

Diverse voices and experiences: Insights from SHL students and instructors in the Midwest

Abstract:

Enrollment in university Spanish heritage language (SHL) program benefits learners via gains in cultural pride, linguistic self-confidence, Latinx college retention rates, and overall personal and academic benefits (e.g., Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005; Holguín Mendoza 2018; Prada & Pascual y Cabo, 2022). Over the past decade the number of SHL programs in U.S. universities has continued to rise, including in regions such as the Midwest without “long-established Spanish-speaking communities” (Beaudrie, 2012). The present study represents the next step in understanding what creates the success of an SHL program comprising of six intermediate and advanced course offerings in a large Midwest university. Pilot data on students in SHL courses in our university in the Midwest showed that students increased their appreciation of linguistic variation, began challenging standard language ideologies, desired the incorporation of culture in the classroom and differentiated in the need to find community in the classroom/city. This study builds on current knowledge of the program’s success by incorporating pre and post surveys at the beginning and end of the semester – which serves to further delineate the extent to which enrollment in the SHL program achieves HL instructor goals through a Critical Language Awareness (CLA) lens (Beaudrie & Wilson, 2022). The methodology was then triangulated by student-only focus groups based on the themes identified in the survey answers. Pre-survey general trends suggest positive experiences in the program, feeling welcome to Spanish variation, translanguaging and self-expression, and appreciation for instructors, and CLA approaches. We predict that post-survey data will demonstrate an array of differences in the progression of student course outcomes related to instructors’ linguistic and pedagogical background. Some implications include the value of instructor training and language ideologies in SHL programs, while also highlighting instructor willingness to empathize to non-pedagogical student needs.

Key Words: Spanish Heritage Learners, Instructor training, language ideologies, critical language awareness, dialectal variation, pedagogical goals

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