

Identifying and Placing Spanish Heritage Speakers: One Program's Placement Test Approach

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Abstract

Despite the increasing number of U.S. born Latinos, placing heritage and native speakers in the Spanish curriculum is still a challenge (MacGregor-Mendoza & Moreno, 2020). The present article (a) addresses the unique needs of heritage speakers in the Spanish curriculum; (b) problematizes traditional grammar-based placement exams; and (c) describes a multiple-choice placement exam (free upon request) designed and used at Georgia State University (GSU), a major urban university in the Southeastern U.S.

Taking a sociolinguistic approach to the dialectical nature of Spanish, the GSU Spanish Language Program Coordinator developed a placement test based on what students—heritage, native, and non-native—do when asked to perform language tasks. The placement test design is outlined using distinctions of linguistic norms, both local/regional and general. Reference is made to the ways in which diverse types of Spanish speakers align linguistically with general Spanish. This essay responds to the call for language standardization studies that recognize diglossia within a single named language by examining the role of heteroglossia to challenge monolingual language standardization ideologies (McLelland, 2021). Pedagogical implications for identifying and placing K-16 learners in a meaningful Spanish for Heritage Speakers classroom are discussed.

Keywords: *placement exam, Spanish heritage speaker, language ideologies, Latinx students*

Introduction

US born Latinos—termed Latinx with gender-inclusivity—form the largest growing group driving the increase in diversity in both K-12 schools and higher education (Gramlich, 2017). There is tremendous variability of linguistic mastery among Latinx students who bring with them a gamut of experiences, skills and knowledge of their heritage language into the Spanish language classroom. Despite scholarly recognition of the linguistic and cultural abilities of the Spanish heritage speaker (HS), traditional Spanish instructional practices tend to deny these HS assets. The teaching of Spanish in schools in the U.S. has been founded largely on an ap-

proach for monolingual, second language (L2) learners who arrive with no previous knowledge of the language (Carreira et al., 2020). The appropriate placement of HSs into a Spanish language curriculum is complicated by traditional, grammar-based placement exams that center on formally learned, rule-based skills and idealized native speaker norms (Fairclough, 2012), underestimating the abilities of Spanish HSs whose foundation of linguistic knowledge does not reside in declarative, rule-based categories. As a result, Spanish HSs are often misplaced in lower-level courses (Belpoliti, 2015) or, as our experience shows, in courses that are too advanced for them to succeed academically. Either way, these students miss an opportunity to build on their existing language skills in a space where HSs can negotiate a positive multilingual identity.

Review of the Literature

There has been growing momentum in the field of World Language Education in how to meet the sociolinguistic needs of the increasing numbers of Latinx students. Historically called native speakers, heritage language learners' needs differ. A Spanish *native speaker* (NS) is a person who was born, raised, and educated in a Spanish-speaking country who speaks Spanish (Carreira et al., 2020). A NS's linguistic performance in Spanish is comparable to that of any speaker of Spanish who lives in a Spanish-speaking country. By comparison, the *heritage speaker* is defined as an individual "who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or at least understands the language, and who is to some degree bilingual in that language and in English" (Valdez, 2001, p. 38). The term HS and its importance in research, policy, and practice only began to gain traction in the 1990s in the U.S. (García, 2005; Hornberger & Wang, 2008). As noted by MacGregor-Mendoza (2020), great strides have been made since then "to guide the teaching profession in the direction of greater consideration and adaptation of the curriculum to better include and meet the needs of Heritage Language (HL) learners" (p. 21).

Despite the field's increased understanding in meaningful pedagogical practices to meet the needs of Spanish HSs, the task of developing Spanish placement exams with a diverse student population in mind is still recognized as challenging (Fairclough, 2012; MacGregor-Mendoza & Moreno, 2020). One complication in the development of a meaningful placement exam is that the NS/HS definitions are not static linguistic profiles. Some speakers who would have been classified as NSs immediately after their arrival in the U.S. may, depending on the duration of their stay in the country, perform linguistically closer to HSs. Latinx Spanish HSs are a diverse population of students with diverse needs, making it urgent to find ways to identify and place them into appropriate Spanish courses.

Further complicating the placement of HSs in the Spanish curriculum is the potential disconnect of shared language learning experiences from their instructors. Spanish instructors who are NSs or advanced second language (L2) speakers of Spanish may not understand the unique situation of HSs of Spanish. Carreira et al. (2020) specified that NS and L2 Spanish teachers have not lived the Spanish HS's affective parts of language use in interactions with parents and the community that challenge the HS's identity formation—being questioned as a legitimate speaker or incomplete speaker of Spanish or another language, or not having a language that

you can claim as your own. MacGregor-Mendoza (2020) noted a common misconception among NS or L2 Spanish teachers that the language HSs bring to the class is, in some ways, flawed, impure, and undeveloped. Specifically, MacGregor-Mendoza (2020) described:

Many Spanish language teachers waiver between uncertainty, skepticism, and frustration regarding the abilities of SHL [Spanish heritage language] learners. They witness the SHL learners' understanding of sometimes complex structures and their knowledge of pragmatic tasks but are distressed by their apparent lack of mastery of seemingly simple grammatical principles or inability to recite the explicit rules explained in class that govern verb conjugations and spelling. (p. 20)

Reiterating Macedo's (2019) call to rupture the yoke of colonialism, MacGregor-Mendoza (2020) described the need for a change from a curricular mindset that positions the Spanish classroom around teaching L2 learners a *foreign* language to one of "acknowledging, accepting and legitimizing the linguistic and cultural skills brought to the classroom by Spanish as a Heritage Language (SHL) learners from their communities here in the U.S." (p. 19).

The Spanish for Heritage Speakers Course

Leeman et al. (2011) documented that "the best educational programs recognize and value students' home identities, building on their existing linguistic and cultural knowledge" (p. 484). Similarly, Beaudrie et al. (2009) found that the inclusion of student voices was of great importance in Spanish for Heritage Speakers courses when they investigated students' understandings of the impact of instruction on their cultural identity as bilingual speakers of Spanish. Norton (2013) viewed identity as an individual's understanding of his or her "relationship to the world, how this relationship is constructed in time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 4). One has multiple identity positions across social contexts (Kramsch, 2009). HSs' language identity is highly influenced by language ideologies present in the society (Gee, 2004). Mislacing HSs into a traditional L2 Spanish classroom that devalues their home language, culture, and identity by promoting an idealized language standard can be damaging (MacGregor-Mendoza, 2020). Fostering a positive sense of transnational, bilingual identity is crucial for HSs, as many lack confidence in their linguistic abilities (Schwartz, 2003).

Critical language awareness (CLA) is an approach used in the Spanish for Heritage Speakers classroom to inform the learner on questions of linguistic prestige and subordination; CLA promotes the validity of all language varieties and the fact that the choice of which variety to use belongs with the individual (Leeman, 2005). Findings from Potowski's (2002) study on HSs' experiences in a university's traditional four-semester Spanish language program underscored the need for a CLA in the heritage language classroom. Potowski (2002) found three common themes in the participant narratives: (1) a negative self-evaluation of their Spanish, as most of them had received little to no formal schooling in Spanish; (2) a comparison to their L2 classmates in which the participants recognized advantages and disadvantages associated with being a heritage speaker; and (3) a label of teaching assistants as language

authorities who taught *proper* Spanish and provided corrective feedback on the bilingual students' work that was deemed problematic. Recognizing identity as "multiple, fluid, and a site of struggle" (Darvin and Norton, 2017, p. 3), critical pedagogues view the Spanish HS as an individual who is bi-cultural, needing to function between a Hispanic and an American identity and looking for ways to fit into both (Clayton et al., 2019; Hornberger & Wang, 2008). CLA approaches in the Spanish classroom for Heritage Speakers teaches learners to negotiate power relations in order to construct their identity as legitimate speakers of the language in both formal and informal contexts.

HSs are a unique group of learners with skills that differ from L2 learners' in the Spanish curriculum. Leeman (2005) found that L2 Spanish students often learn receptive and productive skills simultaneously, whereas "heritage speakers with excellent comprehension abilities may not be able to speak fluently" (p. 36). Other Spanish HSs with successful oral communication skills may have never learned to write the language. Carreira and Kagan's (2011) research found Spanish HSs to rate writing as their lowest skill among listening, speaking, and reading. When placed in the traditional L2 classroom, HSs were sometimes viewed as experts in the Spanish language, and hence, they become "instructors" in their classes while their literacy needs were ignored (Felix, 2009). HS literacy scholars (Burgo, 2020; Mrak, 2020) have underlined the need for a process approach to writing in the Spanish curriculum. Colombi (2009) presented a classroom project consisting of an interview of an older family member, a transcription of the interview, and an academic composition with multiple drafts based on the interview so that students can develop an awareness of the difference in registers. Kagan and Dillon (2001) suggested that Spanish HSs should be focused on familiar content first and then gradually move to working on spelling, grammar, and stylistics.

Colombi (2009) found that HSs often apply their knowledge of both spoken languages to their writing. Martínez (2007) examined two types of writing assignments—graded and non-graded—and found a greater influence from English in the more formal work. Likewise, García (2005) described how the bilingual teacher participants in her study transferred the mechanics, structure and discourse style of English onto their formal Spanish papers. Accordingly, Colombi (2009) suggested that language should be seen as a continuum ranging from informal to formal settings and signaled a need to guide students from informal to formal registers. Leeman (2005) cautioned that the local variety of the language must be validated in the Spanish for HSs classroom, and academic Spanish should be presented as an addition to HSs' existing linguistic repertoires. With pervasive issues in Spanish HS language learning, such as identity formation and literacy development, it becomes clear that a one-size-fits-all placement approach for L2/ HS/ NS learners can result in the common misplacement of HSs in classes where they are unable to meet their fullest potential (Hornberger & Link, 2012).

A Cautionary Approach to Establishing Linguistic Norms

With the intention of identifying Spanish HSs to appropriately place them in courses that honor and build on their existing use of Spanish language varieties, there is the need for a robust placement test. The placement of HSs in the Spanish curriculum frequently comes down to a single, yet complex question: what is *general*

Spanish. To clarify, the term *general Spanish* is being used here instead of *standard Spanish*. Standard Spanish is usually associated with a particular variant of Spanish, frequently defined geographically—many times also historically—and said, or believed, to be prestigious by certain speakers of the language, commonly a self-proclaimed elite of some kind (e.g., language experts, intellectuals, educators, etc.).

On a social scale, Bakhtin (c. 1935/1981) criticized theorists who described language as a closed system. He saw such views as complicit in the creation of a unified language as a vehicle of centralized power. Vogl (2012) emphasized the risk of a standard language ideology in shaping and neglecting the actual practices of speakers, especially minorities and migrants, by making assumptions about language correctness. Most often, the ‘standard’ language is taken from the speech of the elite. Such an elevation of a particular hegemonic language suppresses the heteroglossia of multiple everyday speech-types. Everyday speech is commanded to conform to an official style so as to be recognized as part of a privileged, closed-off speech-community. Standard Spanish refers to beliefs and myths ascribed to the term rather than by what ‘standard’ actually means: a set of linguistic norms that are identified within a particular speech community; traditionally Peninsular Spanish and, if restricted to Latin America, oftentimes Colombian Spanish or Mexican Spanish, which somehow turned into pan-Hispanic variants of the language.

The notion of *standard Spanish* reminds us not only of a politically incorrect position but also of cultural and sociolinguistic awareness by virtue of which no linguistic norm of a particular speech community should be imposed onto any other, a view that lies at the heart of Carreira’s (2000) article on validating and promoting Spanish in the U.S. This is not to say, however, that we should accept that a particular speech community, such as speakers of a *US Spanish*, is, or should be, autonomous from all the other Spanish-speaking communities. The linguistic norms of a particular speech community can be determined and, it is here contended, so is the case for general Spanish. The former can be characterized with reference to the latter.

For example, we might all agree, albeit intuitively for instance, one of the linguistic norms of US Spanish, such as *aplicar para una posición* [apply for a position], may be perceived in our region as a linguistic norm. As a general linguistic norm of US Spanish, it is understood anywhere in the U.S. But, is *vacunar la carpeta* [intended to mean: to vacuum the carpet] a general linguistic norm of US Spanish? Not according to many of the Spanish HSs in our Southeastern region (Georgia). The correct regional form is *vacunear la carpeta*, as HS students corrected Moreno, the first author, when he was teaching them about what *they* do, hear, and say everyday outside of the classroom. What is clear is that intuition may fail or turn out to be imprecise and linguistic norms, whether local/regional or general, must be identified systematically.

Defining General Spanish

General Spanish results from a natural effort by speakers to abide by mutually intelligible, shared linguistic norms as they interact with other speakers of the language. The effort is certainly linguistically unconscious and for the purpose of communicating. As speakers engage in this sort of negotiation for communication by necessity, they avoid local or regional norms and focus on norms that they seem to acknowledge as shared. In order to quantify general Spanish for the purpose of as-

assessment, we define general Spanish as a natural result of what is linguistically common to all speakers of the language, as attested in a particular situation or on a particular task (for instance, a language test). What is clear is that we need a 'standard,' in the statistical sense (as in 'standard deviation'), in order to assess the linguistic performance of our students, heritage and native speakers included, in the language.

The key to understanding the *dialectal reality* of a language, especially if it is spoken in multiple regions and countries, is that there is a lot that differs, yet there is also a lot in common when comparing the linguistic norms of particular communities. In fact, there is linguistic heterogeneity as well as linguistic homogeneity in Spanish. Again, the definitions here are not carved into stone. In this case, the homogeneity-heterogeneity correlate is crisscrossed by another dimension—formal (or public) Spanish and informal (non-public) Spanish, as also noted by several aforementioned scholars (e.g., Colombi, 2009; García, 2005; Martínez, 2007).

For example, if Moreno, the first author, delivered a paper in his native Spanish at a conference in Spain, seemingly nobody's attention would be particularly drawn to the features of his native Chilean Spanish during the talk. Furthermore, it is assumed that Peninsular readers of his paper would not be able to determine whether he was an American speaker of the language unless he declared so. However, they could certainly expect some linguistically (or dialectally) driven anecdote to occur as soon as they stepped outside the conference room with an invitation to the attendees to go for a coffee with the expression, '*Vamos por un café*.' Someone might even feel compelled to correct the conference panelist by stating, "Isn't it '*Vamos a por un café*'?" Here we see the difference of language use in the formal context of a conference presentation and the informal context of going for coffee after the talk.

As the level of formality decreases, linguistic differences occur more frequently. It is also commonly observed that the occurrence of local or regional linguistic norms are narrowed down and reduced to a minimum, and sometimes, almost completely eliminated, as the situation calls for formal speech. Figure 1 illustrates this observation:

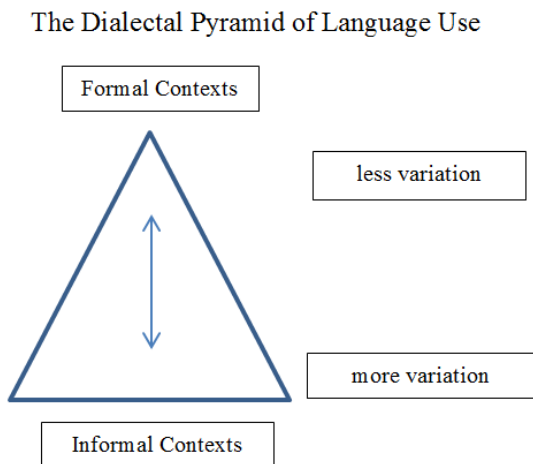


Figure 1. *The context-dependent, dialectal pyramid of language variation*

Figure 1 shows the dialectal reality of Spanish, and perhaps of any language, is like a pyramid—as informal Spanish introduces multiple and diverse linguistic options toward the pyramid base, formal Spanish reduces those options toward the pyramid tip. Then, going up and down this dialectal pyramid is assumed to be a task any NS from any Spanish-speaking speech community can perform naturally. It is precisely in this combination of pragmatic factors where a most fundamental feature of US Spanish is encountered.

Characterizing US Spanish

Studies in social bilingualism have contributed significantly to our understanding of the linguistic reality needed to assess US Spanish HSs who are largely in a situation of sociolinguistic diglossia (Ferguson, 1959; Fishman, 1971). Some of the features of US Spanish are quickly accounted for on these grounds alone—absence of the *Tú/Usted* distinction, for instance (*Doctor Pérez, me gustaría hablar contigo sobre mis notas*) and related phenomena, as the one seen in '*Me gustaría hablar con Doctor Pérez*' instead of '*...con el doctor Pérez*.' Research findings report an increase on the transfer of English syntax, lexical choice, and discourse style on HSs' Spanish writing as tasks increase in formality (Colombi, 2009; García, 2005; Martínez, 2007). Moreno, first author here, corroborates this finding identified in HS writing studies also to be true in HS spoken language; based on his interactions with the instructors of approximately 1,500 NS/HS/L2 Spanish language learners per semester he has overseen for nearly 20 years as the Georgia State University (GSU) Spanish Language Program Coordinator, and also in his personal, lived experiences. As a trained linguist and Chilean NS of Spanish—married to a Spanish NS from Spain, with whom they share two Spanish HS adult children—Moreno has observed an increased influence of the English language in formal settings among US bilingual speakers' language use (Figure 2).

The Dialectal Pyramid of Bilingual US Spanish

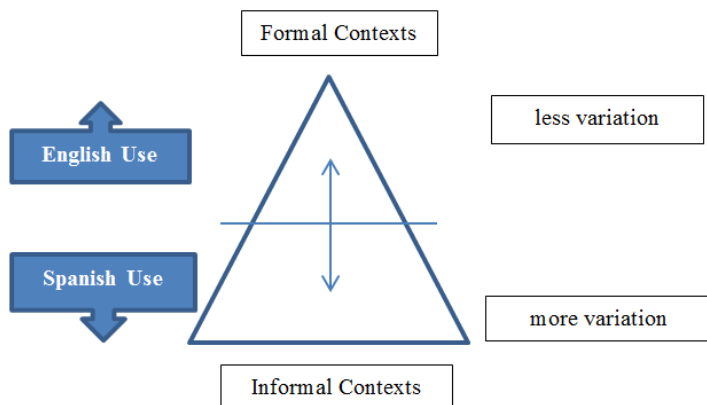


Figure 2. Dialectal pyramid of the US bilingual speakers of Spanish

Figure 2 illustrates a context-dependent, dialectal pyramid of US speakers of Spanish who commonly switch to English in formal contexts—going up the pyra-

mid—and to all of the pragmatic properties of being (socio)linguistically formal in English. Valdés (1997) has long noted the diglossic, context-dependent nature of the Spanish of HSs and suggested the need to expand the bilingual range to acquire general Spanish. The ability to navigate the context-dependent relationship between English and Spanish use in Figure 2 is fundamental to the creation of the Intermediate-Advanced Spanish Exam used for placement in the GSU Spanish curriculum.

The Creation of the Placement Test: Intermediate-Advanced Spanish Exam

The GSU Spanish Language Program Coordinator, Dr. Moreno, has been administering the Intermediate-Advanced Spanish Exam (IASE) in various iterations for over twenty years. Moreno first started teaching a Spanish for NSs course in 2001. The common practice at that time for placing learners who might qualify to skip some of the introductory language sequence (four semesters of language study) or the fifth semester “bridging class” (intensive writing and grammar) was a 100-word written essay and oral interview with no systematic evaluation system to place students. The “native speakers”—the term heritage speaker was still emerging in the field at this time (Carreira et al., 2020)—were frequently placed into a fourth semester course of language study that had little differentiated instruction for the diverse NS/HS students during the first year of its inception. The need for differentiation became apparent, as nearly half the learners in the course were engaged while the other half was disinterested, Moreno recalls. He reports this memory was reinforced with the divided teaching evaluations he received for this course, half glowing and half discontent reviews.

Based on classroom observations during the first year of instruction within this context, in addition to common language innovations identified on the written tests that corresponded to the sociolinguistic history or *sociolinguistic generation* (Escobar & Potowski, 2015) of test-takers, Moreno was able to create a test that included two parts: 60 fill-in-the blank sentences and a 100-word written test. The fill-in-the-blank part of the test also responded to the practical purpose of collecting language innovations by the test-takers in contexts that had been previously noticed in the prior writing task assessment.

The following summer, Moreno was faced with assessing 75 students for placement into the GSU Spanish language program with the newly designed test. As a trained linguist, he performed a quantitative analysis of the responses in each blank and identified frequent occurrences of commonly used language structure differences in the writing section. The resulting figures identified three salient groups of language users, eventually learner profiles, across degrees of language proficiency: intermediate, advanced, and nativelylike. These three groups fully corresponded with the sociolinguistic history of the test-takers as reported on the test. Thus, the intermediate group consisted of (1) intermediate HSs (iHS—placed in fourth semester “Spanish for Native Speakers”); (2) advanced HSs (aHS—placed in a new fifth-semester bridging course “Intensive Grammar and Writing for Native Speakers”); and (3) NSs (students allowed to register for courses on literature, linguistics, and culture). Both fourth- and fifth-semester courses for “Native Speakers” were structured to meet the students’ unique sociolinguistic needs, mainly exploring bilingual iden-

tities (intermediate HSs) and building on formal register abilities (advanced HSs). With this new fifth-semester “Intensive Grammar and Writing for Native Speakers” course added to the curriculum, “instruction time was more meaningful and instructor evaluations greatly improved,” recalls Moreno.

Based on the salient linguistic features of language use from the three groups of student profiles assessed across the original 75 tests, the first iteration of the IASE was created in a multiple-choice format, primarily to allow for more efficient assessment with the growing number of Latinx students. The options in each question were established on the basis of the responses that test takers had previously provided on the fill-in-the-blank version of the test. Between August of 2002 until May 2007, 380 students were assessed using various iterations of the IASE, and the essays were discontinued as they became redundant. Over these years, some test questions and primarily the scoring system were adjusted when a student was placed at a level that did not appear to be appropriate. The last iteration to be revised occurred in 2007. The IASE has had only small updates since that time and exists now as a 92-item, multiple-choice test that students can take online in 30-50 minutes. The IASE, answer key, and score interpretation sheet is freely available upon request from Dr. Moreno (omoreno@gsu.edu).

Assessing IASE Student Responses: Scoring Regionalisms vs General Spanish

A key question in designing the placement test and evaluating student responses was the issue of *regional Spanish* versus a *general Spanish*. The working definition we use to identify a linguistic regionalism—or localism—is a structure, at any level of linguistic analysis that is marked by a Spanish NS as not being associated with his or her own speech community, region, or country. In contrast, we refer to *general Spanish*, as the elements of a shared language that are mutually intelligible, and therefore, assumed to be of effective communication among all speakers of Spanish. Referring to the aforementioned example, if during the coffee break at the conference in Spain, Moreno says ‘*Vamos por un café*’ and his Peninsular colleagues say ‘*Vamos a por un café*,’ obviously they are abiding by different linguistic norms. If a test-taker uses one form—including *a*—and another test-taker uses the other—without *a*—which of the two expressions should be assigned more value in the assessment? Among a majority of Peninsular speakers of Spanish, clearly the prepositional cluster *a por* would be the linguistic norm that should receive full credit, and the use of a single preposition—*por*—to the eyes of his Peninsular colleagues, in Spain, would be considered a *regionalism*. Yet, if this procedure were used to assess the linguistic profile of speakers of multiple origins—such as on this side of *el charco* [the pond—in the informal way Spaniards call the Atlantic], and especially among Latinx Spanish speakers, the cluster of prepositions, *a por*, becomes a marked trait that they do not hear frequently around them. It is on this side of the Atlantic, a *regionalism*. As such, both uses are considered regionalisms.

Every question on the early versions of the IASE, either a blank to fill in or a translation to recognize in a multiple-choice item, was worth one point. Based on our observations of native speakers and heritage speakers’ attempts at communicating with each other, and considering some HSs’ own accounts of their experiences

with NSs, we assumed that regionalisms might reduce the probability of mutual intelligibility when communicating across different speech communities. Regionalisms, identified as forms of US Spanish, were either assigned 50% credit or no credit as they moved away from the group's norm and increased unintelligibility in general Spanish speaker communication. For example, in *general Spanish*, one might say, *A mis padres les gusta hablar español* compared to *US Spanish*, where one might say, *Ø Mis padres les gusta hablar español*. In this instance, dropping the case marker might have an adverse effect on communication between heritage and native speakers. The linguistic profiles, or grammars, of native speakers/advanced heritage speakers (aHS) and intermediate heritage speakers (iHS) are further illustrated below in sample IASE questions, followed by an explanation of the scoring.

The following are samples of the IASE questions with the responses for (1) full credit—*general Spanish* response by NSs or advanced heritage speakers (aHS) and (2) half credit—*regional Spanish* responses by intermediate heritage speakers (iHS). Test-takers are instructed to select “n/a” when the most correct answer is not available.

- Ex. 1. _____ compré un regalo a mi novia para su cumpleaños.
- a. Ayer [iHS= 0.5 pt]
 - b. Yo
 - c. Lo
 - d. La
 - e. n/a [NS= 1.0 pt]

In Example 1, the iHS has not noticed the absence of a double reference to the expressed indirect object—mandatory among most native speakers—and would thus receive half credit as an apparent US Spanish regionalism. The NS, noting the general Spanish rule, would have looked for the correct response “Le”—referring to the indirect object, *mi novia*—[girlfriend/fiancée]—co-occurring in the sentence. Due to the absence of the correct response, the NS would select option “e. n/a” for a full point.

- Ex. 2. Mis padres no _____ el inglés porque _____ de México.
- | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| a. son | a. ellos están |
| b. les gusta [iHS= 0.5 pt] | b. ellos son [iHS= 0.5 pt] |
| c. n/a [NS= 1.0 pt] | c. son [NS= 1.0 pt] |
| d. están | d. n/a |
| e. hablas | e. vienes |

For the first part of Example 2, the iHS may have selected “b. les gusta” with the US Spanish variant resulting from a common drop in the dative case marker *a* with *Gustar*-type verbs, receiving only half credit. Native speakers would instead select “c. n/a” recognizing the general Spanish norm that in this context the verb should have been conjugated as “hablan,” and that this is not available as an option. For the second part of Example 2, the iHSs often select “b. ellos son” with a recurring use of expressed subjects when not needed, due to the verb conjugation giving away the subject in general Spanish.

- Ex. 3. Perdón, ¿dónde _____ el laboratorio de idiomas?
- a. es
 - b. está [NS= 1.0 pt]
 - c. encuentra
 - d. esta [iHS= 0.5 pt]
 - e. n/a

Example 3 reveals a common, informal US Spanish HS trait of not seeing the need for an accent mark, and thus receives half credit for the response.

- Ex 4. ¿Dónde _____ la clase de español?
- a. está [iHS= 0.5 pt]
 - b. n/a
 - c. encuentra
 - d. esta [iHS= 0.5 pt]
 - e. es [NS= 1.0 pt]

Example 4 illustrates a fairly complex status of *clase* among Spanish dialects. In general Spanish, *clase* [class as a teaching/learning session] is an event, not a location, thus requiring the verb *ser*, meaning option “e. es” would be full credit. Both Spaniards and Latin American speakers of Spanish use *clase* this way. It is then a norm of general Spanish. However, in Peninsular Spanish, *clase* is also a synonym of *aula* [a classroom] and *estar* is then frequently heard in this context. Option “a. está,” though a native choice, is common only to Spaniards. It is then a regionalism and would therefore receive half a point. Lastly, option “d. esta” is a common choice among US HSs, who follow the norm of *estar* for location without regard to the exception for events. It is a US Spanish regionalism, and it therefore receives half a point.

- Ex 5. Mi hermano está sentado y no hace nada. No _____ hacer sus tareas de la escuela.
- a. está
 - b. n/a [NS= 1.0 pt]
 - c. va [iHS= 0.5 pt]
 - d. es
 - e. quieres

In Example 5, in US Spanish, it is common for HSs to speak with a natural loss of the prepositional phrase marker *a* of the periphrastic future auxiliary *ir a*. However, the advanced student could notice the full version of this structure, “va a,” is absent and would select option “b. n/a”

- Ex 6. El médico _____ examinó _____ espalda y me dijo que sólo _____ un dolor muscular.
- | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| a. no | a. mi [iHS= 0.5 pt] | a. era [NS= 1.0 pt] |
| b. me [NS= 1.0 pt] | b. mí | b. fue |
| c. mi | c. me | c. tenga |
| d. mí | d. la [NS= 1.0 pt] | d. tuviera |
| e. n/a [iHS= 0.5 pt] | e. n/a | e. n/a |

For the first part of Example 6, option “e. n/a” is another example of an absence of pronouns introducing double reference to the expressed indirect object in US Spanish speech, whereas it is required in general Spanish. For the second part, option “a. mi” is following the Anglicism of “my shoulder” whereas in general Spanish, the possessive pronoun is not needed since ownership was already expressed in the indirect option use “me.” For the third blank, there is only one solid answer, “a.” None of the other options have been attested significantly among the first test-takers, thus no half points are given.

- Ex 7. Dr. Moreno, ¿_____ un minuto? Quisiera conversar _____ sobre mi nota.
- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| a. tienes [iHS= 0.5 pt] | a. contigo [iHS= 0.5 pt] |
| b. tiene [NS= 1.0 pt] | b. consigo |
| c. tenga | c. con usted [NS= 1.0 pt] |
| d. tendrías | d. conmigo |
| e. n/a | e. n/a |

For both parts of Example 7, options “a” are an example of US Spanish unmarking formal/honorary (*Tú* vs *Usted*) morphology in cases other than vocatives. Due to the nature of a student – professor relationship, more formality, as acknowledged by most native speakers, is needed.

- Ex 8. En EE.UU. _____ inglés y en América Latina el español _____ por millones de personas.
- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| a. habla | a. hablan |
| b. es hablado | b. es hablado [NS= 1.0 pt] |
| c. se habla [NS= 1.0 pt] | c. se habla [iHS= 0.5 pt] |
| d. está hablado | d. está hablado |
| e. n/a | e. n/a |

For the first part of Example 8, no credit is given for another choice beyond option “c. se habla.” There is no consistent/systematic response among regionalisms or heritage speakers that differs from this standard response. For the second part, option “b. es hablado” is most common among speakers of general Spanish whereas option “c. se habla” might be selected by an aHS or a NS of Spanish in the Caribbean, receiving half a point as a regionalism.

These question samples reveal some structures that speakers of US (bilingual) Spanish, as compared to general (monolingual) Spanish, have innovated at several levels of linguistic analysis: (1) absence of double reference to expressed indirect object; (2) loss of dative case marker *a* with *Gustar*-type verbs; (3) recurring use of expressed subjects; (4) absence of accent marks; (5) loss of prepositional phrase marker *a* of the periphrastic future auxiliary *ir a*; (6) expression of possession (to refer to body parts) by means of possessive articles; (7) unmarking of formal/honorary (*Tú* vs *Usted*) morphology in contexts other than vocatives; and (8) unstable treatment of passive voice formats. Additionally, the lexical differences between monolingual Spanish and US Spanish are widespread. For instance, Example 4 shows a case in which Spanish *clase* has been reinterpreted semantically to resemble English *class*. US Spanish speakers often mark the option—including *estar*—that turns this lexical item into one that no longer refers to an event and therefore rules out *ser*.

Translation samples are additionally used as part of the IASE to determine if, and to what extent, test-takers' Spanish is independent of English. Arguably, this type of question requires more conscious command of the two languages, and subsequently, helps distinguish borderline profiles. Advanced heritage speakers (aHS) are commonly identified in this translation section. Students are given the instructions in Spanish, ¿Cuál es la mejor traducción? *La opción 'n/a' significa que ninguna de las traducciones dadas es buena o adecuada* [Which is the best translation? Option 'n/a' means that none of the given translations are good or acceptable].

Ex. 9. She's married with children.

- a. Ella está casada con hijos. [iHS= 0.5 pt]
- b. Está casada y tiene niños. [aHS= 0.5 pt]
- c. Está casada y tiene hijos. [NS= 1.0 pt]
- d. n/a
- e. Ella está casada con sus hijos.

In Example 9, “c” is the option native speakers most commonly select as accurate, and therefore, it is assigned full credit—1 point. Option “a” is typically chosen by iHSs and option “b” is selected by aHSs, both for half credit. It is clear here that US Spanish use is closer to English usage (by replacing the *y* conjunction and a lexical item). The translation marked by the iHS is a literal, word-for-word, version of its English counterpart. The aHS, more aware of monolingual Spanish structure, has only adopted a calque—*niños* (young-age children)—to refer to *hijos* (children to parents). Both options, “a” and “b,” as systematically repeated occurrences across two groups of language speakers, receive half a point. Thus, they are regionalisms.

Ex. 10. I'm definitely applying for the position, but I was told the salary was not that good.

- a. Definitivamente, voy a aplicar para la posición, pero fui dicho que el sueldo no era muy bueno. [iHS= 0.5 pt]
- b. n/a
- c. Seguro que voy a solicitar el puesto, pero me dijeron que el sueldo no era tan bueno. [NS= 1.0 pt]
- d. Definitivamente, voy a solicitar la posición, pero se me dijo que el sueldo no era muy bueno. [aHS= 0.5 pt]
- e. De seguro que postulo a la plaza, pero fui dicho que el sueldo no era bueno.

Lexical variation is essential to consider for mutual intelligibility. It is one of the foundations for our quantitative grading of the IASE. It can be observed in Example 10 that the result—unintended messages—may turn out to make no sense to the NS; hence, the high potential for a problematic linguistic exchange between heritage and native speakers. Option “a” shows a word-for-word Spanish version of English *apply for a position*, which a NS would find marked and awkward. This sequence of words is foreign sounding to general (monolingual) Spanish. Then, the English sentence introduces a passive form whereby an indirect object appears as grammatical subject, against a natural tendency in general Spanish to avoid passive voice in the more Anglicized looking and sounding *ser + participle* pattern. Option “d” abides by Spanish

structure but includes an English calque—*posición for plaza or puesto*. Both options “a” and “d” are typical responses by heritage speakers, albeit in two different groups, and are therefore half a point each as regionalisms of US Spanish. The general Spanish option is “c,” which receives full credit.

Interpreting IASE Scores

Table 1 below shows GSU program placement based on IASE scores, including a descriptive language profile designation of terms NS, aHS, and iHS that are used only for placement consideration. As noted by Goulette (2020), “[s]tudents should be allowed to self-select labels” (p. 78), especially concerning issues of linguistic and cultural identities.

Table 1
Language profile descriptors and placement in the Spanish curriculum based on IASE Score

IASE Score and Language Profile Designation	Language Profile Description	Placement in the Spanish Curriculum
80% or above Native Speaker [NS]	Spanish is considered monolingual in terms of mastery of a <i>general Spanish</i> . This speaker may speak both Spanish and English, but his/her Spanish is comparable to that of speakers living in a Spanish-speaking country.	Credit is given for the fifth-semester intensive grammar and writing bridging class. The student is allowed to register for courses on literature, linguistics, and culture.
65% to 79.9% Advanced Heritage Speaker [aHS]	Spanish is considered bilingual. His/her mastery of the language is significant, despite occasional calques and lexical borrowings from English. Mutual intelligibility across varieties of Spanish is not a concern.	Student is placed in the fifth-semester intensive grammar and writing bridging course for Spanish Heritage Speakers.
50% to 64.9% Intermediate Heritage Speaker [iHS]	Spanish is of a bilingual quality, yet further structural command will help the learner achieve consistent mutual intelligibility with speakers of <i>general Spanish</i> across formal and informal contexts.	Student is placed in the fourth-semester of language study course, Intermediate Spanish for Heritage Speakers.
49.9% and below	Emerging Spanish. This student will benefit from language training for more functional command of Spanish.	Courses in Basic Spanish (first-, second-, or third-semester of Spanish)—as determined by a regular CLEP® placement exam.

The linguistic profile of any test-taker that obtains a score of 80% or above is largely comparable to that of a NS living in a Spanish-speaking country. Although the term “native speaker” is applied to the language profile designation category, test-takers may include highly advanced L2 speakers. It should be noted that a number of college-educated NSs—born, raised, and educated in Spanish-speaking countries—were asked to complete a first version of IASE on a multiple-choice format. All of them obtained scores between 82% and 95%, figures that have been confirmed repeatedly over the years among college students, both undergraduate and graduate,

who were also NSs of the language and of recent arrival in the US. Some highly educated non-native, non-heritage speakers have also scored above 80% thus showing language performance in Spanish that is fully comparable to that of NSs. For placement purposes, then, “NS Spanish” is revealed to have dialectal variation that is not more than 20% on the IASE linguistic tasks. Students with scores of 80% and above are allowed to register for advanced courses on literature, linguistics, and culture.

The linguistic profile of students who obtains a score of below 80% to 65% is considered an advanced heritage speaker [aHS] who has mastered informal Spanish and some of the formal language, but they are unaware of sociolinguistic conventions such as those calling for formal (*Ud*) treatment. In our experience, this type of student is often a second-generation Spanish HS, commonly with NS parents who are first-generation immigrants in the U.S. This speaker may also be a first-generation immigrant that arrived in the U.S. at an early age and has been influenced by US Spanish. This type of student is placed in the fifth-semester intensive grammar and writing bridging course for Spanish HSs.

Students scoring between 65% to 50% are considered to be at an intermediate level of *general Spanish*, and an intermediate Heritage Speaker (iHS). Their Spanish is of a bilingual quality, yet further structural command of formal Spanish will help the learner achieve mutual intelligibility with speakers of general Spanish, particularly in formal contexts. This type of learner is often the child of immigrants; however, the iHS might use English as a primary language of communication. They regularly use lexical, sometimes even syntactic, calques and borrowings from English.

Students scoring 49% and below, we term as an emerging speaker of general Spanish. In our experience, this student is frequently a third or older generation immigrant or a second-generation immigrant with a parent who is an English-monolingual speaker and commonly has little functional command of Spanish production. These kinds of students would generally be referred to Spanish WebCAPE online, a commercially available placement test that has steadily placed students properly into classes/levels in Lower-Division Spanish.

Generally speaking, the Spanish Program at GSU uses three placement/level tests. The first one is the Spanish WebCAPE. If students obtain a high score (at GSU, 500 points and above), they are referred to the College Board’s College-Level Examination Program (CLEP® placement exam) for credit by examination. Many students meet the so called our university’s “Foreign Language Graduation Requirement” through this process. If a student intends to continue to study Spanish, usually as a major or as a minor, he or she is asked to take the IASE for determining skill level and placement into advanced Higher-Division courses. Most heritage speakers are tested at this point. There have been very few misplacement concerns over the past fifteen years with use of the WebCAPE, the CLEP® for Lower-Division Spanish credit, and the IASE for placement in Higher-Division courses.

Discussion

The proper placement and support of HSs in the Spanish curriculum is of growing importance given the increasing number of Latinx students in US education. It is crucial for Spanish educators to know the issues concerning language use and identity for a Spanish HS compared to a L2 learner. The outcome of promoting standardiza-

tion of an idealized language or imagined community can be damaging to multilingual speakers when a particular part of their home language, culture, and identity have been positioned as a problem or disapproved in the classroom (MacGregor-Mendoza, 2020). The beginning of this article outlined the unique needs of HSs in the Spanish curriculum, but as recently noted by Goulette (2020), “[d]espite scholarly recognition of the linguistic, cultural and academic differences between HLLs and L2 learners, current policy and instructional practices tend to deny them” (p. 65).

The language ideologies that students experience in their different positions in school and at home play a part in their ongoing multilingual identity development and negotiation. These issues complicate placement practices to identify Spanish HSs for the purpose of building on their existing skills in a Spanish language curriculum. The notion of comparing Spanish NS/HS language use to a *general Spanish* in this article was solely for the purpose of identifying multilingual speakers' linguistic needs and to provide them with a safe space within the Spanish language curriculum where they could be their whole selves.

In responding to the issue of native and heritage speakers' placement in the Spanish curriculum in college, the GSU Program Coordinator first sought a response to the question of what is *general Spanish*. A quantitative standard was established on the basis of group majorities of test-takers when asked to provide original responses on a comprehensive Spanish test. Linguistic profiles were established for native and heritage speakers by recording the most frequent and recurring responses across test-takers. Responses that were common to a majority of test-takers were assumed to reveal common linguistic norms. The responses provided by such majorities were given full credit—a full point—under the assumption that those responses would not become a barrier to mutual intelligibility in actual communicative interactions among Spanish speakers of different origins. The responses given by only some speakers were considered as showing particular, or regional, norms. As such, these would not ensure mutual intelligibility across regions. For grading purposes—response weight on the test—these responses were assigned a value of 50%—half a point. Many of the structures as commonly used by Latinx US Spanish speakers were assigned full credit, as their usage replicated the ones encountered among speakers of monolingual Spanish. Frequently, too, US Spanish, typically used in the informal contexts of family life and around close friends, were assigned half credit, while many other responses were not assigned any value as they appeared generated by English influences.

In more theoretical terms, US Spanish is claimed to be another variant of Spanish, which differs from all others in that US Spanish is intrinsically *bilingual*. In this sense, a defining feature of US Spanish is not that it naturally tends to code-switching, calques, and borrowings from English as much as the fact that HSs of the language switch to English in formal situations. Many innovations in US Spanish may be said to be a result of a pragmatic condition in our region whereby frequent exposure to formal Spanish is less common compared to the exposure of formal English in public situations.

It should be noted that, even though formal and/or public Spanish is largely common to all Spanish-speaking monolingual communities—those in Latin America and Spain—the language varies considerably when monolingual variants of the

language are compared in their informal, non-public domains—many times to the point of hindering mutual intelligibility among native speakers. Linguistically, it is proper to state then that US Spanish appears as different before Latin Americans and Spaniards because of the same sociolinguistic and pragmatic factors that lead Latin Americans and Spaniards to speak in a very particular way in their private surroundings. Social, pragmatic, and communication demands and constraints affect US Spanish the same way they affect monolingual dialects of the language. A noticeable difference is US Spanish switches to English in more formal, public contexts. In this way, the Spanish for Heritage Speakers classroom affords the opportunity to explore a rich tradition of language and culture differences and hybridity within the context of identity formation that positions multilingualism as an asset. From there, the Heritage Speakers classroom should become, as several scholars have pointed out, a gateway for access to the formal and public registers of the language.

Yet, despite recognized demographic shifts, Spanish NSs/HSSs, whose knowledge about the language has been built on a variety of lived experiences in the U.S. and/or abroad, continue to be placed in courses that are designed with L2 learners in mind. It is important for Spanish language educators to be aware of culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) whereby all students can “maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically” (p. 476). It is essential when in interactions with Spanish HSs in the traditional Spanish classroom that “[i]nstead of casting students off as ‘lazy’ or ‘incapable,’ educators must consider to what degree students may be resisting the enacted curriculum for the simple fact that they believe the curriculum does not reflect their reality” (Goulette, 2020, p. 79). When Spanish HSs are made to feel that they speak a broken Spanish language, linguistic stigmatization may prompt them to believe they should drop the language course (Correa, 2016).

The need for a more accurate placement test is crucial because the majority of US Spanish speakers could benefit from some type of Spanish instruction, especially with writing skills (Montrul, 2010; Parra, 2017). Colombi (2009) found that HSs apply the informal conversational resources they had developed in their heritage language to write in academic contexts. Several HS literacy specialists have proposed a critical, process approach to develop writing skills in the Spanish curriculum (Burgo, 2020; Mrak, 2020). This process involves first writing about their familiar, lived experiences, and then analyzing language choices while revising. Burgo (2020) noted an obstacle to meaningful HS writing instruction is the lack of training in the certification process of world language instructors. She further noted, “if educators intend to empower students to become good writers, they need to know how to do so, especially when grading with regard to assessment” (Burgo, 2020, p. 98). Drawing from Leeman’s (2005) critical writing assessment practices for HSs, Burgo (2020) emphasized the importance to “leave behind a traditional approach to error correction based on prescriptive grammar; above all since HLLs’ local variety must be validated in the HL classroom, academic Spanish should be presented as an addition to their linguistic repertoires” (pp 98-99).

In conclusion, the primary aims of this article were to (1) bring attention to the unique needs of Latinx HSs in the Spanish language curriculum; (2) share a free placement test that acknowledges regional uses of Spanish to identify HSs in order

to provide them a meaningful language learning experience; and (3) to provide information about our program in the U.S. Southeast, in response to Potowski's (2016) call for current research on Spanish heritage language programs in certain areas of the U.S. We also are responding to the recent call Kemp (2020) put out, stating the urgent need for educators and researchers to "listen to and document the voices of students enrolled in HL courses as their prior experiences with the language might inform HL curriculum and pedagogy in innovative ways" (p. 35).

Most importantly, the intent of this article is to provide the reader a way to identify Spanish HSs and place them in the Spanish curriculum in a class that supports their voice and dignity. We conclude with a quote by Love (2019), who writes about the need to respect community connections within the schooling of linguistically and culturally diverse Black and Brown children. Love (2019) described her own experience in rejecting the school narrative that did not embrace her identity and the importance of feeling like her voice was listened to:

My dignity was never to be compromised, which meant never compromising my voice and my connection to how I mattered in this world. When you compromise your voice, you compromise your dignity. No dignity, no power. (p. 44)

The general tone we hoped to convey throughout this manuscript is that students' perspectives should guide a bottom-up approach to the Spanish HS curriculum design and placement tests.

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