language different from the dominant language is a valuable opportunity to become multilingual. When discussing how important it is to develop proficiency in the heritage language, Julia commented, “I definitely feel like it is important to become literate in a language that you especially, in a language that you already have.” With regard to Spanish, she said, “I already kind of have it, it's like, it would be nice to like, keep it, I think.” In one instance, she also mentioned “the more languages you have, it is not going to be a bad thing for you.”

Julia's perspectives on multilingualism mirror her mother's beliefs about languages. When asked what language their child should prioritize, Julia's mother shared that they should focus on both (English and Spanish). She also said “*estamos convencidos que podía ser una gran oportunidad para nuestras hijas hablar dos o más idiomas simultáneamente*” [we are convinced that it would be a great opportunity for our daughters to speak two or more languages simultaneously]. This thought was also shared by the three other parents/guardians in their questionnaire responses. Their support for multilingualism might also be evident in three of the participants' choice of French as the world language course that they were taking in school during the development of this research study. Sofia said that she took French “to learn a different language,” since she already knew Spanish. It is important to note that during that school year none advanced Spanish courses were being offered, and that the school district does not have a Spanish for heritage speakers program either.

Furthermore, when discussing the benefits of multilingualism with the participants, Julia stated that “having another language like gives you a different mindset.” On the other hand, Jorge talked about the transaction of making meaning and navigating through his languages as another advantage. With regard to understanding a concept he noted “if I look it up in English and I still don't understand I would access to the definition in Spanish, so I would understand better.” Julia also mentioned how there are words in the Spanish language that do not necessarily translate and how it was an advantage to be able to understand what other people meant when they used them.

These high school students considered knowing the Spanish language as a valuable and “cool” skill to have, as Kevin and Sofia stated. They all mentioned how Spanish is a widely spoken language in the United States, which means it is useful to be proficient in the language. Jorge and Sofia particularly mentioned how it is the second most spoken language in the country and in the state of Texas, making a case for it as being useful. Furthermore, Kevin cited an example and how it has been useful for his mother. He stated:

Even in the U.S. it is better if you speak Spanish, cuz I know my mom, whenever we go to certain restaurants or communities with many Spanish speaking people, she is, like, able to get directions better and stuff better. And like with Spanish speaking contractors.

Meanwhile, none of them stated that they have experienced any negative reactions to speaking Spanish in public, and they all understood that being a Spanish speaker in the United States was a positive thing. Sofia said to me “A lot of people know Spanish, and people are very open with it,” while Kevin noted that “Hispanic culture is kind of highly regarded.” Despite these positive perceptions, Kevin also referenced that there are some societal prejudices about Hispanic people, but that he has seen it in the news, not experienced it.

Some of them stated that being proficient in Spanish makes them more competitive in the job market, because Spanish speakers can fulfill more communication needs. Sofia provided an example where she stated, “When it comes to, like, job interviews and stuff like that, more things [referring to opportunities to speak the language] are open, because you can communicate with other people.” She added, “So, let's say I work at a retail store, and then there is somebody that doesn't understand. I can help them out!” Additionally, Kevin mentioned how he could be “placed in multiple different countries like Spain, Mexico, and all the Spanish speaking countries.”

When it comes to how their heritage language connects to their identity, parents/guardians made some remarks that allude to this. For instance, Jorge's grandmother makes a connection between the Spanish language and identity when she points to the importance of intergenerational language transfer. She explained, “Es muy importante que las generaciones sigan hablando el mismo idioma que sus familiares porque es la cultura y raíces que pasan a lo largo de los años” [It is very important that generations continue to speak the same language of their family because it is the culture and origins that transfer throughout the years]. Meanwhile, the student participants clearly perceived the Spanish language and Hispanic culture as interconnected entities. For example, when asked about his identity Jorge stated that he is Hispanic “because that's the language we speak.” While Sofia mentioned that “that's what they speak in Mexico,” a country that she has a connection with through her parents and relatives who still live there.

In summary, the participants' beliefs about multilingualism and their overall positive perspective about speaking Spanish supports their interest and efforts towards maintaining the heritage language. This, indeed, influences their investment in the heritage language, although

other factors will also play a role. Based on this study's findings, I argue that the need to use the language to communicate with relatives, the participant's level of proficiency in the heritage language, and the exposure or frequency of interactions in the language, also contribute to the participants' overall investment towards maintaining the Spanish language.

### **Heritage Language Investment**

The participants' heritage language investment for this study is defined as their commitment to learning the language or specific actions taken for the maintenance or improvement of their proficiency skills (Norton, 2000) in the Spanish language. Before discussing the students' investment, it is important to mention that the parents/guardians' investment toward the intergenerational transfer of the language, to a great extent, played a pivotal role into the heritage language learning journey of the participants. Without the parents, grandparents, or main caregivers' commitment to transfer the heritage language to the following generations, I would not even have access to the main participants in this study. This is because it would have been difficult for me to identify them as heritage speakers if they did not, in some way, show that they had some relationship to the Spanish language or were proficient in it. I will discuss their actions with details in the De Facto Bilingual Education section below.

Heritage language investment was slightly different for all participants. This was influenced by their perceived level of proficiency in the heritage language and their attitudes about how useful Spanish is for them. Jorge, Julia, and Sofia speak Spanish fluently and can easily switch between English and Spanish. When they were asked if they would take any Spanish classes at school or college, they responded that they do not think they need to take any Spanish courses to maintain proficiency. On the opposite side, Kevin, who self-identified as an

intermediate Spanish speaker, stated that he would like to continue his Spanish language education either in high school or college.

Julia, despite being quite proficient in Spanish, expressed that she would like to study the language deeper. In one of our interactions she said, “I think that it would be a good idea to continue learning. Not only learning, but also reinforcing that language.” During member checking I asked her if she is willing to take any AP Spanish courses in high school and she said that she was planning to take the placement test in Spanish to obtain language credits, and that she would take any advanced level Spanish courses if they were offered in school. If not, she would enroll in Spanish courses in college in order to improve her language skills.

When asked what resources they used or needed to maintain their proficiency in Spanish, Jorge said that he mostly listens to music in Spanish, but that he does not read in Spanish. When asked to clarify if he does not like to read in Spanish but does in other languages, he confirmed that he does not like to read in general. In contrast, Julia said that she would love to have books in Spanish, because reading in Spanish would help her expand her vocabulary in the language. During the interview she stated, “I think especially books in Spanish would be nice to like be able to keep reading because sometimes comprehension is not the same as like reading, and I mean like spoken comprehension.” Then, she added that when she reads in English she learns new words, but in Spanish she does not due to just being exposed to familiar words. She expressed it to me in this way: “Because, like at home, we like, probably use the same words like, daily.”

Sofia said that speaking Spanish at home is enough for her to maintain her proficiency in the language. When asked about what type of support she would need she said, “Communicating with people in the Spanish language. Like, maybe if I’m with my mom instead of speaking to her

in English, speak with her in Spanish and maybe listen to more music in Spanish.” In fact, all participants consider that having more interactions with Spanish speakers is going to help them maintain their skills in the language or improve them.

### **De Facto Bilingual Education**

A de facto bilingual education is “a situation in which an emergent English learner succeeds in an English-only classroom due to parental academic support in the home language” (Guzman, 2020). Since all the participants in this study were to some level exposed to Spanish at home during their childhood, as evidenced in Table 4.1, it is important to discuss their de facto bilingual education journeys (Krashen, 1996). Although heritage speakers can benefit from participating in dual language programs (Kirss et al., 2021), this is not a requirement for them to successfully develop and maintain their proficiency in the heritage language (Krashen, 1996). The findings of this study show that some family members, more specifically mothers and grandmothers, managed to prioritize providing language lessons and support to the participants in this study towards learning the heritage language. As a result, the participants were able to develop speaking and writing proficiency in Spanish.

Kevin's mother used to be a Spanish teacher in middle school, high school, and college. She left the profession after he was born but decided that it was important for her child to learn the language and replicate what her parents did with her. She spoke to Kevin in Spanish and insisted that he called her “madre” [mother] and his grandparents “abuelos.” She also read to him in Spanish and taught him plenty of vocabulary words. This, according to Kevin, has helped him be more successful in his Spanish courses, because he could remember things that his mother taught him when he was younger.

For Sofia, the bilingual education also began early with the support of her maternal grandmother, who was also her main caregiver since she was born. Sofia told me that her grandmother not only used to read to her in Spanish, but also encouraged her to write in the language. Then, Sofia was enrolled in a PreK program where she learned English. Since then, Sofia has attended English-medium schools, but keeps using Spanish at home, especially with the adults. The fact that her grandmother is a member of the household is a strong reason for her to maintain the language.

Julia's de facto bilingual education also started during her early childhood. Her parents only spoke Spanish at home and read to her in Spanish, but she would watch TV in English. Both of Julia's parents attended college in Mexico. Her mother in particular assumed the teaching role, putting emphasis on teaching her the grammar of the language. When Julia started formal schooling, she participated in a dual language program, but after passing the English proficiency test in second grade, she was taken out of the program by her mother, who thought she was being underserved in that program and decided to continue teaching Julia Spanish at home. From second grade until now, Julia has received her formal education only in English-medium schools. However, she has participated in several church summer camps that were completely in Spanish.

Finally, in Jorge's case, his preschool and primary school education was completely in Spanish due to living in El Salvador. However, to start preparing him for his move to the United States, his parents enrolled him in an English as a foreign language program that he attended on the weekends for 2 years. When he moved To the United States to live with his grandmother, he was just starting middle school completely in English. Thus, given his emerging English proficiency, he was placed in the ESL class. Jorge told me that he is no longer receiving ESL services and that his English proficiency has improved significantly since he arrived in the U.S.

He has also only attended English-medium schools, but keeps using Spanish at home and at school, in every opportunity he has.

In the first three cases, it is evident that heritage language learning in the early years was a priority for these families. In Jorge's case though, the heritage language was the only language he was exposed to in El Salvador and the only one his family speaks. Regardless, after moving to the United States to live with his grandmother, the preference for Spanish use at home persists, especially since his grandmother highly values the language and considers heritage language transfer a necessity to preserve cultural values.

When asked about their education in English-medium schools, none of them expressed that they received home language support at school. However, it is possible that the academic support that they received at home in their home language has influenced their strong academic performance in English. Meanwhile, they stated they have not encountered any negative reactions while using Spanish at school. On the contrary, some teachers have encouraged some of them to use their heritage language for academic purposes, such as in Sofia's case, where the teacher asked her to present a speech in Spanish for extra credit. Furthermore, none of them believe that a teacher would ask them to not speak Spanish in class, which influences their positive perception and beliefs about their heritage language.

### ***Parental Investment***

The role of the parent or guardian of the heritage speaker seems to have been pivotal in determining whether the participants in this study were able to maintain proficiency skills in the heritage language. In the case of Julia and Kevin, their mothers both assumed a language teacher role to facilitate the learning of vocabulary and grammar in the heritage language. For Sofia, her grandmother became her Spanish literacy teacher, by reading to her and also encouraging her to



write in the language. In Jorge's case, constant contact with his family who only speaks Spanish is what helps him maintain the language.

The findings suggest that when both parents speak the heritage language, it is easier for the child to acquire and maintain the language. In all the participants' families except for one, the parents or adults in the house were fluent in Spanish and stated a preference for speaking Spanish at home. Julia's mother stated, “Tomamos la decisión de hablar en casa el español” [We decided to speak Spanish at home]. Similarly, Jorge's grandmother mentioned “Hablamos todos español entre nosotros porque es el primer idioma de todos” [We speak Spanish among us because it is everyone's first language]. This is an affordance that can only be possible because the adults in the family are either native or heritage Spanish speakers. For Kevin, that was not the case, since he is the only participant who just had one parent that spoke the language. He is also the only one who seems to be less proficient in Spanish.

### **Heritage Language Interactions**

When it comes to language use in the household, all participants are exposed to differing levels of interactions in the heritage language. On one end is Jorge, whose interactions at home are completely in Spanish, in the middle are Julia and Sofia who switch between both Spanish and English depending on their audience, and on the other end is Kevin who does not use much Spanish, but who is still exposed by listening to his mother and other extended family members speak it.

As shown on Table 4.1 above, of all participants, Jorge is the one who has a strong preference for languaging in Spanish in all environments and with different audiences (i.e., family, friends, classmates, teachers, etc.). On the opposite side is Kevin, who mostly speaks English with everyone, unless he is in the situation where he must use the Spanish he knows to

communicate with another person. Of the three participants with siblings, Julia and Sofi prefer to use English to talk to their siblings but would rather use Spanish when talking to their parents or grandparents.

When asked about their language preferences in different scenarios, Jorge answered that he prefers using Spanish with family and friends but added that he would adapt according to the situation. Thus, if his friends prefer to use English or if his audience does not understand Spanish, he would use English. However, with his family, that is never the case because all of them are native Spanish speakers and prefer to use Spanish.

Julia and Sofi explained to me that they use Spanish with the adults in their families (i.e., parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc.), but prefer to use English with their younger siblings and with friends. I asked both of them if their parents spoke English, and they confirmed they do. So when I asked Julia why she would rather speak Spanish to her parents she told me “I think it’s really just out of habit.” Then, when asked about the language maintenance efforts, Sofi’s mom stated in the parent/guardian questionnaire “No es nada facil, ya que entre los padres e hijos lo hablamos todo el tiempo (Spanish), pero entre hermanos siempre usan el idioma ingles” [It is not easy, between parents and children we speak it all the time, but between siblings they always use English].

When it comes to Kevin, he is the one who has less exposure to Spanish and he barely uses it, because at home his mother is the only one who speaks the language and due to his limited proficiency in Spanish. He explained that he would hear Spanish when his mother speaks to her family members or to the people who provide house cleaning services, but he does not feel that he needs to speak Spanish at home.

All four participants currently attend an English-medium school and prefer to use English at school. Jorge, for instance, says that although Spanish is his preferred language, at school he prefers to learn the content in the language he will be assessed in, which is English. When he is socializing with friends and classmates, he uses Spanish because he gravitates towards other Hispanic students at school. In the case of Julia, Sofi, and Kevin, they do not have many interactions with Spanish speakers at school, so they prefer to use English with their friends, whose only or most dominant language is English.

### ***Language Exposure Through Travel***

Something that all four participants also have in common is the opportunity to travel abroad to a Hispanic country. In the case of Jorge, he visits his family in El Salvador, but for Julia, Sofia, and Kevin, the country that they maintain a connection with is Mexico. Kevin, for instance, refers to his travels when he thinks of his Spanish language heritage. He said to me:

I've been to Cancun, and like I've been to the Mexican, like the temples. The ones with like the 365 steps that reminds me of some ancient Mexican city too. And the environment, everyone there speaking Spanish, like the culture there, like everything. That's what reminds me of Spanish.

Jorge is the one who travels more frequently and who has the longest stays, which is probably because his whole family still lives in El Salvador. He told me that he used to travel only once a year every summer break, but since last year, he is also going on Christmas break, and he is planning to go again this year. In the summers, he spends 2 months in El Salvador.

On the other hand, Julia, Sofia, and Kevin normally travel for a few days, or a week or two at a time when they go to Mexico for fun or to visit family. Sofi's mom in particular has expressed how important travel has been in stimulating her daughters to speak the language. In

the parent/guardian questionnaire she expressed that traveling is a way that her family keeps in contact with family abroad. She wrote: “Viajamos seguido a México a visitar nuestros familiares” [We often travel to Mexico to visit our family]. She also stated that immersion is the best way to guarantee that her children maintain the heritage language.

### **Summary of the Findings**

Figure 4.5 is a logic model (Yin, 2018) that represents the findings from this research study. It shows how language ideologies influenced the heritage language investment of participants and their families. Then, that influenced their decision to provide a de facto bilingual education, which became the foundation to the Spanish proficiency and literacy development of these heritage speakers. Which in the end also relates to the level of interactions in the heritage language that these heritage speakers can afford.

The findings of this study can be summarized with two main ideas. On one hand, heritage language maintenance was possible for these participants because of an environment that was conducive to language learning. The home, school, and community environments in which these participants interact are considered safe places for the use of their language. Their language ideologies afford them the opportunity to see their heritage language as an asset rather than as a burden. They and their families share a good perception about multilingualism and believe that it provides better future opportunities.

Furthermore, all participants received a de facto bilingual education. They all either went through some formal schooling in Spanish or received instruction in the language by a parent or grandparent. Of the four participants, only one was taking Spanish classes during this research, but all other three chose to take French courses instead because they considered they were already proficient in Spanish. Their de facto education keeps being reinforced by the use of the

language at home and in some instances in the school or church like in Julia's case. Going beyond their education, other elements that can be highlighted in terms of influencing heritage language maintenance are language interactions with other speakers, especially family and friends, and exposure to multimedia resources in the language. Finally, for all participants exposure was also warranted through travel to destinations where the language is widely spoken.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the factors that affect heritage language maintenance among adolescent Spanish heritage speakers. As a former teacher of multiple world languages, I am interested in second language acquisition theory, practice, and research, and I was curious to explore why some of my language learners struggled to maintain their heritage language, when that was the first language they acquired in their early childhood. Thus, I decided to research this topic looking forward to understanding my students' situation better. I found that there was a dearth of research focusing on heritage speakers in relationship with their heritage language, particularly for U.S.-born Latinx students. The focus of most studies, especially in the context of the United States, is on emergent bilinguals or immigrant students regarding their success in acquiring English as an additional language.

The questions that guided this study were: 1) How do Spanish heritage speakers maintain their proficiency in the heritage language? and 2) How do schools, families, and the community support Spanish heritage speakers towards the maintenance and development of their heritage language skills? As stated in the previous chapter, the findings suggest that heritage speakers' investment to maintain their heritage language is affected by internalized language ideologies, the support they receive from their families to learn the language, sometimes in the form of a de facto language education, and the amount of interactions they have with other speakers of the language.

The theoretical framework that I used to guide my research were theories that connect language identity and language ideologies to language investment, which then translate into heritage language maintenance. These theories are relevant to the subjects of this study because

they inform the intersectionality of social characteristics, such as class, race, gender, and how they affect language practices. In a society where English is hegemonically positioned as the language of privilege and power (Babino & Stewart, 2020; Chang-Bacon, 2020), heritage language speakers often confront a significant number of challenges that influence their language ideologies and affect their decisions about language learning and development.

I introduced the study by providing some background information on the status of heritage language education in the United States, followed by an analysis of previous research conducted in this field. Next, I explained the methods used to recruit the participants and to collect data. In Chapter 4, I gave voice to each participant by presenting their narratives. Then, I presented a cross-case analysis to highlight my findings. Below, I will summarize the main contributions of my study to research and the implications that the findings have for different actors, including educators, families, policymakers, and researchers.

### **Contributions**

This study contributes to the scarce literature on heritage language speakers and their journey towards heritage language maintenance in the United States. Most research in the last 50 years focused on studying emergent bilinguals, disregarding that heritage language speakers constitute a population with marked differences from other language learners (Fuller & Leeman, 2020). Heritage language maintenance is a difficult task in an environment where hegemonic influences favor monolingualism or the use of the dominant language over minority languages (Babino & Stewart, 2020). Nevertheless, this study shows that through individual investment and family agency, most of the participants were able to maintain their proficiency in Spanish to a great extent. Kevin, the participant who had less proficiency never fully developed Spanish as a home language. That is, Kevin has not necessarily experienced language loss, he just never had

as much exposure to Spanish as the other participants since not everyone in his household (his father nor his stepfather) spoke Spanish.

Overall, the participants have not experienced language loss, which is common amongst heritage Spanish speakers in the U.S. (see Valenzuela, 1999). There are several factors that might have contributed to such results. First, all the participants' parents completed some formal higher education, most of them in Hispanic higher education institutions. At the same time, they and their children have a positive assessment about the Spanish language, which influences their perceptions and ideologies about language learning and maintenance. Second, their families are privileged because they have access to certain resources, such as money to afford living in a community where upper-middle class people live and for traveling to visit family abroad or to go on vacation, which is something not many immigrant families can do. Third, the participants received some type of bilingual education. They either acquired the heritage language first/at home or developed literacy skills in that language during their early childhood and first years of formal schooling. Finally, all these factors also helped families to be fully involved in the process of language learning and development.

### **Language Ideologies and Investment**

In this study, I found high heritage language investment from the participants and their parents/guardians. The participants' investment, their commitment to learning and maintaining the language (Norton, 2000), was affected by internalized discourses and outside influences. In part, the language ideologies of the adults in the family were internalized by the teenagers. For instance, discourses on the benefits of being bilingual and how knowing multiple languages can be important for future opportunities were expressed by both the parents/guardians and their related participants using similar statements. Additionally, as previously stated, these



participants' socioeconomic status and parents' education afforded them some privileges and opportunities to access resources to accomplish language maintenance, such as opportunities to visit family or vacation in Hispanic countries, which guaranteed exposure to the language.

Contrary to what I have witnessed in the past with some former heritage speakers and as presented in previous research on this topic (see Hsieh et al., 2020; Valenzuela, 1999), the participants in this study have an overall positive assessment about their skills in the heritage language. Moreover, they felt proud about having the ability to communicate in a language different from the majority language and they highly valued bilingualism. The participants and their parents/guardians also believed that their heritage language was an asset. Although two of the participants mentioned that there was some discrimination attached to the Hispanic identity, their overall perception of the Spanish language use in the U.S. was positive. As a result, these positive perspectives about the heritage language possibly increased their motivation and investment towards keeping the language, as Tseng (2021) suggested.

Notwithstanding, previous research has found that despite positive views about bilingualism, language loss among heritage language speakers is still prevalent (Beaudrie et al., 2019). For many heritage speakers, there are more urgent needs than investing time and resources into maintaining a language that they do not need to function in the broader society where they take care of their daily businesses (Pascual y Cabo et al., 2017). However, the participants of this study expressed on multiple occasions how their language skills in Spanish might be useful outside of the home environment, but at the same time recognize that it was not as necessary as English to succeed in school.

The sense of belonging to a group or community also played an important role in shaping the participants' identity, along with their needs to communicate with members of that group. For

instance, they tied language use to their participation in a group's activities, like Julia who expressed with pride that she knew many prayers in Spanish and that she attended Mass in Spanish. In the same way, some of them expressed how the need to communicate with members of their family at home or abroad was a factor contributing to language maintenance. For instance, to stay connected with his family Jorge needs to maintain Spanish proficiency because that is the only language his family speaks. For Sofia, her grandmother living with her family and the fact that she speaks Spanish motivates her to keep using the language.

Another relevant finding was how successful heritage language maintenance impacted language investment for some of the participants. That is, once participants believed that they accomplished a good command of the heritage language, such as in the case of Jorge and Sofia, they showed less interest in investing their time to study the language. These participants expressed that the only thing they needed to maintain their proficiency was to continue to speak it with family and friends. However, Kevin, who perceived himself to be less proficient in the language, but still connected to the Hispanic ethnic identity, expressed willingness to continue studying the language. Thus, this finding demonstrates how investment is affected by language identities, mainly on how participants assessed their linguistic abilities and connected them to their heritage.

### **Privilege**

My study is different from other studies on Latinx heritage Spanish speakers in the U.S. (such as Valenzuela, 1999), because my participants come from a place of privilege. These four participants have some degree of privilege in terms of having access to resources that not all heritage speakers in this country have. They attend school in a school district that has a population of higher socioeconomic status. This is also a school district that prioritizes providing

the best quality of education by investing considerable amounts of resources into curriculum development and updates for each content being taught, as well as trying to maintain small class sizes or student-teacher ratios. In most cases this is not possible for heritage speakers in the U.S. In her seminal study with U.S.-Mexican youth, Valenzuela (1999) found that in an overcrowded and underfunded high school in Houston, TX subtractive instructional practices depleted students—both immigrant and U.S. born—from social and cultural capital that translated to lower academic achievement. Another finding exposed that the absence of caring relationships between teachers and students negatively affected student engagement.

As Krashen (1996) explained, there is some influence derived from a better socioeconomic status when it comes to heritage language maintenance, or more generally to bilingual students' overall academic performance. In this study, the fact that the parents/guardians are educated and perhaps better-off economically than other families, made their efforts for heritage language education more effective and successful. Of course, as Krashen (1996) also posited, this is a product of certain advantages that more affluent families can confer, such as living in a more print-rich environment, having a quieter space for studying, and parents or caregivers having the time to provide tutoring in the heritage language.

### **(De Facto) Bilingual Education**

Undoubtedly, heritage language maintenance can be a successful endeavor when heritage speakers have access to formal schooling in the heritage language, like Jorge did in El Salvador, and Julia did for 2 years in the dual-language program she was enrolled in within a U.S. school. Research is clear that participating in academic programs that integrate the development of literacy skills of their heritage language, such as dual language programs and heritage language courses, is beneficial for heritage speakers (Chang-Bacon, 2020; Fuller & Leeman, 2020;

Polinsky, 2018). Nevertheless, since currently only 2% of U.S. schools offer bilingual education, not all heritage speakers will have access to such programs.

A key finding of this study is that although previous research shows the benefits of bilingual education programs (see Kirss et al., 2021; Steele et al., 2017), participating in one of them is not a requisite *sine qua non* for heritage speakers to be successful at language maintenance (Guzman, 2020). That is, in the four cases presented here, the parents and other family members were able to provide instruction in the heritage language to make sure that their children would learn it. Thus, a de facto bilingual education delivered in the home environment by family members or caregivers, might be required to guarantee intergenerational language transfer and heritage language maintenance.

With the previous statement, it is not my intention to support the argument against formal bilingual education, that some scholars (e.g., de la Peña, 1991) have used to argue that it should not be offered because many people have succeeded at becoming bilingual without it as presented in Krashen's (1996) book. In fact, in most cases, individuals who are successful at maintaining their heritage language without formal education or literacy instruction are those with privileges like the participants in this study, who have educated parents and higher socioeconomic status (see Abreu Fernandes, 2019), but the reality is that in the United States not everyone is middle class.

Parents and caregivers taking over the responsibility of language instruction is just a temporary solution for a system that is failing to provide the services that the student population so desperately needs. Additionally, the poor implementation of some bilingual education programs is failing to guarantee the equal development of literacy skills in both languages, by just focusing on transitioning English learners into full English acquisition (Babino & Stewart,

2017; Beaudrie & Loza, 2022; Martín Rojo & Pujolar Cos, 2020), or like in Julia's case, trying to hold back heritage speakers to secure funding for the program. Consequently, that is another area that needs immediate attention by school administrators and education policymakers.

As this study shows, a *de facto* bilingual education, where parents and caregivers implemented literacy practices with the child at home, such as reading in the heritage language and providing explicit lessons on grammar and vocabulary, provided a safe space for the child to develop their proficiency skills in the heritage language. However, receiving formal schooling in a dual language program or taking Spanish for heritage speakers' classes, as Fuller and Leeman (2020) suggested, would be ideal for Spanish heritage speakers in the U.S.

In this study, two of the participants admitted that they were exclusively Spanish speakers before starting formal schooling and they started to develop their literacy skills in that language before receiving any English instruction. However, that was not an impediment for them to acquire English and be successful in English-medium schools. In her research study with emerging English speakers, Guzman (2020) found that the academic support that families provide in the home language to their children increases their knowledge repertoire and helps them navigate English-medium classrooms. She also found that the preference to use a language different from the mainstream language at home does not impede young children from learning the majority language upon entry to formal schooling in kindergarten.

As previously exposed, something to consider is how different the heritage speaker population is from the emergent bilinguals that most research has focused on in the last couple of decades. Heritage language speakers are different from English learners in their acquisition trajectories and the way that they process new knowledge (Polinsky, 2018). In terms of language learning, their needs are different because most heritage speakers are second or third generation

immigrants, who are socialized into the heritage language at home, but live surrounded by the dominant language (Ali, 2021; Carreira & Kagan, 2018; Fuller & Leeman, 2020). On the other hand, English learners or emergent bilinguals are speakers of other languages working to obtain proficiency in the majority language, after having developed literacy skills in their first language through formal education in most cases (García & Kleifgen, 2010; Polinsky, 2018).

I cannot discount the fact that perhaps the most proficient and confident Spanish speaker among the four participants, Jorge, was the one who received many years of his formal education in Spanish, in a Hispanic country. Undeniably, this supports once again the impact of formal schooling in heritage language maintenance. However, for the rest of the participants it was a de facto education from the part of dedicated family members or caregivers who had the available time and resources to enact literacy practices in the heritage language or to explicitly teach language lessons. This is something that all heritage speakers' families can do, but do not necessarily know how to do it.

Sometimes, Hispanic or Latinx families ignore what actions they can take to help with their children's (bi)literacy development. Some are as simple as authentically engaging children in literacy through multimodal experiences with the language, such as telling them life stories (Flores, 2018), using digital tools such as tablets, smartphones, and television (Nuñez, 2019), and even helping them to complete schoolwork at home using the heritage language (Grosso Richins et al., 2021). All these practices, have a significant impact on heritage language maintenance.

### **Role of Families**

Drawing on some research about family language policies that study family language practices and decisions about language use at home (Budiyaana, 2017; Kaveh, 2018; Kheirkhah & Cekaite, 2018), this study suggests that family engagement and commitment towards teaching

the heritage language was pivotal for a successful intergenerational language transfer. The role of parents, grandparents, and other family members was critical for the acquisition of the heritage language of the participants. In Sofia's case, her grandmother was so invested in transferring the language to her granddaughter, that she not only read to her in Spanish, but also taught her to write reports in Spanish about what she read. In this case, it is important to note that Sofia's grandmother does not speak English, which suggests that English language proficiency is not necessary for immigrant families to help their children succeed in language learning and literacy education in the context of the United States (see Nuñez, 2019).

For Julia, her mother explicitly taught her Spanish grammar without being a language teacher, illustrating that families have much knowledge to impart to their children regardless of whether they are trained educators. In Kevin's case the mother, who was a Spanish teacher, taught him vocabulary and exposed him to multimedia resources in Spanish like making him watch TV programs in Spanish. Finally, in Jorge's case the role of the family in language acquisition and maintenance is prevalent because it is still the only language they use during all interactions.

In these cases, it was family, more prominently female figures such as the mother and grandmother, who adopted the role of language instructors during the participants' early childhood education. Lakoff and Bucholtz (2004) commented that the role of women as language keepers and holders of the responsibility of language conservatism is a cultural ideology that has been maintained through time, despite the advancement of women in achieving gender equity. This aligns with Ali's (2021) finding on how females perceived themselves as responsible for intergenerational language transfer. As a result, in her study female participants felt compelled to learn the heritage language and become proficient because they understood it was their

obligation to transfer the language to their future children. In another study, Nuñez (2019) reinforced the role of female figures supporting their children's bilingual and biliterate development when she analyzed how a group of Mexican mothers used multimodal resources to help them learn literacy skills in English, despite only knowing Spanish.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study have implications for the education of heritage language speakers. This does not only include formal schooling, but also the de facto education that they can receive at home or even at school when there is no availability or access to bilingual or heritage language programs. Below I will present the implications for families, educators, academic institutions, and future researchers.

#### **PreK-12 Educators**

Drawing upon previous research, the ideal scenario for heritage speakers is receiving a bilingual education that helps them leverage their bilingualism (Fuller & Leeman, 2020). This should be accessible from their early childhood through grade 12, and not be phased out after middle school, like most dual language programs in the U.S. (Chang-Bacon, 2020; Fuller & Leeman, 2020). Having access to strong bilingual education programs is a way of supporting language maintenance and creating an equitable educational future for Spanish heritage students (Beaudrie & Loza, 2022).

In the absence of strong dual language programs, English-medium schools should at least offer heritage language courses tailored to enhance heritage speakers' literacy skills in their home language (Fuller & Leeman, 2020). Although many school administrators will say that they do not have the funding or resources for including heritage language courses in their curriculum, I would argue that there is a space for including heritage speakers into their ESL or



emergent bilingual programs. This can even work as the implementation of a program where heritage speakers and emergent bilinguals can support each other on their language acquisition process. Additionally, schools should adopt an asset-based approach that recognizes and celebrates the linguistic skills of heritage speakers (Kirss et al., 2021). This can be accomplished through the effective implementation of programs like the Seal of Biliteracy (Chang-Bacon, 2020; Colomer & Bacon, 2020; Fuller & Leeman, 2020; Heineke & Davin, 2020).

Educators at all levels can cultivate relationships with families (Flores, 2018; Fránquiz et al., 2021), by showing appreciation and welcoming their languages, traditions, and stories into the classroom. This will result in a more active engagement of parents willing to collaborate with teachers and the school (Grosso Richins et al., 2021). It is also important to establish partnerships between schools and families that foster mechanisms of support, so that educators and parents/guardians work together towards the literacy development of the children in all their languages.

Moreover, heritage speakers' decisions about language can be affected negatively if teachers do not show appreciation for their skills. In Valenzuela's (1999) study, U.S.-born Latinx students did not show any interest in their academic achievement and did not give a lot of thought to their futures. She attributed this to the subtractive nature of the schooling they were experiencing, which asked them to de-identify from their Mexican culture, sacrificing their bilingual and bicultural competencies (Valenzuela, 1999).

Thus, teachers in PreK-12 classrooms should implement additive practices that create opportunities for linguistically diverse students to showcase their skills in their other languages, like when Sofía was allowed to write and present a speech in Spanish in her Professional Communication class. They can also use the parents' funds of knowledge as resources that

heritage speakers could use for class literacy practices, like in Flores's (2018) study. Flores (2018) conducted a study grounded in intergenerational stories, where immigrant parents and their daughters participated in storytelling practices, which afforded the daughters an opportunity to develop literacy skills while connecting to their familial, cultural, and linguistic identities.

Educators should also learn how to teach these students how they can leverage their language and cultural knowledge in their specific content classes. Part of that is what Valenzuela (1999) called the politics of caring, to get to know the student, as well as recognizing how valuable knowing another language is, and celebrating heritage speakers at the same level language learners are celebrated for their accomplishments in acquiring an additional language (Chang-Bacon, 2020; Colomer & Bacon, 2020).

### **Higher Education**

Higher education institutions have become key to helping heritage speakers overcome their fears and insecurities when it comes to the use of the heritage language, and to improve their proficiency with courses that are especially tailored for them. Their role is extraordinarily relevant now, because more than ever, it is colleges and universities that are serving heritage speakers through heritage language courses (see Ali, 2021; Carreira & Kagan, 2018). Although it would be ideal for heritage language speakers to receive heritage language education before college, as Ali (2021) suggested, primary education institutions tend to serve heritage speakers through bilingual or dual language programs (Beaudrie & Loza, 2022; Valdés et al., 2008), while secondary institutions mostly offer their languages as foreign language courses.

The problem with both approaches, is that the focus of primary education has been shown to focus on promoting English acquisition rather than full bilingualism (see Babino & Stewart, 2017), and the secondary schools' approach through world language classes fails to respond to

the specific needs of heritage language speakers (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 2016). Perhaps, if heritage Spanish courses were offered in the high school where this study was conducted the heritage speakers that participated would have taken those classes. In contrast to offering those types of courses, what high schools are doing is phasing out most heritage language programs and replacing them with placement tests and advanced level courses, where heritage speakers are sharing the class with second language learners.

Higher education institutions have the resources to adopt a bilingual approach that will further leverage the language skills of heritage speakers (Carreira, 2018; Mazak & Carroll, 2017). For instance, they can offer courses within their programs in some widely spoken heritage languages among their student population, as some U.S. universities offer in Spanish for pre-service bilingual teachers (see Mojica et al., 2022).

### **Teacher Preparation Programs**

Teachers need to become aware of the needs of heritage language speakers and learners and how their language and identity is affected by their language ideologies (Norton, 2013, 2016; Norton & McKinney, 2011). Contrary to other studies that highlight language subtractive practices in the classroom (see Valenzuela, 1999), the participants in this study felt a sense of security and inclusion, when they expressed that they felt safe to speak Spanish in any classroom if they needed to, without concern for a teacher calling their attention or asking them to speak only English. Possibly, this was the case because of the high number of multicultural teaching staff of this particular school. As a matter of fact, previous research has highlighted that teachers with immigrant or diverse backgrounds are more understanding and nurturing towards their students, and more so to linguistically and culturally diverse students (Murillo, 2012; Valenzuela, 1999).

If we want teachers to be more assertive in the classroom and care about their students' linguistic and cultural repertoires, teacher preparation programs in higher education and alternative certification programs need to consider the inclusion of cultural, literacy, and learning theories that explain how diverse students learn and how their identity and ideologies are affected by the way they are treated or perceived by their teachers, especially heritage speakers. In the same manner, more incentives, like higher salaries or additional stipends, should be provided so more higher education students decide to specialize in bilingual education in order to address the current shortage of bilingual teachers.

### **Families**

Families, and for the most part female figures, feel the responsibility of transferring the heritage language to the following generations (see Ali, 2021). I noticed in this study that when I sent the parent/guardian questionnaire home with the participants, all of them were returned filled out by mothers and a grandmother. This reflects some similarities with Ali's (2021) findings where female students attributed to themselves the responsibility of transferring the language to the next generation. Perhaps, mothers feel that they are the ones responsible for this task and thus, they were the ones equipped to talk about this topic with me.

Notwithstanding, intergenerational language transfer should be a responsibility assumed by all members of the family with disregard for gender, age, hierarchical position, or any other identity markers. Despite the prevalent involvement of mothers or female figures in language transfer (Lakoff & Bucholtz, 2004), traditional gender roles should be revised. Simon's (2017) study, for instance, showed that fathers can also provide access to literacy instruction and resources, as well as support their daughters in questioning and breaking with traditional gender roles and expectations for women, that persistently marginalize them.

Moreover, as mentioned in the Prek-12 Educators section above, schools and families should work in partnerships to support the bilingual development of heritage speakers. For instance, families should inform teachers about the linguistic capital that their children possess and whether they are working towards any language maintenance goals, so that teachers can support those efforts in the classroom and enact additive instructional practices.

In addition, parents/guardians must be assertive and determined in their efforts towards their children's language maintenance. This is what McKinney and Norton (2008) called strategic essentialism. In the context of this study, what this means is that there must be an intention represented by explicit actions directed towards language maintenance, such as language use policies and practices.

As in several previous studies, this study showed that when parents implement rules like the use of only the heritage language at home, their children are more likely to develop proficiency in the heritage language. For instance, in Julia's, Jorge's, and Sofia's house parents/guardians stated that they have instituted the use of Spanish at home as the norm because it is the language that they are less exposed to outside of the familial environment. In Stewart and Babino's (2022) study, both participants decided to use Spanish purposely in private and public spaces, which is something families can also do by integrating their children into communities and activities where the language is used.

### **Community Organizations**

It is difficult to find community organizations helping heritage Spanish speakers to develop or improve skills and proficiency in this language in the United States. For instance, none of the participants was able to cite a particular organization that was providing such type of services. Julia was the only one who participated or was exposed to the use of Spanish at church,

by attending Mass and summer camps where Spanish was used. She also was the only one who mentioned that there might be resources to learn Spanish in public libraries, but she was not sure since she has not looked for them.

In the literature it is easy to find studies who cite grass-root organizations that teach minority or heritage languages that are less prominent in the United States when compared to Spanish, such as Korean (Song, 2019), Chinese (Tse, 2001), among others. It is thus concerning that having such a high percentage of the population in this country that can be considered Spanish heritage speakers there are not community groups working to assist families in the intergenerational transmission of the language and culture (Weber & Horner, 2014).

### **Researchers**

Applied linguists and literacy education researchers have focused for too long on the language practices of emergent bilinguals, disregarding how significant the heritage speaker population is and how their needs are being unfulfilled (Fuller & Leeman, 2020). Further research that includes heritage speakers and their families as subjects in the context of the United States is needed to expand our understanding of this growing population and better respond to the needs of this type of students. There is limited research on heritage speakers, and the focus has been on English learners and emergent bilinguals, who have had a different linguistic journey and learning experience than heritage speakers.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The findings of this study bear implications for researchers who study language, migrant populations, and even education in general. As a result, more in-depth research needs to investigate families' investment in intergenerational language transfer and what is informing their decisions and actions regarding heritage language maintenance. In this regard, it would be useful

to include families with different socioeconomic backgrounds in similar studies to be able to compare findings.

Moreover, since this study was conducted with participants who have for the most part attended English-medium schools, additional research needs to be conducted on the perspectives and practices of heritage speakers in the U.S. who are attending bilingual education programs or any other heritage language maintenance programs. Furthermore, it would be interesting to also explore whether teachers have been using different approaches to teach heritage speakers in English-medium classrooms and how their practices, policies, and ideologies have changed in education in the last decades.

Given the limited number of participants in this qualitative study the findings cannot be generalized to all Spanish heritage language speakers. Also, the fact that these students depart from a space of privilege, makes it necessary to investigate whether those with lower socioeconomic status or possessing less resources can be as successful in maintaining their language skills.

There is also more research needed that investigates deeper into the parents' background and the decisions they made for their children about heritage language maintenance. Consequently, my future research will focus on interviewing the parents and observing the family interactions to study parents' investment on intergenerational language transfer, influenced by their identity and language ideologies.

### **Conclusion**

In a society that privileges the majority language, monolingualism, and mainstream culture, heritage language speakers face many challenges, including complete acculturation and the potential loss of their heritage language. They must fight the societal forces that affect their

perceptions about language, and a system that does not guarantee access to a quality education that leverages their language skills and cultural background. Nevertheless, this study shows that the consistent support of family members can translate into a successful achievement of language maintenance when families are able to provide a de facto bilingual education to their children when there is an absence of opportunities for this at schools.



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## APPENDIX A

### LANGUAGE USE AND EXPOSURE SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. What grade are you in?
4. What languages are spoken at home?
5. Have you had any formal education in Spanish (e.g., study in a Hispanic country, attended a dual language program)?
6. Were you ever classified as an English language learner at school, or did you take any ESL classes?
7. Did your parents ever teach you Spanish at home?
8. Did your parents read to you in Spanish when you were younger?
9. Do you have friends who speak Spanish?
10. Are you taking Spanish classes at school?
11. Do you have exposure to Spanish through music, reading, etc.?
12. Do you consider yourself proficient in Spanish?

## APPENDIX B

### FIRST SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Where were you born? And your parents? And your grandparents?
2. Do you identify as Hispanic or Latinx? Why?
3. How and when did you learn Spanish?
4. What can you do with the language in terms of speaking, reading, writing?
5. How do you feel about your proficiency in Spanish?
6. What type of language rules or practices were implemented at your house with regard to the use of Spanish?
7. Who do you use Spanish with? /When do you speak Spanish?
8. How comfortable do you feel about using Spanish in public and why?
9. Do you speak Spanish with friends or classmates who also speak that language at school?  
Why or why not? If yes, ask when and where?
10. Are there any benefits to being bilingual (Spanish/English)?
11. What is the perception of society about people who speak Spanish?
12. How is Spanish related to your culture and ethnicity?

## APPENDIX C

### SECOND SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What resources do you have access to for learning the Spanish language?
2. If you were given the opportunity to use textbooks for your classes in Spanish, would you use them? Why?
3. Is it important for you to become fully literate in Spanish? Why?
4. Do you think parents should speak to children in their heritage language, so they learn that language first? Why or why not?
5. What language class do you take at school? What motivated you to take Spanish/French?
6. Do you feel that your knowledge of Spanish helps you in any way to complete schoolwork? If so, how?
7. Do you feel that you would be forbidden to use Spanish in any particular class (other than Spanish)?
8. Do you plan to (continue your) study your heritage language after you graduate high school? Why or why not?
9. What support do you need to keep using your heritage language and not lose your skills (writing, reading, listening, and speaking)?



## APPENDIX D

### THIRD SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you talk to me about a memory from your childhood when you used Spanish?
2. Can you tell me about a place that reminds you of Spanish?
3. Please show me a picture that represents Spanish for you.
  - a. Describe what is in the picture for me please. (What is the context?)
  - b. May you please explain to me how the language is represented in that picture?
  - c. Why did you choose that one? Did you think about other pictures?

APPENDIX E

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

<p>Observation of: Jorge</p> <p>Date: 05/16/2022</p> <p>Place: School (D) Hallway</p> <p>Description of the setting: During Megalunch (1 hour lunch period) students are allowed to eat in the collaborative spaces of the two school main hallways. Those spaces have flexible sitting furniture that includes tables, armchairs, rolling chairs, etc. Students are also allowed to go to the gym or participate in other activities such as club meetings, recreational games, and so on.</p> <p>Time: 12:35 - 1:05 pm</p> <p>Language(s) used: Spanish and English</p>		
Observations notes	Personal Interpretations	Triangulation
<p>I greeted Jorge and his friends in Spanish when I encountered them in the hallway during lunch time.</p> <p>Jorge eats lunch (a sandwich) with three friends. One friend is from Puerto Rico, and the other two are from Mexico.</p> <p>One of the friends said a cuss word in Spanish, then Jorge and one of his friends looked at me immediately, another friend saw me and told me he should get detention.</p>	<p>Jorge responded to me in Spanish which might be a sign that he feels confident about speaking Spanish in public.</p> <p>Jorge prefers to hang out with Hispanic/Spanish speaking friends during lunch time. On other occasions I have seen him with the same group of friends.</p> <p>Jorge and his friends wanted to see my reaction after their friend cussed. Because I spoke to Jorge in Spanish the group knows that I can clearly understand when they cuss in Spanish.</p>	<p>During the 2nd interview Jorge confirms that he is more confident speaking Spanish.</p> <p>During our member checking conversation Jorge states that he has been friends with them for a while. He added that he would speak Spanish with them, but not necessarily with other Spanish speakers.</p>

<p>The friend that said the cuss word stands up and joins a different group of students who are sitting in the proximity, while Jorge finishes his lunch.</p>	<p>While his friends are talking to other students in English, Jorge stays seated and does not talk much.</p>	<p>This same friend (the one who cussed in Spanish) is in the same eSports class with Jorge. This I noticed when I visited that class to bring something to another student. During my time there I also heard them speaking in Spanish to each other.</p>
<p>The group stands up and starts walking in the hallway towards the cafeteria. While walking the same friend that cussed before started to horseplay with other students he encountered in the hallway. Jorge and the other two friends just laughed.</p>	<p>Jorge seems to be a follower of his friends and is more active than when he is in the classroom. I didn't see him using his cellphone, something that he normally does in class.</p>	

## APPENDIX F

### PARENT/GUARDIAN QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Does your family speak Spanish at home? Please explain why.
2. What resources do you have at home in Spanish (books, magazines, Spanish TV channels or networks, etc.)?
3. What is your level of proficiency in Spanish? Are you able to read and write in Spanish?
4. Do all members of your family have the same proficiency level in Spanish?
5. How was it possible for you to maintain your proficiency in Spanish?
6. How do you keep in contact with members of your extended family who Speak Spanish?
7. In which activities does your family participate in that provide an opportunity for your child to use Spanish?
8. What do you think about passing the Spanish language to the following generation?
9. What language should your child prioritize between English and Spanish? Please explain why.
10. How would you describe the best education program to help your child achieve full proficiency in Spanish or become biliterate?

APPENDIX G  
NVIVO CODEBOOK

## Dissertation Data Analysis

### Nodes

Name	Description	Files	References
Beliefs about other languages and multilingualism	Perceptions about speaking other languages.	9	13
Benefits	Perceived advantages of maintaining or developing proficiency in the heritage language.	9	17
Cultural identity	Descriptions where the participant explains whether they identify as Hispanic or Latinx and why.	6	7
English is more important	Refers to either a level of preference, usefulness, or superiority of the English language over the heritage language.	2	4
Exposure to Spanish through travel	Is exposed to the language by traveling to Hispanic countries.	7	8
Feelings about Spanish use	Express how they feel about using Spanish in different spaces and with different audiences.	3	7
Formal heritage language instruction	Schooling or formal instruction received in Spanish.	4	4
Guardian HL knowledge	Guardian perceptions about their level of proficiency of the Spanish language.	3	5

Name	Description	Files	References
Heritage language ideology	Beliefs and perceptions about the heritage language.	9	20
Heritage language learning	References made by the participant about how they learned Spanish.	6	7
Heritage language loss	Elements cited as factors causing language loss.	6	9
Heritage language proficiency	Participants perceptions about their level of mastery of the Spanish language in terms of interpretation (listening and reading) and production (speaking and writing).	9	15
I used to only speak Spanish	In vivo code (the participant acknowledges that Spanish was the first language they acquired).	4	4
Intergenerational language transfer	Practices used by family members (i.e., parents, grandparents, caregivers, etc.) to pass on the language to the participants.	13	19
Language preference	Language(s) that the heritage speaker prefers to use to communicate with others.	10	11
Language(s) used at home	Preferred language(s) used at home.	5	6
Literacy practices in the HL	Mentions a literacy activity (e.g., reading, writing, etc.) that was completed in the heritage language.	10	11
Resources	Materials, tools, and practices used to develop literacy skills in the heritage language.	14	23
Spanish interactions with family	Uses Spanish to communicate with family members at home and abroad during travel or using communication technologies.	11	19

Name	Description	Files	References
Spanish interactions with friends	Uses Spanish to communicate with friends.	7	7
Spanish language as identity	Connections between their identity with their languages, their ethnicity and/or family origin.	4	4
Spanish language interactions	Keeps direct contact ort communications with Spanish speakers (family and friends).	6	8
Speaks both (English and Spanish)	Has equal interactions in English and Spanish in different spaces, like home, school, community with monolingual and multilingual people.	7	7
Speaks only English	Communicates in English with English monolinguals or English dominant speakers.	2	4
Speaks only Spanish	Communicates in Spanish with Spanish monolinguals or Spanish dominant speakers.	7	9
Translanguaging	Communicates with others mixing Spanish and English.	5	5
Translates	Works as a language broker to facilitate communication for Spanish or English monolinguals.	2	2
Use of Spanish at school	Ways in which the participant uses their knowledge of the heritage language to communicate or to complete schoolwork.	5	7