Why do Heritage Language Speakers Study L3 at Community Colleges?: A Multi-method Study
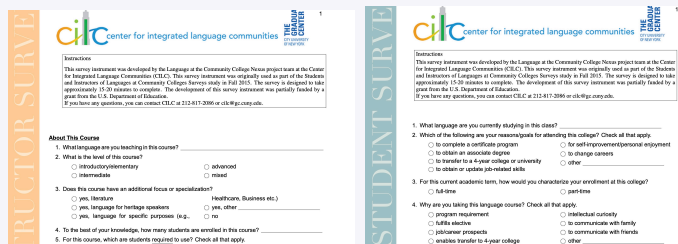
Tomonori Nagano <tnagano@lagcc.cuny.edu>, *LaGuardia Community College, The City University of New York*

Abstract

This presentation will report two studies exploring the demographics of heritage language (HL) speakers at community colleges and analyzing the choices that HL speakers make when enrolling in modern language courses. The SILCC Surveys, a national survey of teaching and learning of modern languages (MLs) at community colleges (CCs), show 42% of CC students in ML classrooms are identified as HL speakers. However, nearly half of them are studying a language different from their own HL (thus, they are L3 learners). A follow-up interview-based study was conducted to further explore why L3 learners study new languages. The analysis of interviews with ten L3 learners highlights a few salient motivational factors shared by the L3 learners, such as intellectual curiosity about a new language and culture and misperceptions about HL courses.
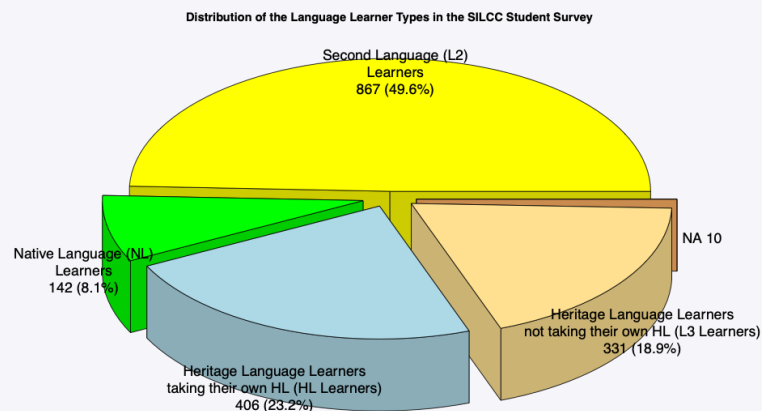
Method of Study 1

- Methodology of the SILCC Surveys (Nagano et al., 2017, 2019, 2020)
  – Survey on teaching & learning of ML at community colleges (CCs)
  – Population: 831 CCs in the American Association of Community Colleges
  – 1,756 student and 140 instructor responses from 101 CCs in 33 states in Fall 2015

Results of Study 1

- Findings of the SILCC surveys about HL speakers
  – 737 (42%) out of 1,756 students in ML classes at CCs are HL speakers
  – However, only 46% of HL speakers are studying their HLs at CCs.
  – 54% are learning a new language different from their HLs (i.e., L3 learners)

Distribution of the Language Learner Types in the SILCC Student Survey

Second Language (L2) Learners 867 (49.6%)

NA 10

Native Language (NL) Learners 142 (8.1%)

Heritage Language Learners not taking their own HL (L3 Learners) 331 (18.9%)

Heritage Language Learners taking their own HL (HL Learners) 406 (23.2%)

Results of Study 1 (cont.)

- Why are there so many L3 learners (i.e., HL speakers not learning their own HLs)?

Q2: Which of the following are your reasons/goals for attending this college?

	HL (n=406)	L3 (n=331)
to obtain an associate degree	42.6%	28.8%
to transfer to a 4-year college or university	69.5%	60.1%

Q4: Why are you taking this language course?

	HL (n=406)	L3 (n=331)
job-career skills	45.1%	36.5%
enables transfer to four-year college	44.4%	33.1%
intellectual curiosity	41.4%	58.0%
to communicate with family	46.5%	12.8%

Q5: What led you to choose the particular language you are studying?

	HL (n=406)	L3 (n=331)
It has the best potential for professional use	53.8%	37.7%
It connects to my family background/heritage	67.4%	15.0%
I am interested in the culture	44.7%	63.0%

Q6: On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is it to know a language other than English?

HL (n=406)	L3 (n=331)
9.4	9.1

- Different motivations between HL and L3 learners
  – **HL**: Prominent extrinsic motivations (e.g., career opportunities etc.)
  – **L3**: Prominent intrinsic motivations (e.g., interest in new culture etc.)

Method of Study 2

- Methodology of the follow-up interview study
  – Individual & group interviews with 10 L3 learners at a CC
  – Everyone took the SILCC survey, followed by the first individual interview
  – A follow-up group interview (3-4 participants) after a few weeks
- Participants
  – All but one spoke Spanish as their HL. One spoke Mandarin as the HL.
  – Backgrounds (e.g., L3, HL experience, age, gender, home countries) varied a lot

ID	Gender	Home Language	New Language	Self-identified ethnicity	Birth	Age	Parents' home countries
P1	Male	Spanish	ASL	N/A	Immigrated at 5 yld	21	Dominican Republic
P3	Female	Spanish	ASL	Dominican	US-born	24	Dominican Republic
P4	Male	Spanish	Japanese	American	US-born	19	DR & Nicaragua
P5	Male	English, Spanish	Japanese	Mexican-American	US-born	25	Mexico
P6	Female	Chinese (Mandarin)	Spanish	Chinese-American	Immigrated at 13 yld	22	China
P7	Female	Spanish	Korean	Ecuadorian	Immigrated at 2 yld	20	Ecuador
P8	Female	Spanish	Latin	N/A	US-born (lived in El Salvador for 10y)	35	El Salvador
P9	Female	Spanish	Italian	Mexican-American	US-born	20	Mexico
P10	Male	Spanish	Arabic	N/A	Immigrated at 4 yld	22	Mexico
P11	Female	Spanish	Arabic	Afro-Latina	US-born	41	Unknown

- All interviews were recorded and transcribed with *Temi* (speech-to-text app)
- A total of 280 minutes of transcripts were analyzed with *Atlasti*
- Frequently appeared codes in the transcript analysis include: interest in new culture (12), lack of confidence in HL (11), contact with L3 (10), intellectual curiosity (8), similarity between HL and L3 (8), interest in a new language (8), GPA (7), value of bilingualism (6), challenging yourself (5), family members (5), new immigrant experience (5), language requirement (5), parents' high expectation (5), and career (5)

Results of Study 2

- **Intellectual curiosity** was the most prominent motivation among L3 learners

  "Um, I'm fascinated with Roman Empire stories and how someone rose to the top on the known world and just kind of went away." (L3: Latin)

  "For me it was more just their culture and the way they are. So different from the way that I was brought up. And it's just different. I would like to, you know, learn new things. I like to expand my horizons." (L3: ASL)

- Many also indicated that they had prior contact with L3 speakers or culture before taking the L3 class.

  "Cause growing up [...] I watched a lot of anime and all my friends that I had watched a lot of anime too." (L3: Japanese)

  "I [participated in a] study abroad in Morocco two years ago, and I was exposed to the culture and tradition, so I wanted to finish what I had started two years ago." (L3: Arabic)

  "Um, I have a lot of Korean friends [and] some of them aren't as good at English as I am. [...] sometimes we can't really communicate too well because they're not really talking in English." (L3: Korean)

- At the same time, the participants expressed lack of confidence in HL and avoided taking the HL class

  "I read a lot, so, um, reading wouldn't be a problem for me, but in terms of writing, I sometimes I do forget how to write a word, but I can search up and just copy the word." (Chinese HL, L3: Spanish)

  "I'd say I feel comfortable with writing up [but not as good as] taking college classes in Spanish. [B]ecause, um, at one point I had both languages hand in hand, but I haven't written for a long time. And then when I do write, it's not for something like for school." (L3: Italian)

Discussion & Conclusion

- About one-third of higher education enrollment is in two-year institutions (USDoE, 2015), much of which appeared to be HL speakers.
- There are a lot of HL speakers at CCs, but many of them are studying a new language (L3 learners).
- The HL and L3 learners appeared to have different motivations/interests.
- L3 learners indicated intellectual curiosity and prior experience in L3 as significant factors to study a new language (i.e., not studying their HL).
- HL speakers' ambivalence in the HL experience/proficiency seemed to have influenced their decision not to study the HL as well.
- There is a clear need for ML instructors at CCs to become familiar with recent developments in research on L3 acquisition (Cabrelli Amaro et al., 2013 etc.) as well as HL acquisition (Montrul, 2006 etc.)

Bibliography (partial)

- Ketcham, Nagano, & Funk. (2020). Students of Languages at Community Colleges. *ADFL Bulletin*, 46(1), 56-70
- Nagano, Ketcham, & Funk. (2019). Why do Heritage Language Speakers Opt out of Their Own Heritage Language?. *Heritage Language Journal*, 16(3):318-339.
- Nagano, Funk, & Ketcham. (2017). Modern Language Instruction at Community College. *Foreign Language Annals*, 50(3):621-631.
- Original survey instruments & data are available at https://j.mp/2vjZ3tw