

**University of Alberta**

**Spanish Heritage Speakers and Second Language Learners in Mixed  
Classrooms: Perceptions of Students and Instructors**

by

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## **Abstract**

Heritage speakers and second language learners (L2) are enrolled together in many Spanish classes in North American universities. These groups have differing language abilities, motivations and needs, and being in the same class could represent a challenge for them. The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of Canadian learners in mixed classes. This study also adds the perceptions of instructors of how to address the needs of students in these classes. Data were gathered from questionnaires and interviews with 55 students and four course instructors. Findings revealed that both groups respected each other and appreciated collaborative opportunities, as it allowed them to benefit from each others' strengths. Participants showed more positive perceptions than those in previous studies on the United States. The study also provided evidence that the way the instructor handles the mix of these groups is important to the success of the class.

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## Table of contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 Aims and background of the research .....	1
1.2 Organization of the study .....	8
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	9
2.1 Linguistic similarities and differences between heritage speakers and L2 learners .....	9
2.2 Heritage speakers' and L2 learners' motivations .....	14
2.3 Perceptions of the interactions of Spanish heritage speakers and L2 learners in mixed classes .....	17
2.4 Research questions .....	24
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....	26
3.1 Participants .....	26
3.1.1 Spanish heritage speakers .....	28
3.1.2 Second language learners .....	28
3.1.3 Self-rated Spanish proficiency.....	29
3.1.4 Course instructors .....	30
3.2 Instruments .....	30
3.2.1 Questionnaire .....	30
3.2.2 Participant interviews .....	32

3.2.3 Instructor interviews .....	33
3.3 Procedure.....	33
3.4 Data analysis.....	34
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS .....	35
4.1. Questionnaire results .....	35
4.1.1 Results from L2 learners .....	35
4.1.2 Results from heritage speakers .....	38
4.1.3 Comparison of L2 learner and heritage speaker questionnaire results.....	41
4.2. Interview results .....	45
4.2.1 Perceptions of mixing heritage speakers and L2 learners .....	47
4.2.1.1 Heritage speakers .....	47
4.2.1.2 L2 learners .....	47
4.2.2 Collaboration between heritage speakers & L2 learners .....	49
4.2.2.1 Heritage speakers .....	49
4.2.2.2 L2 learners .....	50
4.2.3 Instructors' level of expectation .....	51
4.2.3.1 Heritage speakers .....	51
4.2.3.2 L2 learners .....	51
4.2.4 Intimidation .....	53

4.2.4.1 Heritage speakers .....	53
4.2.4.2 L2 learners .....	54
4.2.5 Language Use .....	54
4.2.5.1 Heritage speakers .....	54
4.2.5.2 L2 learners.....	55
4.2.6 Comparison of results .....	56
4.3 Results of the interviews with instructors .....	58
4.3.1 Strategies to address the needs of students in a mixed classroom .....	58
4.3.2 Intimidation, respect, and collaboration among students .....	60
4.3.3 Perceptions of the success of mixed classes .....	62
4.3.4 Summary of the instructors' responses .....	64
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS .....	65
5.1. Research questions 1 and 2: Student perceptions .....	55
5.1.1 Advantages and disadvantages of working in mixed classes .....	66
5.1.2 Perceptions of the instructors' expectations .....	70
5.1.3 Perceptions of respect and intimidation .....	72
5.1.4 Mixed classes in the American and Canadian contexts .....	74
5.2 Research questions 3 and 4: Instructor perceptions .....	77
5.3 Pedagogical implications.....	79
5.4 Limitations of this study and suggestions for further research .....	83

5.5 Conclusion .....	87
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	89
APPENDICES .....	97
A. Language Background Questionnaire .....	97
B. Spanish L2 learner Questionnaire .....	99
C. Spanish Heritage Speaker Questionnaire .....	101
D. Possible Interview Warm-up Questions and Interview Questions for Students.....	103
E. Possible Interview Questions for Instructors .....	104
LIST OF TABLES	
Table 1. Comparisons of Self-rated Proficiency by Group.....	30
Table 2. Stages of Data Collection .....	34
Table 3. Questionnaire Results (Means and Standard Deviations): L2 learner Questionnaire.....	35
Table 4. Frequency of Responses for the L2 learner Questionnaire.....	36
Table 5. Questionnaire Results (Means and Standard deviations): Spanish Heritage Speaker Questionnaire.....	38
Table 6. Frequency of Responses for the Spanish Heritage Speaker Questionnaire .....	39
Table 7. Chi-square Test for the Frequency of Responses among L2 learners and Heritage speakers .....	42

Table 8. Independent Samples T-test for L2 learners and Heritage speakers .....	43
Table 9. Heritage Speaker and L2 learner Interview Participants .....	46



## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Aims and background of the research**

In most elementary, high school, and post-secondary Spanish language programs in Canada and in many Spanish language programs in the United States, heritage speakers and second language learners (L2) learners are enrolled together in the same courses. These two groups of learners come to the language classroom with different motivations (Alarcón, 2010; Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005; Beaudrie, Ducar & Relaño Pastor, 2009; Carreira, 2000; Carreira & Kagan, 2011; Ducar, 2008; Lynch, 2008; Potowski & Carreira, 2004; Yanguas, 2010; Zentella, 1997) as well as with different levels and types of language proficiency (Bowles, 2011b; Foote, 2010; Lipski, 1993; Lynch, 2008; Montrul, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010; Montrul & Bowles, 2009; Montrul, Foote & Perpiñán, 2008; Polinsky, 2007; Potowski, 2007; Silva-Corvalán, 1994; Zapata, Sánchez & Toribio, 2005; Zentella, 1997). Given this situation, it is necessary to understand the dynamics of Spanish mixed classes (classes that include both heritage speakers and L2 learners) by not only examining the characteristics and profiles of heritage speakers and L2 learners, but also by attending to the students' perceptions of working together in mixed classes.

Beaudrie and Fairclough (2012, p. 204) maintain that the huge expansion of the US Latino population in institutions of higher education has greatly increased the need to respond to this new student population in the language classroom. In the last two decades, there has been a growing interest in Spanish heritage speakers enrolled in traditional foreign language courses designed for Spanish L2 learners. Current research, focused almost exclusively on the United

States, has shown that these programs do not address the needs of the heritage speakers, which are different from those of English-speaking students studying Spanish as a foreign language (Beaudrie, 2012; Beaudrie, Ducar & Relaño Pastor, 2009; Potowski, 2002; Valdés, Lozano & García Moya, 1981).

In terms of the needs and proficiency levels of heritage speakers, Valdés (2001) maintains that “in the case of teaching heritage learners who present some proficiency in the language, challenges include determining the range of proficiencies that these students have already developed in the language and understanding the ways to strengthen these proficiencies.” (pp. 3-4)

Valdés provides three main criteria for identifying heritage language students:

(a) being raised in homes where a non-English language is spoken, (b) speaking or merely understanding the heritage language, and (c) being to some degree bilingual in English and their heritage language. This latter criterion includes two different components: the linguistic ability that learners possess and the cultural background that students bring with them from home. Carreira (2004) claims that “heritage speakers do not constitute a homogeneous group, but rather appear to be a collection of types of learners who share the characteristic of having identity and linguistic needs that relate to their family background.” (p. 21)

Montrul (2008) proposes that from the point of view of acquisition, heritage speakers are in some respects similar to native speakers in having been exposed to the target language early in childhood. However, they differ from native speakers in that their exposure to the heritage language may get interrupted and may be limited in its scope and domain—usually confined to the

home and immediate family and community. According to Valdés (2001), heritage speakers' language ability develops mainly through exposure to input in the home and community, most times without the benefit of reinforcement through schooling. This language background causes heritage learners, as a group, to have a more restricted lexicon and range of registers. For this reason, adult Spanish heritage speakers' speech is often characterized by incomplete acquisition of grammatical features or language attrition which is most likely due to reduced input and limited use of the heritage language (Montrul, 2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2006a, 2006b, 2008; Montrul & Bowles, 2009; Montrul et al., 2008)

Thus, a number of factors become critical in determining heritage speakers' overall competence in their heritage language, including quantity of the input, age of acquisition, language use, status of the heritage language, and degree of attachment to the ancestral home. Some of the gaps in the knowledge of heritage speakers are due to transfer from their dominant language, and this influence becomes progressively more visible with age, especially because of decreasing input and increasing use of the dominant language.

According to Valdés (2001):

Second-, third-, and fourth-generation heritage students will be clearly English dominant. Their strengths in English will very strongly overshadow their abilities in the heritage language. Moreover, many heritage speakers will often be speakers of non prestige varieties of their heritage language. They may speak a rural variety of the language or a stigmatized variety associated with non-academic uses of language, or their productive abilities may be limited to a very narrow repertoire of

styles and registers. The spoken language of these students may often contain a number of features typical of casual and informal registers of the language (p.8).

Beaudrie and Ducar (2005) maintain that although low-level heritage speakers have strong receptive proficiency, they often have few or no productive skills because the majority of these speakers seldom use Spanish at home. Lynch (2008) argues that the abilities that some heritage language students bring to the classroom are, in many ways, linguistically similar to those of traditional L2 learners with some prior formal study of the language.

It is equally important to note that heritage speaker learners have distinct motivational and affective needs as compared to L2 learners. Heritage speakers enrol in Spanish language classes at the high school and college level for many reasons that include maintaining their speaking and listening abilities, developing and/or improving literacy skills in Spanish, acquiring more formal registers and styles of Spanish for professional reasons, and reconnecting with their family, community and culture. In contrast, L2 learners' motivation to learn Spanish is often to increase their job and business opportunities and to travel and explore other cultures (Alarcón, 2010; Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005; Félix, 2009; Mikulski, 2006; Potowski, 2002; Valdés, 2001, 2005).

Nevertheless, from a sociolinguistic perspective, both heritage speakers and L2 learners can benefit from working together and collaborating in mixed classes. Both groups of students can take advantage of their complementary strengths and skills and can learn from each other (Blake & Zyzik, 2003). For example, the presence of heritage speakers allows L2 learners to learn about

cultural differences, to be exposed to the naturally spoken language of the heritage speakers, to have access to native models of pronunciation and conversational Spanish as opposed to only academic language, and to have opportunities to practice Spanish with native-like speakers. In turn, the heritage speakers can rely on the L2 learner students' formal knowledge of the language and ask for help with grammatical rules, verb tenses, and use of accent marks. (Edstrom, 2007; Potowski, 2002)

A further important issue to study is the interactions and perceptions of heritage speakers and L2 learners working together in mixed classes. Investigating the opinions of these students could highlight the advantages and disadvantages of combining heritage speakers and L2 learners, and thus it could allow instructors to develop instructional strategies to address the needs of each group. To date, this topic has mostly been examined within the situation of Spanish heritage speakers and their L2 peers in the United States. Indeed, the opinions of the students in mixed classes seem to reflect the negative attitudes and linguistic prejudices from a dominant English-speaking society towards speakers of Spanish in the United States (<http://www.us-english.org/>). These language attitudes may also influence both heritage speakers and L2 learners' willingness to accept their differences, work together, help each other, and collaborate in mixed classes. Unlike the United States, Canada's multicultural openness may be reflected in the classroom environment where L2 learners may value diversity and learning languages, and may be more open to cultural differences. Thus, the perspectives of heritage speakers and L2 learners in Canada need to be investigated independently in order to determine how the

perceptions of these learners compare to the attitudes of the students in existing American studies.

In summary, it is clear that having L2 learners and heritage speakers in a single classroom presents unique challenges for both teachers and students, but at the same time, there are potential benefits of collaboration among heritage speakers and L2 learners that need to be further investigated. (Edstrom, 2007; Lynch, 2008)

Drawing from the work of Edstrom (2007), this thesis deals with Spanish mixed classes in the Canadian context where second language instruction is not perceived as negatively by the dominant English-speaking community as it is in the United States. Canada is a multicultural society that protects the use of heritage languages and fosters and celebrates cultural diversity (Canadian Multiculturalism Act 1985). According to the Canadian Education Association (1991), bilingual and heritage programs exist in several provinces (Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan) and are regulated by provincial language policies that promote the implementation of second language programs. In many of these programs, heritage speakers and L2 learners are often combined in mixed classes and present particular challenges that both students and instructors have to face in order to meet the needs of both groups.

The present study examines Canadian learners' perceptions in regard to being together in a mixed class of heritage speakers and L2 learners of Spanish. In addition, it adds an important perspective: the instructors' opinions on the dynamics and the challenges of teaching mixed classes, which is key for understanding how to address the different needs and motivations of heritage

speakers and L2 learners. The study also allows instructors to reflect on the challenges of promoting collaborative learning and to address how to best teach mixed classes.

The study involved 55 students –44 L2 learners and 11 heritage speakers– enrolled in four upper-level (third-and fourth-year) Spanish content courses at the University of Alberta. Their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of working together in mixed classes were identified by means of a two-part written questionnaire. Further insights on the topics in the questionnaire were explored through individual semi-structured interviews with volunteer students and also with the instructors of the four courses. Two methods of data collection were employed in this study in order to provide a more comprehensive view of students’ and instructors’ perceptions of learning and working together in a mixed class.

This study contributes to an understanding of the dynamics of upper-level mixed content classes through an exploration of students’ opinions on working and collaborating with each other as well as the instructors’ perspectives on teaching mixed classes. The results of this study may therefore be of benefit in L2 instruction by helping instructors reflect on the importance of attending to both groups of learners by understanding their attitudes and needs, thereby making their classes accessible to both heritage speakers and L2 learners and creating opportunities for collaboration among the students combined in mixed classes.

## **1.2 Organization of the study**

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 gives an overview of past and ongoing related research that motivates and generates the research questions addressed in this thesis. Gaps in previous research are subsequently identified and the research questions are raised for investigation. Chapter 3 describes the methodology adopted in the study. This section starts with a detailed description of the two participant groups. The two major research instruments –a written questionnaire and semi-structured interviews– are described and the procedures followed in collecting and analyzing data are stated. Chapter 4 presents key findings from the analysis of the research data. These include results combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Chapter 5 includes an interpretation of the findings of the study, with reference to each of the research questions and in relation to relevant previous research findings. This section also focuses on both pedagogical and research implications of the study, and indicates its limitations and suggestions for future studies.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter reviews the literature associated with the main areas of interest in this research and focuses principally on research conducted on Spanish heritage speaker and L2 learner classes. For the purposes of this thesis, the term “heritage language” refers only to Spanish-as-a-heritage-language.

The first section of this chapter identifies the research that has investigated and identified linguistic similarities and differences between heritage speakers and L2 learners. The second section discusses studies that have concentrated on heritage speakers’ and L2 learners’ motivations. Examining the linguistic competence and the motivations for learning Spanish of these two distinct groups of learners is clearly important for understanding their attitudes and perceptions about working collaboratively in mixed classes. The third section provides a summary of current research concerned with Spanish heritage speakers’ and L2 learners’ interactions and perceptions of collaborative work in mixed classes. The last section describes the rationale of this study and presents the research questions raised for investigation.

### **2.1. Linguistic similarities and differences between heritage speakers and L2 learners**

The field of heritage language teaching has been growing in the last three decades. Research, mostly conducted in the United States, has focused principally on the grammatical knowledge and the motivations and needs of heritage speakers and has mainly emphasized the differences between heritage speakers and L2 learners. Some of these studies have argued whether heritage

speakers should be placed in specialized programs or whether it is appropriate to instruct them together with L2 learners (Beaudrie, 2006; Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005; Beaudrie, Ducar & Relaño-Pastor, 2009; Potowski, 2002; Potowski & Carreira, 2004; Valdés, 1997; Yanguas, 2006, among others). The arguments in favor of creating specialized classes for heritage speakers suggest that mixed classes of heritage speakers and foreign language learners are not an ideal environment for either group (Potowski, 2002) and that, at least at the lower levels, instruction should meet the specific needs of heritage speakers (Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005; Beaudrie et al., 2009), which include developing standard and formal Spanish registers, as well as proficiency in reading and writing Spanish (Valdés, 2005), and promoting a sense of self-identity and cultural pride (Beaudrie, 2012, p.214).

On the other hand, other studies claim that, in upper- level courses, heritage speakers and L2 learners could learn together, given that the emphasis is on content rather than language skills. These studies have suggested that even though heritage speakers and L2 learners have different needs, they also approach their mixed classes with different strengths (Potowski, 2002, p. 36) and thus, could benefit from collaborating with each other. For example, heritage speakers could become models of authentic target language usage for L2 learners, who in turn could help the heritage speakers with grammatical rules, given that the heritage speakers have no formal instruction in their heritage language. (Edstrom, 2007)

A number of recent studies have compared the grammatical development of heritage speakers and L2 learners in the classroom. According to Davidson, de la Fuente, Montrul and Foote (2011):

What second language learners and heritage speakers have in common is that they display comparable levels of nonnative-like ability in the secondary and less dominant target language, appearing to make very similar errors. From a pedagogical perspective, it is important to understand what type of linguistic knowledge heritage speakers already bring to the classroom and how their learning is different or not from that of second language learners. At the same time, the comparison between second language learners and heritage speakers is also motivated by theoretical issues. Do heritage speakers have advantages over second language learners with early acquired aspects of language? Heritage speakers acquired the heritage language early in life in the home environment and received aural input, whereas second language learners start acquisition of the second language well after the foundations of their first language are in place, they learn the language primarily in the classroom and have more experience with written language than heritage speakers. (p.1)

Many studies have shown that Spanish heritage speakers display significant gaps in their grammatical development, such as in the tense, aspect, and mood system, the copulas *ser* and *estar*, subject pronouns, prepositions, gender agreement, articles, and word order. These gaps are interpreted as being the result of incomplete acquisition, most likely due to reduced input and limited use of the

heritage language (Bowles, 2011b; Foote, 2010; Lipski, 1993; Lynch, 2008; Montrul, 2002, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010; Montrul & Bowles, 2009; Montrul et al., 2008; Polinsky, 2007; Potowski, 2007; Silva-Corvalán, 1994; Zapata, Sánchez & Toribio, 2005; Zentella, 1997).

In terms of linguistic similarities between heritage speakers and L2 learners, Montrul et al. (2008) acknowledged that L2 learners and heritage speakers both make similar kinds of mistakes in tense, aspect and mood. Likewise, Au, Knightly, Jun, and Oh (2002) examined very low-proficiency Spanish heritage speakers and L2 learners and also found no differences in their morphosyntactic knowledge. In a similar vein, Lynch (2008) conducted research among lower-proficiency heritage language and L2 students of Spanish enrolled in intermediate and advanced Spanish language courses at the University of Miami. Data for this study were collected through interviews which were aimed at collecting grammatical and lexical features in oral discourse. The analysis of grammatical features showed that there were evident similarities at the linguistic levels most frequently emphasized in Spanish language classrooms: morphology and syntax. The results of this study found no substantial differences between the two groups on noun-adjective gender agreement, word order, *ser/estar* verb distinction, aspect, mood, and use of the subjunctive and the conditional.

With regard to linguistic differences between heritage speakers and L2 learners, Montrul et al. (2008) found that even though the heritage speakers and L2 learners in their study made the same kind of mistakes in tense, aspect and mood, they differed with regard to where they made their mistakes. For the L2 learners, it was mainly in their oral skills, while for the heritage speakers, it was

primarily in their written skills. Lynch (2008) also found that the heritage learners tended to insert more English words into their Spanish oral discourse than the L2 learners. In turn, Anglicisms and invented Spanish words were more frequent in the L2 learners' speech.

Some differences between heritage speakers and L2 learners were also indicated in Au et al. (2002), in which the authors identified phonological advantages for the heritage speakers who exhibited more native-like pronunciation than the L2 learners. Au et al. attributed these differences to the fact that heritage speakers are exposed to the heritage language from infancy. A more recent investigation by Montrul and Perpiñan (2011) expanded on Au et al.'s study by focusing on heritage speakers ranging from low to advanced proficiency in Spanish. The purpose of the study was to investigate whether heritage speakers and L2 learners had similar knowledge of tense, aspect, and mood morphology, specifically the acquisition of the morphology of the preterit/imperfect and indicative/subjunctive. The study also examined whether the differences found between L2 learners and heritage speakers at the low proficiency level disappeared with increased proficiency. The results showed significant differences between the L2 learners and the heritage speakers. The authors concluded that there were differences between the two groups depending on the linguistic structure, proficiency, age, and mode of acquisition. The heritage speakers with low intermediate proficiency were overall more accurate than the L2 learners with early acquired aspects of language, in this case grammatical aspect (see also Montrul et al., 2008). In contrast, the L2 learners were more accurate than the heritage speakers in tasks involving tense, aspect,

and mood, due to their experience learning Spanish in the classroom setting which trained them to use their metalinguistic knowledge. Furthermore, more advanced L2 learners outperformed the heritage speakers on the use of the indicative and the subjunctive. Montrul and Perpiñan explained that grammatical aspect is acquired by children in early life, while mood is acquired later; thus, once the heritage speakers start school in English, their exposure to Spanish diminishes significantly as does their ability to continue developing their heritage language.

The conclusions that these studies reached about the grammatical competence of heritage speakers as compared to L2 learners point to the need for approaching the teaching of these two groups of learners differently and dealing with these similarities and differences when they are together in mixed classes. Montrul and Perpiñan (2011) suggest using a variety of tasks that meet the needs of these two types of learners and taking advantage of the complementary strengths of each group, such as tasks that target vocabulary where the heritage speakers have an advantage and written tasks that take advantage of the expertise of the L2 learners and provide learning opportunities for the heritage speakers.

## **2.2. Heritage speakers' and L2 learners' motivations**

According to Gardner (1985), motivation is defined as “the combination of effort plus desire to learn to achieve the goal of learning the language, plus favorable attitudes toward the language” (p.10). Research on the role of attitudes and the sociolinguistic status of Spanish heritage learning has mainly focused on the complex reality of the role of Spanish and Spanish speakers in the

United States (Castillo 2004; Potowski & Carreira 2004; Yanguas, 2010; Zentella 1997).

Beaudrie and Fairclough (2012) point to “the powerful negative stigma attached to the language from the dominant English-speaking community and additionally, the internal linguistic prejudices and negative attitudes that some US speakers of Spanish have toward other members of their heterogeneous language community” (p.167). They argue that “these linguistic prejudices cannot be ignored when addressing the heritage speakers’ attitudes and motivations” (*ibid*). These negative attitudes towards Spanish speakers in the United States, which could affect their perceptions on studying with L2 learners in mixed classes, are not necessarily at play in L2 classes in Canada. In particular, the interest for learning Spanish in Canada has increased among students who not only acknowledge the advantages of learning second languages but also “want to get an insight into the rich and varied cultures of the Spanish-speaking world and communicate with Spanish-speaking people.”

[http://www.education.alberta.ca/media/831236/span\\_456.pdf](http://www.education.alberta.ca/media/831236/span_456.pdf)

Such differences between the American and the Canadian contexts could have an effect on the perceptions of the heritage speakers and L2 students that participated in this study and might reveal more positive attitudes towards working collaboratively in mixed classes.

Further studies that focused on heritage speakers in the United States investigated heritage speakers’ attitudes, motivations, and goals in taking a college heritage language course (Alarcón, 2010; Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005; Beaudrie et al., 2009; Mikulski 2006). Their results showed that overall, heritage

speakers had positive attitudes toward their language and culture and were motivated to study Spanish, but they lacked confidence in their Spanish abilities because of the low prestige of the Spanish dialect to which they had been exposed at home. Therefore, their main goals for enrolling in a Spanish class were to improve their fluency and to learn a standard Spanish dialect (Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005). Other findings revealed that students enrolled in the classes for both personal and academic reasons, and their goals included: improving their orthographic accentuation, grammar, and writing skills (Mikulski, 2006), increasing job opportunities (Alarcón, 2010; Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005; Carreira & Kagan, 2011), improving communication with family and friends, and learning about their culture and linguistic roots (Carreira & Kagan, 2011). In the latter case, competence in Spanish was viewed as central to the heritage speakers' identity (see also Noels, 2005 for similar results with German speakers).

When comparing heritage speaker and L2 learners, studies on attitude and motivation seem to support the idea that heritage speakers' cultural connection and cultural experiences with the language make them different from L2 learners.

For example, Reynolds, Howard and Deák (2009) investigated the motivations towards language study of 401 first-year language learners of 19 different foreign languages at two large American universities. The overall findings indicated that heritage speakers had positive attitudes towards learning their heritage languages coupled with a high integrative motivation, whereas instrumental motivation was highest among the L2 learners. L2 learners'



motivations can include the desire to: (a) meet a requirement, (b) learn a language in order to communicate with people speaking that language, (c) learn about other cultures and travel, and (d) obtain a better job and improve their career prospects. As for the heritage speakers, their motivational factors are primarily: (a) developing identity, (b) maintaining their heritage language, (c) improving their heritage language writing skills and developing literacy, (d) communicating with members of their community, and (e) increasing job prospects (Csizér and Dörnyei, 2005; Lamb, 2004). These distinct motivational factors could have a direct effect on the perceptions and attitudes that learners have towards learning the target language in a mixed class. For example, positive attitudes towards Spanish and common goals for learning could result in more willingness from both heritage speakers and L2 learners to work together and collaborate. In turn, heritage speakers might feel that their specific goals in terms of identity and cultural connection are not met in a mixed class.

### **2.3. Perceptions of the interactions of Spanish heritage speakers and L2 learners in mixed classes**

Given that heritage speakers and L2 learners are enrolled together in Spanish language programs, especially in Spanish content classes (e.g., literature, linguistics, translation), it is also relevant to examine the interactions of these two groups and how they work and collaborate with peers who do not share their same language background and linguistic proficiency.

Of particular interest to this present study are the findings about heritage speakers' and L2 learners' interactions and collaborative work (Blake & Zyzik,

2003; Bowles, 2011a; Edstrom, 2007; Potowski, 2002; Quintanar-Sarellana, Huebner & Jensen, 1993). These studies considered the implications of mixing students of diverse linguistic backgrounds and identified both advantages and disadvantages of collaboration in mixed classes.

Blake and Zyzik (2003) investigated the potential linguistic benefits by examining the interactions between 11 heritage speakers and 11 L2 learners enrolled in an intermediate level Spanish course in an American university. Heritage speakers were paired with L2 learners to solve a two-way jigsaw task on the Web through computer-mediated communication. The study examined points of negotiation and interactional modifications between learner/learner pairs. The results showed that both groups initiated and resolved miscommunications, although the heritage speakers assisted their L2 partners more often. The L2 learners, in turn, provided the heritage speakers with opportunities to expand their command of multiple registers. The heritage speakers also reported benefitting from their exchanges with L2 learners for affective reasons: (a) it gave them an opportunity to use their cultural and linguistic knowledge to help others and (b) it boosted their confidence in their heritage language ability. Blake and Zyzik (2003) argued that “many heritage speakers have often negative appraisals of their own Spanish abilities. When interacting with L2 learners of Spanish, the heritage speakers feel that they are the linguistic experts, which is a confident-boosting experience.” (p.540)

In a similar study, Bowles (2011a) examined the interactions between 18 students –heritage speakers and L2 learners– enrolled together in Spanish language courses at a large Midwestern US university. The focus of this study

was to assess the potential linguistic benefits of exchanges between these two groups of learners during task-based interactions on a series of both oral and written tasks. The results of this study reported positive experiences for both groups of students. For example, both heritage speakers and L2 learners seemed to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses and enjoyed being paired with a learner from a different linguistic background. They also worked collaboratively and encouraged each other to notice linguistic gaps and negotiate meaning in their interactions. These findings suggest that there may be mutually beneficial ways in which heritage speakers and L2 learners could be grouped together for pedagogical purposes; on written tasks in particular, L2 learners could assist heritage speakers with issues of spelling and accent placement and, conversely, heritage speakers could help to increase L2 learners' lexical knowledge. Although neither Blake and Zyzik nor Bowles examined heritage speakers and L2 learners' attitudes to working together and interacting in mixed classes, both studies provided evidence that mixed heritage speakers- L2 learner interactions were favorable.

A second group of studies investigated heritage speakers' and L2 learners' special instructional needs and interests and indicated that mixing linguistically diverse students has some disadvantages. This work has advocated for separate classes and programs for the heritage speakers. For example, Potowski (2002) examined the course selection decisions and course experiences of 25 heritage Spanish students enrolled in advanced Spanish content courses at the University of Illinois, Urbana. This study used a questionnaire and focus-group interviews with both heritage speakers and L2 learners. The study

reported that heritage speakers felt a distinct advantage over their L2 peers in oral fluency, pronunciation, and comprehension and were uncomfortable with their instructors' higher expectations. Other disadvantages were also highlighted by some of the participating L2 learners. For instance, the presence of heritage speakers was intimidating to some L2 learners, as they felt embarrassed or afraid to speak or use their Spanish in the class. In spite of their mostly negative experiences, heritage speakers in this study also expressed that they benefited from working collaboratively with L2 learners; some of the students in this study seemed to acknowledge their differences and to use them to their benefit. Specifically, the heritage speakers frequently asked their L2 partners for assistance with spelling and accent placement, and the L2 learners often relied on their heritage language partners for their vocabulary knowledge. The author suggested that special attention should be given to how best to address the needs of students from different linguistic backgrounds.

Subsequent studies by Beaudrie (2006, 2009b, 2011), Beaudrie & Ducar (2005), Ducar (2008), Yanguas (2010), and Valdés (2005), among others, have also examined the students' perspectives on mixed classes by focusing on the limitations of these classes for heritage speakers and directly addressing the fact that instruction must meet the needs of this group of students. These studies have identified the strengths and weaknesses of the current Spanish programs that accommodate the increasing number of Spanish heritage speakers in the United States. This line of research advocates for differentiated instruction that focuses on attending to the distinct needs of heritage speakers by: (a) promoting language maintenance, (b) developing literacy, (c) developing both non-standard

and standard registers, (d) increasing a sense of identity, and (e) fostering cross-cultural awareness. The main objective of this work was limited to addressing heritage speakers' instructional needs. Therefore, only the perceptions of this group of learners were collected in these studies.

Because the needs of heritage speakers are different, Quintanar-Sarellana et al. (1993) acknowledge that heritage speakers need a vehicle whereby they can improve the Spanish they already know as well as see the value of their language skills in the school setting. The authors describe a program implemented by the Campbell Union High School District in collaboration with San Jose State University in which heritage speakers were trained and employed as peer tutors in Spanish foreign language classrooms:

By tutoring their native English-speaking peers, heritage speakers are made aware of the cultural value afforded to proficiency in Spanish. They are also recognized for their skills, by teachers and peers alike. At the same time, the tutorial sessions benefit the L2 students in that they have opportunities to practice Spanish in communicative contexts with native speakers of the language, thereby developing proficiency in it. And additionally, there are also benefits for the heritage speakers because by preparing to tutor, they must also review and thoroughly understand the grammatical points, punctuation and accent rules, etc. This becomes a vehicle for refining their own literacy skills. (pp.211-14)

The researchers not only identified major successes and contributions of this program, but also benefits for both heritage speakers and L2 learners, such as:

(a) positive reactions and raised self-esteem among heritage speaker students as

a result of peer teaching, (b) opportunities for exchanges of varied cultural experiences using the students as resources, (c) increased awareness of dialect variation in the Spanish language, (d) interest for reading and writing among the heritage speakers, and (e) development of friendship among heritage speakers and L2 learners.

Lastly, of particular interest to this thesis, is a study conducted by Edstrom (2007). This study investigated Spanish L2 students', heritage speakers' and native-speakers' perspectives on studying in linguistically mixed classes and elicited their suggestions for successfully managing the wide variety of needs represented in their classes. The participants in this study were 16 university students (four of whom identified themselves as non- native, two as heritage, and ten as native speakers) enrolled in upper-division, university-level Spanish courses. Data for this study were collected from language background questionnaires and interviews. Edstrom's findings also suggest that there are advantages to studying in a linguistically mixed academic environment. For example, the L2 learners felt that studying with heritage speakers had a positive influence on their listening comprehension skills, and they also identified the following specific advantages: learning about cultural differences, exposure to fluent native speech, access to native models of pronunciation, opportunities to practice Spanish with native speakers, and access to conversational Spanish as opposed to only academic language. The native and heritage speaker participants mentioned specific benefits as well. For example, they expressed appreciation for the non-native speaker's ability to explain grammatical rules, identify verb tenses, and use accent marks.

Edstrom's study also revealed some negative perceptions on working in mixed classes. For example, the L2 learners reported feeling intimidated when speaking in front of native and heritage classmates and that their presence affected their ability to participate in class as well as their professors' expectations. Conversely, some of the native and heritage speakers expressed that the presence of L2 learners sometimes slowed the pace of the class. Overall, however, the data in Edstrom's study seems to reveal a positive perception of mixing learners of diverse backgrounds.

In brief, while most recent research in the United States has emphasized the need for specialized courses that attend to the distinct needs of heritage speakers, other studies which examined the perceptions of heritage speakers and L2 learners in mixed classes have identified benefits of collaboration between the two groups. Both learner groups seemed to identify their strengths and weaknesses and enjoyed helping each other. For example, L2 learners claimed that working with heritage speakers gave them the opportunity to be exposed to fluent native speech and models of pronunciation, practice the target language, improve their listening comprehension skills, rely on their heritage language partners for their vocabulary knowledge, and learn about cultural differences. Even though there seemed to be more advantages for L2 learners, heritage speakers also identified benefits from their exchanges with the L2 learners. They observed that they frequently asked their L2 partners for assistance with spelling, grammatical rules, and accent placement. At the same time, helping their L2 learner peers gave the heritage speakers the opportunity to use their

cultural and linguistic knowledge to help others, which boosted their confidence in their heritage language ability.

In contrast, some disadvantages of working in mixed classes were also found. For example, some heritage speakers claimed that the L2 learners would sometimes slow the pace of the class. Some L2 learners, in turn, felt that the presence of heritage speakers was intimidating as well as affected their participation in class and their instructors' expectations.

#### **2.4. Research questions**

The studies discussed in the previous sections have focused mainly on the situation and the opinions of the heritage speaker population in the context of the United States. It is possible that these opinions are influenced by negative perceptions of multilingualism and multiculturalism that are dominant in many parts of the United States (Beaudrie & Fairclough, 2012). In Canada, there are more favorable attitudes towards multilingualism and multiculturalism (Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1985). The socio-political status of people of Hispanic heritage is also different, as they constitute a far smaller proportion of the general population than in the United States. Given these differences, it is necessary to examine independently the perceptions of heritage speakers and L2 learners in mixed classes in Canada, in order to investigate whether the situation is similar to that in the United States. This study is an attempt to understand the situation of Spanish heritage speakers and L2 learners in mixed upper-level content classes in the context of a Canadian university. The study also examines



the opinions of instructors about teaching and promoting collaborative learning in mixed classes, a topic that has not been addressed in previous studies.

This study is a partial replication of Edstrom (2007) in that it uses the same instruments for data collection: personal interviews with the student participants and a written questionnaire adapted from Edstrom's study. In addition, this study includes a student language background questionnaire and personal interviews with course instructors that were not part of Edstrom's study.

Four research questions are raised below for investigation:

1. What are the learners' perceptions in regard to being together in a mixed class of heritage speakers and L2 learners of Spanish?
2. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages to being a student in a class with heritage speakers and L2 learners?
3. What are the instructors' perceptions on the dynamics of a heritage speaker-L2 learner mixed class?
4. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages to teaching a class with heritage speakers and L2 learners?

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter contains a discussion of the methodological approach and research design used to examine the research questions set out in Chapter 2. The first section of this chapter presents a description of the participant population followed by an overview of the research design and an outline of the two instruments employed: questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews. The final section includes an illustration of the process of data collection and analysis.

### **3.1 Participants**

A total of 55 students enrolled in four upper-level Spanish content courses at a large Canadian university participated in this study. Data were collected from four different classes since examining only one mixed class may be limiting in that the dynamics of the class may be specific to that particular group.

These four classes were chosen because at this university, heritage speakers and L2 learners are not combined until the upper-level classes. The four principal instructors of the courses were also invited to participate in the interviews for this research study.

At the time the study was conducted, five heritage speakers and 22 L2 learners were enrolled in one of the classes, eight heritage speakers and 15 L2 learners in another class, seven heritage speakers and 19 L2 learners in the third class and five heritage speakers and 13 L2 learners in the remaining class. Some of the students that participated in the study were attending more than one of the

classes where the data for this study were gathered, so they were asked to participate in just one of the classes they attended.

In order to distinguish between heritage speakers and L2 learners, the researcher administered a written language background questionnaire to all students (see Appendix A). The questionnaire organized the students according to the following categories: (a) personal background, (b) language use at home and work and with friends, (c) Spanish language exposure or instruction, (d) exposure or study abroad in a Spanish-speaking country, and (e) self-rated proficiency in Spanish.

Eleven participants in this study self-identified themselves as heritage speakers, while the remaining 44 considered themselves L2 learners. In order to help the students classify themselves, the researcher explained to them the definitions of heritage speakers and L2 learners. The students who indicated that they grew up in monolingual Spanish or bilingual Spanish-English households (in which one or both parents speak Spanish) self-classified as heritage speakers. The participants that self-categorized as L2 learners were the students that reported receiving formal Spanish instruction in a school or university setting, and additionally, that English or other languages, with the exception of Spanish, was their native language or the language spoken at home and other settings. The researcher subsequently checked that the students classified themselves correctly after data collection was complete and did not notice any anomalies.

### **3.1.1 Spanish heritage speakers**

The group of Spanish heritage speakers who participated in this study consisted of 11 students (4 males, 7 females). Six of these students were born in Canada, while the rest came from other Latin American countries, namely Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Puerto Rico. All the heritage speakers have been exposed to Spanish in the home since birth. Ten students speak both Spanish and English at home, while one student uses only Spanish. Seven speak Spanish with friends and six use Spanish at work. In terms of Spanish language instruction and study abroad experiences, only three participants reported being schooled in Spanish, receiving between one to four years of formal instruction in their countries of origin. The remaining eight participants started to learn the language formally at university and have been taking courses for one to four years.

### **3.1.2 L2 learners**

The L2 speaker group consisted of 44 students (12 males, 32 females). Thirty-seven students were born in Canada, two students in Romania, and the remaining five students were born in the USA, Hong Kong, Ukraine, Poland, and Brazil, respectively. Thirty-four students declared that English was their native language. Two students identified French as their native language, two students indicated both Romanian and English as their native languages, two other students indicated Portuguese and English, and the remaining four students indicated Cantonese and English, Russian and English and Ukrainian, Polish and English, and Arabic and English, respectively.

In regard to the L2 learners' exposure, instruction and study abroad opportunities in Spanish, all the participants first acquired English or their other native languages at home and started to learn Spanish in a formal classroom environment here in Canada. One student reported that she studied Spanish beginning in elementary school. Three other students reported that they learned Spanish starting in junior high school. Seventeen participants indicated that they took Spanish in high school, while 20 students reported that they only began to study Spanish at university. One student indicated that he learned Spanish when he was a missionary in the USA and then continued to study the language at university for the last three years. Another participant reported that he also learned Spanish in the USA for two years and then took Spanish classes at the university for two more years. Twenty participants never spent time abroad in a Spanish-speaking country. Two students reported going on vacation for two to three weeks. Fourteen other students reported that they spent two to ten months studying Spanish in different Spanish-speaking countries. The remaining eight participants reported that they had lived in a Spanish-speaking country. Seven participants lived abroad for one to three years, and one participant, for seven years.

### **3.1.3 Self-rated Spanish proficiency**

Both the heritage speakers and the L2 learners self-rated their proficiency on a scale from 1 to 7, where 7= native-like abilities, 4= moderate, and 1= minimal. Table 1 shows the mean (M), median and standard deviation (SD) for each group. The mean rating for the heritage speaker group was 5.8, the median

was 6.1, and the standard deviation was 0.9. The mean rating for the L2 learner group was 5.1, the median was 5.3, and the standard deviation was 0.9. The results show that the heritage speakers self-rated their Spanish proficiency higher than the L2 learners.

**Table 1**  
*Comparisons of Self-Rated Proficiency by Group*

	<b>M</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Heritage speakers</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>0.9</b>
<b>L2 learners</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>0.9</b>

### **3.1.4 Course instructors**

All the instructors that participated in this study had ample experience teaching Spanish content mixed classes in the university where this study was conducted. All the instructors were female; two of them were non-native speakers, and the other two were native speakers from Mexico. One of the instructors had been teaching at the university for 26 years, one for 12 years, one for nine years, and one for six years.

## **3.2. Instruments**

Two instruments were employed in the data collection: a written questionnaire and interviews with students and instructors.

### **3.2.1 Questionnaire**

First, a written questionnaire, which was divided into two parts, was administered. The first part, Part A, consisted of a language background questionnaire that was given in English in class (see Appendix A). It asked for

the following biographical information: (a) personal background; (b) language use at home, at work, at university, and with friends; (c) Spanish language exposure or instruction; (d) exposure or study abroad in a Spanish-speaking country, and (e) self-rated proficiency in Spanish. Data from this questionnaire were used by the participants to categorize themselves as either heritage speakers or L2 learners.

Part B of the questionnaire, adapted from Edstrom (2007), was then administered on the same day. This second part of the questionnaire consisted of 10 statements to which the participants had to indicate their agreement or disagreement using a Likert-type scale. These statements were similar to those in Edstrom's study; however, some statements were rephrased, and two were left out because the researcher considered them repetitive. This part of the questionnaire was prepared in two separate versions: one for the L2 learners and another for the heritage speakers (see Appendices B and C). The statements were designed to frame the same general themes from the perspective of each participant group. The objective of this part of the questionnaire was to evaluate students' perceptions of working together in a mixed class by considering the following issues: (a) their preferences for working together with linguistically diverse classmates, (b) issues of intimidation and feeling uncomfortable in the class, (c) contributions of each group to the diverse class, (d) language skills and language preferences, (e) collaboration and respect among peers, (f) instructors level of expectations, and (g) benefits from learning from other cultures. For each statement, participants had to indicate their level of agreement or

disagreement: Strongly disagree, Disagree, No opinion, Agree and Strongly agree.

### **3.2.2 Participant interviews**

Data from the questionnaire were supplemented by individual semi-structured interviews to achieve reliability. Personal interviews with the participant volunteers gave them the opportunity to provide further insights and feedback regarding their perspectives on working in linguistically mixed classes. The questions in the interview expanded on the most important issues in the written questionnaire: perceptions on mixing heritage speakers and L2 learners, collaboration between heritage speakers and L2 learners, instructors' level of expectation, intimidation, and language use (see Appendix D).

Interview data for this study were collected from two heritage speakers and six L2 learners. Each interview consisted of semi-structured questions and took 20-30 minutes to complete, depending on the amount of detail each participant was ready to provide. Warm-up questions were asked before each interview to ensure that interviewees felt comfortable and willing to share their views and experiences (see Appendix D). The interview protocol also included an open-ended question to ensure that all participants had the opportunity to make any comment that they considered relevant. The researcher gave the participants the option to conduct the interviews in either English or Spanish. Only one participant, Cristina, a heritage speaker, chose to use Spanish.



### **3.2.3 Instructor interviews**

The instructors of the four courses that participated in the study were also invited to participate in a semi-structured interview with the researcher. The questions in the interviews were designed to allow instructors to discuss their views about teaching a mixed heritage speaker- L2 learner class and about how they address the needs of the two groups. (see Appendix E) In addition, each instructor was asked to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages and the challenges that teaching a mixed class presents.

### **3.3 Procedure**

Data for this study were gathered in a three-step process (see Table 2). First, both part A and part B of the questionnaire were given in each class on the first day of the study. Part A was completed by all students. The researcher then gave explanations on the difference between heritage speakers and L2 learners and additionally indicated that definitions were also provided in the questionnaires. Students then self-identified as heritage speakers or L2 learners, and part B was administered on the same day. Heritage speakers and L2 learners completed the appropriate version of this part of the questionnaire.

Following this meeting with each group of students, the researcher analyzed the data obtained from the questionnaires and contacted the participants who volunteered to participate in the interviews by e-mail. Interviews were arranged at a mutually convenient time and were held at the researcher's office on university grounds. While the student interviews were being arranged, the researcher conducted the interviews with the instructors of the courses.

**Table 2**  
*Stages of Data Collection*

<b>Stage 1</b>	<b>Stage 2</b>	<b>Stage 3</b>
<b>Week 1-2</b>	<b>Week 3-4</b>	<b>Week 5-8</b>
Part A and B questionnaires administered, completed and analyzed	Instructors interviewed	Volunteer student participants interviewed

### **3.4 Data analysis**

A quantitative analysis was carried out on the responses for Part B of the questionnaire. The researcher assigned a successive value ranging from 1 to 5 to each response option (1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=No opinion, 4=Agree and 5=Strongly agree). The results were summarized using the mean and the standard deviation. The frequency of responses was also calculated. The researcher tabulated the responses to each question and then summarized the responses of the heritage speaker and the L2 participants, respectively, before comparing the data from the two groups.

Interview data were analyzed qualitatively in order to explore further perceptions and attitudes on working in a linguistically diverse class. The audio-tape recordings of the student and instructor participants were summarized by writing out verbatim those parts that were of particular interest. These excerpts were then grouped together by topic.

## Chapter 4: Results

The analysis of the data gathered during classroom surveys and face-to-face interviews is presented in this chapter. Quantitative results from the surveys of the heritage speaker and the L2 learner groups are examined, followed by a presentation of the findings from the interviews with student and instructor participants.

### 4.1 Questionnaire results

The results are summarized using the mean and the standard deviation and are presented in Tables 3 and 5. The frequencies of responses were also calculated and are summarized in Tables 4 and 6.

#### 4.1.1 Results from L2 learners

The means and standard deviations for the questionnaire data from the L2 learner group are presented in Table 3, while Table 4 shows the frequencies of responses for each statement. The researcher tabulated the value ranging from 1 to 5 assigned to each response option (1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=No opinion, 4=Agree and 5=Strongly agree).

**Table 3**

*Questionnaire Results (Means and Standard Deviations): L2 learner Questionnaire (n = 44)*

Questions	Mean	SD
1. Having Spanish heritage speakers in my classes is good for my Spanish listening and speaking skills.	4.25	0.75
2. I find the heritage speakers in my class intimidating; I feel uncomfortable speaking in front of them.	3.05	1.45
3. I am as happy to work in a group with heritage speakers as I am to work with L2 speakers.	3.98	1.04

4. I especially like working with heritage speakers because I learn from their insights and contributions.	3.84	0.86
5. When I work in groups with a Spanish heritage speakers, I feel the pressure to use Spanish.	3.18	1.15
6. Having Spanish heritage speaking classmates makes me feel good because I'm reminded that even their language skills need polishing.	3.27	0.99
7. The fact that there are heritage speakers in class seems to affect my instructors' expectations for how much material we cover.	2.89	1.08
8. The presence of Spanish heritage speakers influences my ability to participate in class.	3.45	1.09
9. I feel that my heritage speakers peers respect my contributions to class	3.84	0.91
10. I learn a lot about Spanish-speaking cultures from my heritage-speaking classmates.	3.48	1.0

**Table 4**

*Frequency of Responses for the L2 learner Questionnaire (n=44)*

Questionnaire statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>1. Having Spanish heritage speakers in my classes is good for my Spanish listening and speaking skills.</b>	0	1 2%	5 12%	20 45%	18 41%
<b>2. I find the Spanish heritage speakers in my classes intimidating; I feel uncomfortable speaking in front of them.</b>	7 16%	13 30%	2 4%	14 32%	8 18%
<b>3. I am as happy to work in a group with a Spanish heritage speaker as I am to work with another second language Spanish speaker</b>	0	5 11%	7 16%	15 34%	17 39%
<b>4. I especially like working with heritage speakers because I learn from their insights and contributions.</b>	0	4 9%	10 23%	20 45%	10 23%
<b>5. When I work in groups with a Spanish heritage speaker, I feel the pressure to use Spanish.</b>	1 2%	15 34%	10 23%	11 25%	7 16%

<b>6. Having Spanish heritage speaking classmates makes me feel good because I'm reminded that even their language skills need polishing.</b>	1 2%	10 23%	13 30%	16 36%	4 9%
<b>7. The fact that there are many heritage speakers of Spanish in class seems to influence my instructors' expectations for how much material we cover and how thoroughly we cover it.</b>	2 4%	19 43%	8 18%	12 28%	3 7%
<b>8. The presence of Spanish heritage speakers influences my ability to participate in class</b>	2 4%	7 16%	11 25%	17 39%	7 16%
<b>9. I feel that my heritage speaker peers respect my contributions to class.</b>	0	3 7%	11 25%	18 41%	12 27%
<b>10. I learn a lot about Spanish-speaking cultures from my heritage-speaking classmates</b>	1 2%	8 18%	9 22%	19 44%	6 14%

As indicated in Tables 3 and 4, overall, 86% of the L2 learners agree that having Spanish heritage speakers in their classes is good for their Spanish listening and speaking skills (Q #1). 73% of the L2 learner group also claimed that they are as happy to work in a group with heritage speakers as they are to work with other L2 speakers (Q #3). 68% like working with heritage speakers because they learn from their insights and contributions (Q #4). In addition, 68% of the L2 learners reported that they feel that their heritage speaker peers respect their contributions to class (Q #9).

Table 4 presents more differing results in regard to the instructors' expectations: 35% of this participant group expressed that the presence of heritage speakers does seem to affect their professors' expectations for how much material is covered in class, while 47% disagreed on this topic (Q #7).

Furthermore, 55% of L2 learners claimed that the presence of Spanish heritage speakers influences their ability to participate in class (Q #8). The L2 learner group's opinions were also less uniform when deciding whether having Spanish heritage speaking classmates makes them feel good because they are reminded that even their language skills need polishing: only 45% agreed on this issue (Q #6). In addition, the L2 learner group's perceptions were mixed in regard to the fact that they learn a lot about Spanish-speaking cultures from their heritage-speaking classmates (#10): 58% of the L2 learner participants agreed on this topic, while 20% expressed their disagreement, and 20% had no opinion.

The data also revealed that the L2 learners had more differing perceptions in regard to working in groups with Spanish heritage speakers: 50% of the L2 learners reported that they feel intimidated and uncomfortable speaking in front of the heritage speakers, while 46% disagreed on this topic (Q #2). Furthermore, 41% affirmed that they feel the pressure to use Spanish when they work with Spanish heritage speakers (Q #5).

#### 4.1.2 Results from heritage speakers

The means and standard deviations for the questionnaire data from the heritage speaker group is presented in Table 5. Table 6 reveals the frequencies of responses for this participant group.

**Table 5**  
*Questionnaire Results (Means and standard deviations): Spanish Heritage Speaker Questionnaire (n = 11)*

Questions	Mean	SD
1. I think that mixing L2 speakers with heritage speakers in upper-level classes is a good thing.	4.18	0.75

2. The L2 speakers seem intimidated by the fact that there are many heritage speakers in upper- level courses.	3.55	1.37
3. I am as happy to work in a group with heritage speakers as I am to work with L2 speakers.	4.18	0.98
4. I especially like working with L2 speakers because I learn from their insights and contributions.	4.00	1.18
5. When I work in groups with L2 speakers, I feel the pressure to use English.	2.26	1.43
6. The mix of students in upper-level courses allows us to learn a lot about our classmates' cultures.	3.18	1.78
7. The fact that there are some L2 speakers of Spanish in class seems to affect my instructors' expectations for how much material we cover and how thoroughly we cover it.	2.18	1.47
8. The heritage speakers in upper-level courses try to help the L2 learners.	3.36	1.12
9. My L2 classmates respect me and appreciate my contributions to class.	4.27	0.90
10. I feel impatient sometimes when L2 speakers try to express their ideas in Spanish in some of my classes.	2.64	1.63

**Table 6**

*Frequency of Responses for the Spanish Heritage Speaker Questionnaire (n=11)*

<b>Questionnaire statement</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>No opinion</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
<b>1. I think that mixing L2 speakers with heritage speakers in upper-level classes is a good thing</b>	0	0	2 18%	5 46%	4 36%
<b>2. The L2 speakers seem intimidated by the fact that there are many heritage speakers in upper- level courses.</b>	0	5 46%	1 9%	2 18%	3 27%
<b>3. I am as happy to work in a group with heritage speakers as I am to work with L2 speakers.</b>	0	1 9%	1 9%	4 36%	5 46%
<b>4. I especially like working with L2 speakers because I learn from their insights and contributions.</b>	1 9%	0	1 9%	5 46%	4 36%
<b>5. When I work in groups with L2 speakers, I feel the pressure to use English.</b>	4 37%	3 27%	1 9%	2 18%	1 9%
<b>6. The mix of students in upper-level courses allows us to learn a lot about our classmates' cultures.</b>	3 27%	2 18%	0	2 18%	4 37%

<b>7. The fact that there are some L2 speakers of Spanish in class seems to affect my instructors' expectations for how much material we cover and how thoroughly we cover it.</b>	5 46%	3 27%	0	2 18%	1 9%
<b>8. The heritage speakers in upper-level courses try to help the L2 learners.</b>	1 9%	1 9%	3 27%	5 46%	1 9%
<b>9. My L2 classmates respect me and appreciate my contributions to class.</b>	0	0	3 27%	2 18%	6 55%
<b>10. I feel impatient sometimes when L2 speakers try to express their ideas in Spanish in some of my classes.</b>	5 46%	0	1 9%	4 36%	1 9%

The majority of the heritage speaker students, 82%, indicated that mixing L2 speakers with heritage speakers in upper-level classes is a good thing (Q#1) and claimed to be as happy to work in a group with L2 learners as they are to work with other heritage speakers (Q #3). Likewise, the same percentage of students reported that they like working with their L2 learner peers because they learn from their contributions to the class (Q #4). In addition, 73% claimed that they feel respected by the L2 learners in the classroom as well as appreciated for their contributions to class (Q #9).

The heritage speakers indicated differing perspectives on working with L2 learners in a mixed classroom. Their perceptions in regard to the topic of intimidation and impatience were also mixed (Q #2 and Q #10): 45% of the heritage speaker participants claimed that they feel impatient when the L2 learners try to express their ideas in Spanish and thought that L2 learners feel intimidated by the presence of heritage speakers. In contrast, the remaining 46% disagreed on these issues, and 9% had no opinion. 55% of the participants in



this group claimed that mixing students allows them to learn from other cultures, whereas the remaining 45% disagreed (Q #6).

Additionally, 55 % of the heritage speaker students are willing or try to help the L2 learners (Q #8).

In terms of language choice, 64% of the heritage speakers reported that they do not feel the pressure to use English when working with L2 learners (Q #5). In addition, 73% of the heritage speaker group expressed that linguistically mixed classes does seem to affect the instructors' expectations (Q #7) and indicated that they could discuss things more in depth if all students in the class were heritage speakers.

#### **4.1.3 Comparison of L2 learner and heritage speaker questionnaire results**

Further statistical tests were conducted in order to compare and determine if the responses of the two participant groups were statistically different. Only the questions that were directly comparable between the heritage speaker and the L2 learner questionnaire (Q # 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 9) were chosen for analysis. Table 7 presents the results of a Chi-square test of contingency. The Strongly agree and Agree responses were combined together, as both indicate agreement, albeit to different degrees. Likewise, the Strongly disagree and Disagree responses were also collapsed into a single category.

**Table 7***Chi-square test for the frequency of responses among L2 learners and heritage speakers*

Topics emerging from the questionnaires	Frequency of Strongly Agree-Agree responses		Frequency of Strongly Disagree-Disagree responses		Chi-Square results L2 learners/ Heritage speakers (df= 1)	
	L2 learners n=44	Heritage speakers n=11	L2 learners n=44	Heritage speakers n=11	Chi-Square	p
<b>Q #1</b> Having heritage speakers/L2 learners in the same class is a good thing	38	9	1	0	0.65	0.42
<b>Q #2</b> L2 learners feel intimidated to work with heritage speakers	22	5	20	5	0.05	0.82
<b>Q #3</b> Heritage speakers /L2 learners feel happy to work in a mixed class	32	9	5	1	0.07	0.79
<b>Q #4</b> Heritage speakers /L2 learners learn from their insights and contributions in a mixed class	30	9	4	1	0.17	0.68
<b>Q #5</b> Heritage speakers use of English/ L2 learners' pressure to use Spanish in the mixed class	18	3	16	7	0.84	0.35
<b>Q #7</b> Heritage speaker/ L2 mixed classes affect the instructor's expectations	15	3	21	8	0.26	0.61

<b>Q #9</b> <b>Heritage speakers /L2 peer respect and contributions in the mixed class</b>	30	8	3	0	0.02	0.88
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The results of the Chi-square test of contingency revealed no statistical significant differences between the L2 learner and the heritage speaker groups. Both groups seem to share similar opinions about being in a linguistically mixed class. Subsequently, an independent sample T-test was run for each question individually. The T-test aimed at assessing whether the strength of agreement or disagreement of the two groups was statistically different from each other (see Table 8).

**Table 8**  
*Independent Samples T-test for L2 learners and heritage speakers*

Topics emerging from the questionnaires	Mean		SD		T-test results L2 learners/ Heritage speakers (df= 53)	
	L2 learners n=44	Heritage speakers n=11	L2 learners n=44	Heritage speakers n=11	t	p
<b>Q #1</b> <b>Having heritage speakers/L2 learners in the same class is a good thing</b>	4.25	4.18	0.75	0.75	0.26	>.05
<b>Q #2</b> <b>L2 learners feel intimidated to work with heritage speakers</b>	3.05	3.55	1.45	1.37	-0.47	>.05

<b>Q #3</b> Heritage speakers /L2 learners feel happy to work in a mixed class	3.98	4.18	1.04	0.98	-0.5871	>.05
<b>Q #4</b> Heritage speakers /L2 learners learn from their insights and contributions in a mixed class	3.84	4.00	0.86	1.18	-0.5072	>.05
<b>Q #5</b> Heritage speakers use of English/ L2 learners' pressure to use Spanish in the mixed class	3.18	2.36	1.15	1.43	2.0125	<.05
<b>Q #7</b> Heritage speaker/ L2 mixed classes affect the instructor's expectations	2.89	2.18	1.08	1.47	1.7923	>.05
<b>Q #9</b> Heritage speakers /L2 peer respect and contributions in the mixed class	3.84	4.27	0.91	0.90	-1.4048	>.05

These results show that there were no significant differences on questions # 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 and 9. In general, the participants' responses supported the assumption that mixing students in upper-level courses is positive in terms of working together, feeling respected, and learning from both groups' contributions to the class. No significant differences were found, either, when considering the topic of intimidation or the instructors' expectations for the students in diverse classes. As is evident in Table 8, both the heritage speaker

and the L2 learner groups feel happy to work together and collaborate in their mixed classes.

On the other hand, there was a significant difference on question # 5. The heritage speakers and the L2 learners expressed some differing perceptions in regard to language use. Table 8 reveals that the L2 learners feel more pressure to accommodate linguistically to their heritage speaker partners. The heritage speakers do not feel the need to use English when working with the L2 learners as much as the L2 learners feel the pressure to use Spanish in conversations with heritage speakers.

#### **4.2 Interview results**

Personal interviews with the participant volunteers expanded upon the questions and issues in the written questionnaire. In addition, participants had the opportunity to provide further insights and feedback regarding their perspectives on working in linguistically mixed classes. The following analysis is based on the responses of the heritage speakers and the L2 learners that volunteered to participate in the interviews. The qualitative results are presented in five sections: (a) perceptions on mixing heritage speakers and L2 learners in the same class, (b) collaboration between heritage speakers and L2 learners, (c) instructors' level of expectation, (d) intimidation, and (e) language use.

The perceptions of the heritage speakers and the L2 learners are analyzed and presented separately within each section. Table 9 displays background details about the heritage speakers and the L2 learners who participated in the interviews.

The mean of each participant's self-rated Spanish proficiency are also presented on this table, where 7= native-like abilities and 1= minimal.

**Table 9**  
*Heritage Speaker and L2 learner Interview Participants*

Participants (Pseudonyms)	HS/L2 learner	Home country	Age of Spanish acquisition	Language used at home	Language used with friends	Language used at work	Formal Spanish instruction	Travel/ Study abroad	Self-rated Spanish proficiency (1-7)
Cristina	HS	Canada	birth	Spanish & English	Spanish & English	Spanish & English	1 year (in El Salvador) + 2 years (university courses)	1 Elementary School year in El Salvador/ Visited El Salvador and other Latin American countries on several occasions	6.85
Pedro	HS	Canada	birth	Spanish & English	English	English	2.5 years (university courses)	None	6.28
Victoria	L2 learner	Canada	14	English	English	English	7 years (High School + university courses)	5 months in Spain studying Spanish	5.28
Carmen	L2 learner	Canada	15	English	English	English	8 years (High School + university courses)	1 year in Mexico studying Spanish	3.71
Elena	L2 learner	Canada	15	English	English	English	6 years (High School + university courses)	5 months in Spain studying Spanish	4.92
Susana	L2 learner	Canada	20	English	English	English	5 years (university courses)	None	4
Carlos	L2 learner	Canada	55	English	English	English	6 years (university courses)	12 weeks in Mexico and Guatemala	3.71
Alicia	L2 learner	Romania	15	Romanian & English	English	English	6 years (High School + university courses)	4 months in Spain	5.71

## **4.2.1 Perceptions of mixing heritage speakers and L2 learners**

### **4.2.1.1 Heritage speakers**

Both heritage speakers, Cristina and Pedro, indicated that they enjoyed working with L2 learners and having the opportunity to learn from each other in a linguistically mixed environment. Cristina, who is planning to become a Spanish teacher, claimed, “Yo quiero ser una profesora y me gusta ver como la gente aprende una lengua. (I want to be a teacher and I like to see how people learn a new language.)” Later on in the interview, she added, “Es más interesante estar en la clase con ellos porque yo les voy a poder ayudar con palabras y vocabulario y ellos me van a poder ayudar con el contenido. (It is more interesting to be in the class with them because I will be able to help them with words and vocabulary and they will be able to help me with content questions.)” According to Pedro, “learning in a mixed class is a good experience for everyone.” However, he added, “It is more beneficial for the L2 learners because they have the opportunity to hear the language naturally spoken by the heritage speakers.”

### **4.2.1.2 L2 learners**

All the L2 learners that participated in the interviews also expressed positive perceptions about mixing Spanish heritage speakers and L2 learners and identified benefits of working with heritage speakers, such as exposure to naturally spoken language and to different accents and dialects, and opportunities to discuss cultural differences and to practice Spanish with the

heritage speakers. In addition, the L2 learners regarded their heritage speaker classmates as models for pronunciation and everyday spoken language.

Victoria, an L2 learner who spent 5 months on an exchange program in Spain, pointed out that her experience helped her gain confidence: “It is helpful to have heritage speakers in the class. You learn more. You are immersed in a Spanish-speaking environment, just like in Spain.” Elena and Alicia, who also studied Spanish in Spain, made similar comments. Elena affirmed, “It is an advantage to work with people for whom Spanish is the first language and to listen to them talking naturally, which is different from the way we were taught.” Alicia added:

When I listen to the heritage speakers speaking naturally, I can definitely start picking up from some words that they use, and from the way they make sentences. The mixture of students is ideal because you learn from different perspectives and you learn from their cultures.

Similarly, Carlos, an enthusiastic Spanish L2 student who has been learning Spanish because he regularly travels to Mexico, indicated that he preferred to have heritage speakers in the class because they are models of Spanish apart from the instructors: “You benefit even if you are not participating, by hearing, understanding, by having the reinforcement of the spoken language.” Later on in the interview, Carlos acknowledged that, in his opinion, there were more advantages for the L2 learners to be in a mixed class than there were for the heritage speakers.



## 4.2.2 Collaboration between heritage speakers and L2 learners

### 4.2.2.1 Heritage speakers

In regard to collaboration between heritage speakers and L2 learners, both heritage speaker students recognized the L2 learners' contributions to the class.

Pedro, who was taking a Spanish literature class, affirmed that working in groups was productive: "The L2 learners always contribute with ideas and opinions and I learn from their perspectives and points of view." Likewise, Cristina observed:

Se equilibra. Mi nivel de lenguaje y su nivel de gramática están al mismo nivel. Yo siempre trato de ayudarlos. A veces, ellos tienen las ideas correctas y no saben cómo decirlas, no saben las palabras. (There is equilibrium. My language proficiency and their grammar proficiency are at the same level. I always try to help them. Sometimes, they have the right ideas but do not know how to express them, they do not know the words to use.)

Later on in the interview, Cristina added that although she liked to help and felt a lot of respect for the L2 learners' effort to learn Spanish, "Algunas veces ellos *expectan* más de los heritage speakers. Ellos piensan que uno sabe más porque es heritage speaker, pero luego se dan cuenta que no es así. (Sometimes they expect too much from the heritage speakers. They think that one knows more than them because he is a heritage speaker, but then they realize that it is not like that.)" On this issue, Cristina reported sometimes asking an L2 learner classmate for help with using the subjunctive and commented, "Ellos me pueden ayudar a mí con el

contenido y con temas de gramática porque ellos lo estudiaron en otros cursos. (They can help me with content questions and grammar concepts because they have learned them in other classes.)”

#### **4.2.2.2 L2 learners**

Overall, the L2 learner participants, like the heritage speakers, reported working in a cooperative and respectful environment in the mixed classrooms. Carmen, an L2 learner who was pursuing a Spanish major in Education, indicated: The heritage speakers are quite tolerant and patient and particularly very helpful when we have opportunities to work in groups. Group work benefits the L2 learners who are struggling because it is a more informal situation for us to ask for a heritage student’s help.

In addition, three of the six L2 participants (Victoria, Elena, and Carmen) also stated that working in mixed group settings helped them build confidence.

In terms of collaboration, all the L2 learners claimed to learn from working together with their heritage speaker classmates. Susana, an L2 learner who was taking a Spanish minor, observed that she frequently asked them for help with vocabulary, pronunciation, intonation, as well as with understanding concepts or ideas that she missed in the class. The L2 learners also described other occasions in which they had opportunities to help the heritage speakers. For example, Alicia pointed out that when it came to writing, “some heritage speakers ask an L2 learner about some grammar rules because the heritage speakers recognize that they never received Spanish formal instruction like me.”

### **4.2.3 Instructors' level of expectation**

#### **4.2.3.1 Heritage speakers**

Regarding the instructors' level of expectation, both heritage speakers assumed that the instructors in their literature classes organized the content of their courses at an ideal level that everybody would reach. They noted that sometimes in class their instructors made adjustments in the way a discussion was presented; for example, Cristina pointed out, "Los profesores siempre les dicen a los L2 learners si quieren que ellos hablen más despacio. Los profesores ven que ellos están tratando y los ayudan a expresar sus opiniones siempre. (Instructors always ask the L2 learners if they want them to slow down. Our instructors realize that the L2 learners are trying and always help them to express their ideas.)"

Both heritage speaker participants felt that grading was equal and fair for both groups of learners due to the fact that their papers were evaluated on both content and grammar. Pedro observed:

It is easier for us to express our ideas in Spanish. However, we make grammar mistakes. It is the contrary for L2 learners. Their grammar is better than ours. Some of us never learned grammar until we took courses at the university. Besides, they have been writing papers for longer than us.

#### **4.2.3.2 L2 learners**

The responses of the L2 learners corroborated those of the heritage speakers. None of the L2 participants indicated that the instructors had higher expectations for the heritage speakers. They claimed that all students in their

classes were graded fairly. For example, Carlos and Elena commented that in their literature classes, they were mostly graded on concept more than language or speaking abilities.

The L2 learners' opinions were also unanimous when considering how instructors addressed the needs of both groups and how they encouraged the participation of all the students in the classroom. The following quotes are representative of students' comments on this topic:

Our Spanish instructors have strategies to work with both groups.

They try to find a balance for the class to be challenging and stimulating for everybody. (Carmen)

The instructors give equal opportunities for us to participate in class. In fact, they generally give more time to the L2 learners to frame their thoughts before asking the heritage speakers for their participation.

(Susana)

Some L2 learners rely on the heritage speakers to provide answers first, but generally our instructors try to challenge the L2 learners to participate first. (Alicia)

Only one student, Elena, felt that even though the instructors tried to accommodate both groups, they seemed to gear the course content towards the L2 learners: "I think that if we were not there, the heritage speakers would be able to engage in more in-depth discussions."

## 4.2.4 Intimidation

### 4.2.4.1 Heritage speakers

Both heritage speaker participants observed that the L2 learners in their classes sometimes felt intimidated to work with heritage speakers in mixed classes. According to Pedro:

They feel intimidated to talk to us because they think that we only speak Spanish. I think it is also because some heritage speakers in the classroom speak too fast and do not realize that sometimes the L2 learners do not understand and are very quiet. It is generally not intentional, but happens.

Later in the interview, he revealed, “Once, an L2 learner told me that she never participates because she thinks that a heritage speaker already said what she wanted to express and so she gets frustrated.” Similarly, Cristina noted, “Creo que se sienten intimidados porque no siempre me piden ayuda. Creo que no quieren molestar y quizás prefieren ir al profesor porque ellos *trust* el profesor más. (I think that they feel intimidated because they do not always ask for help. I think they do not want to bother us and perhaps they prefer to ask the instructor because they trust the instructor more.)”

In terms of respect, both participants reported feeling respected by the L2 learners and expressed their willingness to help them in class. Pedro noted:

I try to slow down to be understood by everybody and I do not have a problem with L2 learners taking the time to express themselves.

Sometimes, I try to participate in discussions initiated by L2 learners to encourage them and help them build confidence.

#### **4.2.4.2 L2 learners**

When considering the issue of intimidation, the opinions of the L2 learners were divided. Carmen, Susana and Carlos expressed that they did not feel intimidated by the heritage speakers in the class. In particular, Susana commented, “The heritage speakers are not impatient or disrespectful, so we do not mind participating in discussions or asking for their help when we need it.” According to Carmen, “the heritage speakers can be facilitators when the instructor is not around.” However, later on in the interview, she mentioned that even though she felt confident about her grammar and language abilities, she would be intimidated to correct a heritage speaker who made a language mistake.

Other participants like Victoria, Elena, and Alicia suggested that they were sometimes intimidated to speak to heritage speakers outside the classroom context. Alicia observed, “It can be intimidating to speak in front of them. They have spoken the language much longer than I have. Besides, my words do not come up as fast as for them. I am very self-conscious.” Victoria also commented on this issue, “Outside the class, they speak too fast, while in the classroom most of them speak very clearly and that makes a big difference.”

### **4.2.5 Language Use**

#### **4.2.5.1 Heritage speakers**

The opinions of the two heritage speakers interviewed were uniform when considering the language they used in the classroom. They stated that they felt no pressure to use English when talking to L2 learners. Cristina explained:

Yo trato de *slow down* cuando hablo con ellos. A mí me gusta poder hablar en español con ellos. Si usara mi inglés, sería como un insulto a su aprendizaje. Sería como decirles: “Oh, tú no me vas a poder entender, entonces te lo digo en inglés. (I try to slow down when talking to them. I like to be able to speak Spanish with them. If I used my English, it would be like an insult to their learning. It would be like saying: “Oh, you will not be able to understand me, so I will say it in English.”)

Pedro indicated that even outside class, the L2 learners sometimes initiated conversations in Spanish.

#### **4.2.5.2 L2 learners**

All the participants in this group expressed their preferences to use Spanish in the classroom. In fact, they indicated that they preferred the heritage speakers to address them in Spanish so that they could make the effort to practice the language and their speaking skills.

On the other hand, they pointed out some concerns and issues of intimidation when having to initiate a conversation in Spanish with the heritage speakers. Carmen, Elena, and Susana reported feeling shy and self-conscious when speaking to heritage speakers. They commented that sometimes they used Spanish to start a conversation with a heritage speaker but immediately switched to English. Susana added, “It is different from when you speak Spanish with another L2 learner who is someone that is learning the language just like you.” Carlos also commented on this topic: “I do not feel any pressure to speak Spanish with heritage speakers because they seemed to be very comfortable speaking English.”

#### 4.2.6 Comparison of results

Both participant groups appeared to express similar perspectives on mixing heritage speakers and L2 learners in a Spanish class. The results of the interviews show that both groups enjoyed working in a diverse class and saw the benefits from group work and collaboration between them. The L2 learners expressed the following benefits of having heritage speakers in their classes: (a) they were immersed in a Spanish-speaking environment as well as being exposed to their heritage speaker partners' different accents and dialects, (b) they had constant reinforcement of the spoken language, (c) they learned colloquial expressions that their heritage speaker classmates commonly used, (d) they regarded the heritage speakers as models of pronunciation, (e) they learned from their different cultures and Spanish varieties, and (f) they had ample opportunities to practice their Spanish with them.

At the same time, the heritage speakers claimed that they also learned from their L2 partners' contributions to class, particularly from their points of view and from their different cultures and perspectives in class discussions. Additionally, they recognized that when it came to writing, they sometimes asked their L2 learner partners for help with spelling and grammar questions.

Two interesting issues surfaced in regard to these topics. Even though the two groups identified the advantages of collaboration, both the heritage speaker and the L2 learner participants perceived more advantages for the L2 learners than for the heritage speakers. Indeed, the L2 learners' interview responses revealed that they appeared to be learning more from their exposure and opportunities to work together with the heritage speakers than the heritage



speakers from their interactions with L2 learners. Nonetheless, the heritage speakers claimed that they liked to help the L2 learners. However, they also noted that some of the L2 learners expected too much from them and did not always recognize that they also had gaps in their metalinguistic knowledge.

In terms of the instructors' level of expectations, the opinions of the two groups were similar. Both heritage speakers and L2 learners reported that their instructors seemed to address the needs of both groups by promoting participation and collaboration in the classes. In addition, they indicated that both groups are graded equally.

One challenge that the L2 learners faced was feeling intimidated by the heritage speakers in their classes. The results of the interviews show that the two heritage speakers seemed to agree that some L2 learners are intimidated by their presence. Indeed, some L2 participants admitted that holding a conversation in Spanish with a heritage speaker outside the classroom could be intimidating. However, some other L2 learners noted that they tried to take advantage of all the opportunities they had to use and practice their Spanish in conversations with heritage speakers. In regard to language choice and language use, the L2 learners reported more self-consciousness when using Spanish with heritage speakers. In contrast, both heritage speakers interviewed indicated that they felt no pressure to use English with L2 learners because these learners always made the effort to use and practice Spanish with their heritage speaker partners, at least in the classroom setting.

### **4.3 Results of the interviews with instructors**

The questions in the interviews with the four instructors were intended to provide insights and feedback regarding the instructors' experience with working with linguistically mixed classes. The data analysis in this section has been organized and analyzed according to the following topics: (a) course/class characteristics and strategies to address the needs of students combined in a mixed classroom, (b) intimidation, respect and collaboration among students, and (c) perceptions of the success of mixed classes.

#### **4.3.1 Strategies to address the needs of students in a mixed classroom**

All the instructors that were interviewed described the differences between Spanish heritage speakers and traditional L2 learners in terms of linguistic and academic skills. Graciela reported that because she taught a phonology course with focus on phonological theory, not language, the content was new for everybody. Some heritage speakers in her classroom wanted to be teachers and were motivated to learn about registers and correct pronunciation, while her L2 learners' motivation was to improve their Spanish pronunciation.

Graciela commented that she needed to accommodate both groups given the reality that heritage speakers and L2 learners were combined in upper-level Spanish content classes at the university. She explained that she designed her course in such a way that each group had to work, and more importantly, she made it clear to the class at the beginning of the term in order to avoid misperceptions such as the professor favouring one group or the other. Graciela added:

Sometimes, I have the entire group working on phonetic transcriptions (which needs to be learned by all the students in the class). By contrast, I plan other classes so that the L2 learners can focus on pronunciation practice while the heritage speakers work on a different task.

According to her:

It requires experience and preparation but you need to consider the needs of both groups. If you don't, the L2 learners resent the heritage speakers because they think that they have an advantage. The heritage speakers, on the other hand, think that the course will be very easy.

Similarly, Melisa pointed out that in her translation class, she tried to make the topics and tasks accessible to all her students. In addition, she tried to incorporate materials that addressed the interest of both L2 learners and heritage speakers. She revealed that both groups in her class liked and appreciated learning different forms of Spanish, like regional terms or colloquialisms. Melisa observed that heritage speakers and L2 learners can learn from each other; therefore, she frequently paired different types of learners but never forced grouping. On this topic, she added, "Naturally the L2 learners and heritage speakers in the class interact among each other. However, the L2 learners are generally more willing to interact with the heritage speakers and always look up to them."

In terms of her students' motivation to learn Spanish, Melisa observed that the heritage speakers in her class realized that their Spanish had interference from colloquial registers spoken at home, so they wanted to learn more formal

registers. On the other hand, the L2 learners' motivation was more to travel and explore other cultures.

The other two instructors that participated in the interviews, Rosa and Claudia, also mentioned that the L2 learners in their literature classes always made a strong effort to speak and practice Spanish. Rosa, like the rest of the instructors, chose carefully the material to be covered in class in order to address everybody's needs and had the same expectations for both groups. Rosa indicated that in her opinion, it was a positive experience to have heritage speakers together with L2 learners in the classroom because they can complement each other and added:

It is good for the L2 learners to be exposed to the heritage speakers' different accents and naturally spoken Spanish. It is like being immersed in the culture. It is part of their learning: if they go to a Spanish-speaking country, everybody will speak the language like that.

Claudia, like Graciela, promoted collaboration among students by giving them the opportunity to freely form groups or work in pairs and pointed out, "Students benefit from group work because they present different levels of language proficiency, even among heritage speakers. In groups, students can negotiate, collaborate, and help and learn from each other."

#### **4.3.2 Intimidation, respect, and collaboration among students**

In terms of collaboration among students, Graciela mentioned that she promoted collaborative learning by pairing heritage speakers with L2 learners for pronunciation exercises and found that the heritage speakers seemed happy to

help the L2 learners out. However, she let the students form groups naturally, and she never forced pairs so that the students would not feel uncomfortable. In regard to intimidation and respect among heritage speakers and L2 learners, Graciela indicated that the L2 learners did not feel intimidated to participate in class because they are not graded on pronunciation. In fact, they put more effort in learning the rules of pronunciation and practicing. However, she went on to add:

I need to concentrate on the L2 learners more because they represent the majority of the class. Thus, on occasions, the heritage speakers sometimes find the class a little less challenging or boring because they have to do pronunciation and repetition drills.

Like Graciela, the rest of the instructors also mentioned that they did not think that the L2 learners in their classes felt intimidated by the heritage speakers.

The following quotes are representative of instructors' comments:

Everybody in the class interacts freely and participates. Although sometimes the L2 learners feel that the heritage speakers have an advantage because they know how to speak the language, it is very common that proficient L2 learners make the strong effort and eventually catch up to the heritage speakers. (Melisa)

The L2 learners are very competitive and hard-working students. They feel challenged, work very hard and try to match up the heritage speakers. When working together, the two groups can complement each other: the heritage speakers have higher oral skills but lack formal

language instruction. On the other hand, the L2 learners have an advantage over the heritage speakers in that they know the grammar rules and generally have higher written skills. (Claudia)

However, some differing comments were also made. For example, Rosa indicated:

In previous courses, some L2 learners felt intimidated and complained because they considered that the heritage speakers were more advanced, so some L2 learners felt intimidated and had the perception that heritage speakers were better. The heritage speakers, however, never complained about the L2 learners slowing the pace of the class. Generally, the heritage speakers were patient and respectful and often took the initiative to help the L2 learners.

### **4.3.3 Perceptions of the success of mixed classes**

The instructors' opinions were uniform when considering the issue of teaching mixed classes. Claudia stated that mixing students is positive because both groups feel challenged and actively participate in class. Graciela pointed out that all the students seemed to work well together in her mixed classes. However, she observed that, "It always depends on the natural grouping. Students do not appear to think about it, they just work together with the classmates they know." Graciela later reported that she had had some conflicts between heritage speakers and L2 learners in the past: "I tried to give different assignments to each group and that brought conflict between the two groups; the

students resented not being evaluated the same way and marked on the same criteria.”

Similarly, Rosa indicated that the heritage speakers and L2 learners in her classes enjoyed working together and realized that they can learn from each other. However, she added, “Mixing students varies according to the dynamics of each group. In addition, large mixed classes do present a problem.” Like Graciela, she mentioned that she once tried to separate a large class into different levels and that caused tension, “Both groups complained and wanted to do the same tasks and be evaluated the same way.”

Melisa pointed out that the proficiency level of the L2 learners may play a role in the success of a mixed class:

Mixing heritage speakers and L2 learners is OK in upper-level classes, not at more beginner levels where the presence of heritage speakers may intimidate the L2 learners. In more advanced classes, the L2 learners have acquired enough proficiency to participate with the others and learn from each other. I think it is constructive and both groups can complement each other: the heritage speakers have strong speaking skills but need basic formal instruction of the language, while the L2 learners have difficulty understanding and speaking but are able to understand and apply grammar better because they had learned Spanish in a formal classroom setting.

#### **4.3.4 Summary of the instructors' responses**

Overall, the four instructors that participated in this study appear to agree on the most important topics of the interviews: (a) the need to make the material accessible to both heritage speakers and L2 learners, (b) the benefits of collaboration (pair work-group work) between groups, (c) the positive environment of respect in the class, (d) the L2 learners' feelings of intimidation with the presence of heritage speakers in their classes, and (e) the L2 learners' hard work and effort to catch up to the heritage speakers.

Some other issues also surfaced from the interviews with the instructors. Although they considered the mix of students as positive, they claimed that the dynamics of the combined groups varied from class to class and depended on natural groupings. A related issue was mixing heritage speakers and L2 learners in large classes. Two of the instructors reported past problems of conflict and complaints from both heritage speakers and L2 learner students and related this conflict to combining students in two very large classes that they had had in previous years. They commented that they had tried to divide the class and assign different tasks, but the students complained and were dissatisfied with doing different assignments. The instructors then concluded that designing the course content, attending to the needs of all the students, and accommodating the two groups was more challenging on those occasions when they had a large number of students in their classes. Finally, one of the instructors, Rosa, also indicated that in previous classes, her L2 learner students resented the lack of opportunities to participate in class and complained that the heritage speakers were more advanced than them.



## **Chapter 5: Discussion of results**

This chapter provides a discussion of the key research findings presented in chapter 4, with reference to each of the research questions in this study:

1. What are the learners' perceptions in regard to being together in a mixed class of heritage speakers and L2 learners of Spanish?
2. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages to being a student in a class with heritage speakers and L2 learners?
3. What are the instructors' perceptions on the dynamics of a heritage speaker mixed class?
4. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages to teaching a class with heritage speakers and L2 learners?

The first section of this chapter focuses on the learner participants' perceptions in the four mixed classes where the study was conducted. The second section discusses the instructors' perceptions on teaching heritage speaker-L2 learner classes. The last section presents the pedagogical implications and recommendations for further research, followed by an assessment of the limitations of the study.

### **5.1 Research questions 1 and 2: Student perceptions**

The first and second research questions investigated the learners' perceptions in regard to being together in a mixed class of heritage speakers and L2 learners of Spanish and examined the advantages and disadvantages of learning in mixed classes. On the whole, the questionnaire and interview results suggest that both heritage speakers and L2 learners have positive perceptions in

regard to working in mixed classrooms, although some disadvantages were also identified. The findings of the present study are comparable with those of Blake and Zyzik (2003), Edstrom (2007), and Quintanar-Sarellana et al. (1993).

### **5.1.1 Advantages and disadvantages of working in mixed classes**

The statistical analysis of the students' responses in this research seems to indicate that mixing heritage speakers and L2 learners in upper-level courses in Canadian universities can be beneficial. Both participant groups expressed similar positive perspectives on having heritage speakers and L2 learners in the same class and indicated that both groups can benefit from group work and collaboration between them. Likewise, they expressed their willingness to work in mixed classes because they learn from the contributions of all members of the class.

In terms of the advantages of working in mixed classes, the L2 learners claimed that they benefited from exposure to the heritage speakers' naturally spoken language and to different accents and dialects, as well as from the opportunities to discuss cultural differences and to practice Spanish with the heritage speakers. Similarly, the heritage speakers in the study also identified benefits of collaboration with L2 learners, such as learning from different points of view, perspectives, and cultures.

With regard to collaboration between heritage speakers and L2 learners, both participant groups in this study claimed that they worked in a cooperative and respectful environment in their mixed classes. The heritage speakers indicated that working in groups was productive because both heritage speakers

and L2 learners seemed to benefit from the interactions. For example, the heritage speakers helped the L2 learners with questions about vocabulary or pronunciation while at the same time, they learned from exchanging ideas and different points of view with their peers. In addition, the heritage speakers revealed that when it came to writing, sometimes they asked the L2 learners for help because they learned Spanish in formal settings and had a stronger command of grammatical rules and spelling.

The L2 learners seemed to agree with the heritage speakers that working in mixed classes was a positive experience and recognized that the heritage speakers in their classes were tolerant, patient, respectful, and helpful when they had opportunities to work in groups. Additionally, they emphasized that working in groups with heritage speakers benefits the L2 learners who are struggling by giving them the opportunity to ask for help in a more informal situation and thus helping them build confidence.

Given that this study is a partial replication of Edstrom (2007), it is now relevant to compare the results of her study to the findings obtained here. Even though the sample size was smaller in Edstrom's study, some findings in the present research seem to corroborate those of Edstrom. For example, the L2 learners in the present study seem to feel that having heritage speakers in their classes is good for their listening comprehension and speaking skills and are willing to work in groups with heritage speakers. Similarly, the heritage speakers indicated that they like to help the L2 learners and are happy to work with them because they also learn from their contributions to class.

However, a few (27%) of the heritage speaker questionnaire results indicated the perception that the instructors could cover more topics if the L2 learners were not there. These attitudes were also revealed in Edstrom (2007), although the heritage speakers there seemed to be more uncomfortable with the presence of L2 learners in the classroom. Some heritage speakers in Edstrom's study expressed feelings of frustration that the L2 learners slowed the pace of the class, and four of twelve students even expressed interest in the creation of separate classes. These opinions were not reflected in the findings of the present research. The only student who felt that heritage speakers would learn more in a non-mixed class was, in fact, an L2 learner (Elena); none of the two heritage speakers interviewed felt that they were being held back.

A possible explanation for the more negative opinions in Edstrom's study is that 75% of the participants were heritage and native speakers of Spanish. The smaller proportion of L2 learner participants reflected the situation in the upper-level Spanish courses at the institution where her study was conducted. Thus, the perceptions could reflect the impatience of the majority of the students in the classes who resented the instructor trying to accommodate to the pace of the L2 learners who represented the minority in the class. Additionally, the participants in Edstrom's study were not only heritage speakers but also native speakers of Spanish, who, unlike the heritage speakers, were completely fluent and probably had little to learn from the L2 students. As a consequence, the native speakers might have felt greater impatience with the developing language abilities of the L2 learners.

In contrast, the present study only examined the perceptions of the heritage speakers (native speakers were not included in this study) who represented the minority –between 20% and 30%– of the students in each of the classes where data were collected. The opinions of these heritage speakers were mixed. Half of the participants expressed feelings of impatience when the L2 learners were trying to frame their thoughts and consequently they were not always willing to offer to help the L2 learners. However, these perceptions were not observed in the other half of the heritage speakers or in the interviews with the two heritage speaker participants who expressed their respect for the effort that the L2 learners were making to learn Spanish and also their willingness to help them in class.

The attitudes of the instructors in Edstrom (2007) could have played a role in the heritage speakers' perceptions as well. Some heritage speakers in her study claimed that their instructors seemed to immediately praise the L2 learners for their modest contributions to class. These negative perceptions were not reported in the present study given that overall, both heritage speakers and L2 learners recognized that their instructors supported and encouraged participation from all the students in the class.

In sum, the findings in the present study seem to reveal that there can certainly be benefits to both heritage speakers and L2 learners from being in mixed classes. However, the proportion of heritage speakers to L2 learners in a class appears to play a significant role. More feelings of impatience among heritage speakers were reported in Edstrom (2007) in which this group dominated the class numerically as compared to the present study. Another

implication of these findings is the students' perceptions of how their instructors handle the mix of students. Whereas in Edstrom (2007), the heritage speakers appeared to be upset about the way their instructors over-encouraged the L2 learners for their participation, the instructors in this study were perceived to be more balanced.

### **5.1.2 Perceptions of the instructors' expectations**

Results from the investigation of how both participant groups perceived the instructors' expectations show that overall, the heritage speakers and L2 learners felt that their Spanish instructors organize the content of their courses to meet the needs of all the students in their classes. Moreover, the instructors were perceived to have strategies to address the needs of both groups and in this way, find a balance for the class to be stimulating for the heritage speakers and challenging for the L2 learners.

Heritage speakers' and L2 learners' opinions about the instructors' expectations seemed to indicate that everyone in the class was graded fairly and because they were enrolled in content courses, they were graded on content and grammar, not simply oral production. In particular, the L2 learners acknowledged that they would be at a disadvantage if they were graded on their oral and speaking abilities. The L2 learners seemed to recognize that they had difficulties in their oral skills and were at a disadvantage compared to their heritage speaker partners. At the same time, this perception suggests that the L2 learners realized that their instructors accommodated to the abilities and strengths of both groups and appreciated their contributions to the class.

A previous study by Potowski (2002) also examined the perceptions of heritage speakers and L2 learners in mixed classes, although with an emphasis on the heritage speakers' profiles and needs. In Potowski's study, the heritage speakers pointed out that they felt an advantage over the L2 learners in oral fluency, comprehension, and pronunciation. However, they felt uncomfortable because instructors had higher expectations of what they should know about Spanish. As a result, the heritage speakers felt inferior to the L2 learners who had been exposed to linguistic terminology and formal varieties of Spanish, had a better understanding of grammar rules, and got better grades than the heritage speakers. These results do not seem to corroborate the findings in the present research. Although the heritage speakers in this study also recognized that they had an advantage over their L2 partners' comprehension and oral skills, they did not appear to feel that their instructors had higher expectations for them or lower expectations for the L2 learners.

Overall, both student groups observed that their instructors created a supportive and pleasant classroom environment. The fact that, unlike in Potowski's study, the heritage speakers in this study showed more positive perceptions of their instructors' expectations implies that the role of the instructors is fundamental. These findings seem to suggest that the way the instructor handles the mix of heritage speakers and L2 learners is important to the success of the mixed class where all students feel respected and valued for their contributions to class.

In terms of participation, the L2 learners interviewed in this research seemed to feel that their instructors always encouraged the L2 learners to

participate in class by giving them time to frame their thoughts and express their opinions. However, the questionnaire results also revealed that over half of the L2 learners (55%) felt that the presence of heritage speakers influenced their ability to participate in class. This implies that despite the positive perceptions revealed in the interviews, some L2 learners seemed to feel intimidated by the heritage speakers' oral skills and the fact that they can express themselves better and give their views and opinions before the L2 learners have the opportunity to frame their ideas and contribute to class discussions.

As a result, the implications of these findings suggest that it is the role of the instructors to ensure that L2 learners have adequate time to participate in class and to discourage heritage speakers from always jumping in with their answers first or controlling class discussions. This implication is corroborated by Edstrom's study, in which the situation of the L2 learners in terms of opportunities to participate in class was an even bigger problem, given that the heritage speakers and native speakers dominated the class numerically and consequently, intimidated the L2 learners and limited their opportunities to contribute to class.

### **5.1.3 Perceptions of respect and intimidation**

Overall, both heritage speakers and L2 learners in this research seem to feel respected by their peers. However, some issues of intimidation surfaced in the questionnaire and interview results. Half of the L2 learner participants expressed that they felt intimidated by the presence of their heritage speaker classmates, in particular when they had to speak or initiate a conversation in



Spanish with them, especially outside the classroom setting. Feeling the pressure to use Spanish was observed to be a disadvantage of working in mixed classes with heritage speakers. These opinions were corroborated by some heritage speakers, who also noticed that the L2 learners were intimidated to ask for help or use Spanish in conversations with them. However, for the other half of the L2 learners, having heritage speakers who were willing to help them in their classes represented an opportunity to make the effort to practice their Spanish.

Clearly, the classroom environment and the dynamics of the interactions between students are fundamental in that they directly influence the students' perceptions on working and collaborating in mixed classes. Positive perceptions and cooperation among heritage speakers and L2 learners appear to increase when students are willing to help each other and feel respected by their peers. The role of the instructors is also important to help reduce the intimidation felt by the L2 learners. If the instructors provide opportunities for the students to collaborate, engage in class discussions and thus get to know each other, students will build relationships within the classrooms and since they know their classmates well, they might feel less intimidated. Moreover, these findings imply that the instructors should also help reduce L2 learners' feelings of intimidation by creating a less threatening atmosphere and a more pleasant classroom environment where both heritage speakers and L2 learners have equal opportunities and are considered valuable members of the class.

#### **5.1.4 Mixed classes in the American and Canadian contexts**

Overall, the findings from the present research seem to reveal more positive results than those of previous studies carried out in the United States. The greater positiveness may be due to social differences between the American and the Canadian contexts.

The socio-political environment in the US points to a preference for monolingualism. Ducar (2012) maintains that “heritage speakers’ attitudes in the classroom reflect the negative stigma attached to the language from the dominant English-speaking community along with internal stigmas attached to US varieties of the language, stemming from both the speakers of US varieties of Spanish themselves and outsider, Spanish-monolingual attitudes toward the language.” (Ducar 2012, p.167 in Beaudrie & Fairclough 2012)

It is thus possible that the more negative results obtained in the American studies were directly influenced by the attitudes attached to being Latino together with the negative perception of multilingualism and multiculturalism prevalent in the US. As a consequence, the English-speaking or non-Latino L2 learners in previous studies might not be comfortable with having heritage speakers in their classes, even though they were learning a second language and this fact should make them more open-minded toward other cultures. Because the L2 learners felt intimidated by the heritage speakers, teachers might be over-compensating by excessively praising them for their contributions to class. As a result, the heritage speakers might feel, consciously or subconsciously, that they were not being given adequate recognition for their own efforts and were being

treated differently. This fact could also reinforce any feelings of inferiority that the heritage speakers may feel as members of a minority group, which may lead to greater resentment.

In Canada, the government's policy is to recognize and promote multiculturalism. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act maintains that Canada's multiculturalism policy should "preserve and enhance the use of languages other than English and French, while strengthening the status and use of the official languages of Canada" (Canadian Multiculturalism Act 1985, Article 3). This means that immigrants and residents are encouraged to maintain their languages. Diversity and multiculturalism are reflected in the educational context as well. Several provincial governments have implemented and currently promote heritage language programs. Specifically in Alberta, where this study was conducted, the Language Education Policy (1988) and the Enhancing Second Language Learning Report (2003) promote second language learning by: (a) encouraging school authorities to offer opportunities for all students to learn French and languages other than English and French, (b) supporting language and culture courses and partial immersion (bilingual) programs, (c) developing curriculum and teacher support resources, (d) implementing supportive language policies, and (e) ensuring sufficient instruction time in second language programs. (Enhancing Second Language Learning Report 2003, pp.1-24).

Given a society that is open to cultural and linguistic differences, it is of little surprise that L2 learners and heritage speakers show more positive attitudes towards each other. Both participant groups reported a pleasant, supportive, and collaborative classroom environment where they enjoyed working together and

learning from each other. The heritage speakers and L2 learners seemed to value diversity and to be more open to cultural differences, and as a consequence, mixed classes seemed to be more successful. Both groups in this study valued learning about different cultures and enjoyed being exposed to different perspectives and ideas by participating in class discussions, working on group projects, and collaborating in class activities.

Another factor that might have a positive influence on students' openness to diversity could be the supportive environment that the instructors created in their courses, which itself could be a reflection of the general openness to diversity in Canadian society. Both the heritage speakers and the L2 learners in this study indicated that their instructors were fair and did not discriminate the Spanish-speaking students from the L2 learners. Overall, the instructors were perceived to accommodate the needs of both groups of students and always encouraged them by providing the same opportunities to participate in class as well as to work together.

It was thus observed that overall, the students in this study seemed to enjoy interacting with each other and also getting acquainted with their peers by engaging in class discussions and exchanging ideas, which could also increase the students' openness to diversity. This acceptance of others seemed to foster good relationships among the students, who felt integrated and valued in the mixed class.

## **5.2 Research questions 3 and 4: Instructor perceptions**

From the perspective of the instructors, teaching diverse classes demands careful consideration, experience, and preparation. The four instructors that were interviewed pointed out that they selected and organized the content of their classes to address the needs, interests, and motivations of both learner groups.

Collaborative learning was indicated to be a common strategy used by the instructors in all their classes. Indeed, their opinions in the interviews suggest that pairing and promoting group work between heritage speakers and L2 learners is beneficial. These findings corroborate those of Potowski (2002) and Quintanar-Sarellana et al. (1993), who also pointed out the needs of students from different linguistic backgrounds and suggested that peer-tutoring in mixed classes maybe an option for collaboration among students. Particularly because heritage speakers and L2 learners present different levels of language proficiency, they can collaborate, help, and learn from each other when they work in pairs or groups. The instructors in this study noted that for the L2 learners, working in groups with heritage speakers gives them the opportunity to practice and to be exposed to authentic language. The heritage speakers, in turn, also learn from the contributions that their L2 peers bring to the class and have the opportunity to be exposed to the more formal registers of Spanish used by the L2 learners. Indeed, the instructors thought that both groups engaged in discussions and respected each other's views and opinions.

In sum, group work and collaborative learning was thought to be successful in helping heritage speakers and L2 learners learn from each other.

However, some L2 learners still indicated that they felt intimidated by the presence of their heritage speaker classmates. Potowski (2000) reported similar results, in that some L2 learners continued to feel at a disadvantage despite being provided with collaborative learning opportunities. Thus, it seems that apart from providing opportunities for group work and student interactions, instructors first need to create a safe classroom environment where all students are treated equally and fairly, are not afraid to make mistakes, feel respected and valued for their contributions to the class, and are encouraged to build relationships with their peers.

In addition, instructors should also consider factors that could make cooperative learning more effective. For example, they should: (a) address the needs of students of different ability: high-proficiency students may dominate the interactions while low-proficiency students may contribute fewer ideas or sit back and let other members do the work; (b) structure the groups carefully: higher- proficiency learners with lower-proficiency partners can result in greater collaboration (Storch, 2001); (c) organize tasks in ways that require certain kinds of interactions and that promote peer support within the groups, and (d) consider assessment strategies that reward the group but at the same time assess students individually.

Finally, in terms of respect, all the instructors in this study mentioned that both heritage speakers and L2 learners were respectful and both groups interacted and participated in their classes. Furthermore, they all appeared to agree on that the L2 learners showed great effort in class. Their opinions indicated that, even though sometimes they felt that the heritage speakers had the

advantage of having higher oral skills, the L2 learners were very competitive, hard-working and motivated to work hard and catch up to the heritage speakers.

In general, the four instructors appeared to believe that, given the reality of having heritage speakers and L2 learners combined in mixed classes, mixing students is good in upper-level content courses. This assumption seems to imply that in more advanced classes, L2 learners and heritage speakers can work together and complement each other, given that the heritage speakers speak the language fluently and spontaneously but have not generally received any formal language instruction, while the L2 learners have the advantage of having been schooled and exposed to academic Spanish. As a consequence, it is possible for them to collaborate and benefit from their complementary skills in upper-level courses.

### **5.3 Pedagogical implications**

Upon close examination of the results gathered in this research study, there are several pedagogical recommendations for classes that include heritage speakers and L2 learners. Prior knowledge of the perceptions about working together in mixed classes could assist instructors in attending to the needs of their students. The heritage speakers' and L2 learners' perspectives on working together in mixed classes identified several advantages:

(a) Group work allows students to get to know each other and creates a setting where L2 learners are able to practice the language in a non-threatening environment.

(b) Pair-work and group work also help both L2 learners and heritage speakers to learn Spanish. The L2 learners learn from the exposure to the heritage speakers' naturally spoken Spanish and the opportunities for oral practice.

(c) The L2 learners can help the heritage speakers with spelling, conjugations, and grammar rules.

(d) The heritage speakers are models of spoken language and pronunciation for the L2 learners and can answer L2 learners' questions on vocabulary, colloquial expressions, and also offer corrections.

(e) As a result of group work and collaboration, the heritage speakers have access to more formal registers of Spanish and give more thought to spelling, grammar, and the rules of the Spanish language.

Given that it is important that heritage speakers and L2 learners interact and collaborate in mixed classes, instructors should create ample opportunities for pair work, group work, and group discussions among heritage speakers and L2 learners. Storch (2001) maintains that pairing a higher-proficiency learner with a lower-proficiency partner can result in even greater collaboration than pairing learners from similar levels. Participants in this research study referred to the benefits of collaborating and working in a non-threatening environment. For example, instructors should include in their lessons class activities in which heritage speakers and L2 learners have the opportunity to exchange ideas, collaborate, and help one another. If interactions among students become a frequent and regular class activity, students could also build personal relationships and feel more engaged in the learning process.



A strategy that would make learning more cooperative would be to encourage students to sit in groups in order to avoid them dividing themselves into heritage speakers and L2 learners. Particularly in content classes, instructors should encourage learners to work together by designing group projects. This could allow students of different language skills and background to help each other and could also promote responsibility among group members.

This study has identified that both heritage speakers and L2 learners learn from their different cultures and points of view. Instructors who teach mixed classes should include lessons on culture. Although culture is embedded in Spanish literature courses, it could also be incorporated in translation and pronunciation classes. In translation classes, both heritage speakers and L2 learners could learn how different words and expressions are used across English and Spanish and thus compare different expressions and the connotations that they suggest. Additionally, students in mixed classes could have the opportunity to learn about different varieties of Spanish, such as regionalisms, colloquialisms, and the differences between formal and informal registers. Similarly, pronunciation classes might also raise cultural awareness by allowing students to recognize different ways of speaking Spanish such as dialectical or regional variants, and thus develop sociolinguistic communicative competence in the target language. (Bachman, 1990)

A further implication is the need for providing ample opportunities for student participation. Instructors should make sure to create a pleasant and respectful classroom environment that promotes the expression of students' ideas. The L2 learners in this study specifically mentioned their instructors'

encouragement and support and emphasized that their instructors were patient while letting them frame their thoughts or express themselves. In addition, by giving constant reinforcement, instructors could help reassure the L2 learners that they are valuable members of the class. Heritage speakers' needs should also be addressed in order to avoid feelings of impatience among these learners.

Instructors should utilize their strengths, for example, by: (a) making them feel that they are also valuable members of the course as they bring their linguistic and cultural backgrounds to the class, (b) occasionally assigning optional exercises that would allow them to continue improving their speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills and to incorporate their rich cultural heritage, and (c) creating opportunities for them to assist their L2 classmates. For example, peer-tutoring among students (Quintanar-Sarellana et al. 1993) could have the potential to ensure collaboration between heritage speakers and L2 learners in that it could allow the heritage speakers to feel recognized for their Spanish skills while making them review their grammatical knowledge. In turn, tutoring could benefit the L2 learners by providing them with opportunities to practice the target language in communicative situations with native speakers and at the same time, review their grammar while they help the heritage speakers.

Finally, with regard to material selection, instructors should be attentive to heritage speakers' and L2 learners' interests by carefully choosing the content and material in their classes and adapting them to both learner groups' interest and language skills. The materials chosen for mixed classes need to be selected in order to match the student population to be taught. Instructors should consider not only the goals of instruction but also the skills that students need to develop.

Thus, in attending to both heritage speakers' and L2 learners' needs, materials should focus on improving the students' oral language and literacy skills, reviewing their grammar, phonetics, acquiring standard Spanish varieties, developing Spanish fluency, and giving both heritage speakers and L2 learners the opportunities to learn about their cultures.

#### **5.4 Limitations of this study and suggestions for further research**

Arguably, to confirm the findings of this study, there is a need to further examine the perceptions of the students and the realities of mixed classes where there is a more even proportion of heritage speakers and L2 learners. For example, a greater presence of heritage speakers in a classroom could increase the L2 learners' feelings of intimidation, although at the same time, it would provide more comprehensive input. Conversely, a higher number of L2 learners would possibly slow the pace of the class even more for the heritage speakers. In contrast, a more equal proportion of heritage speakers and L2 learners could avoid having one group dominate the class. Also of importance, a balance of heritage speakers and L2 learners could lessen the differences between both groups and provide more opportunities for students of different language skills and proficiency to interact, collaborate, and learn from each other's strengths.

The most obvious limitation in this research was the small sample of heritage speaker participants, as compared to the number of L2 student participants that contributed their opinions to this study. The two heritage speakers interviewed may not be completely representative of their group. This may explain the mismatch between the positive comments of the two heritage

speaker participants and the not-so-positive answers in some of the heritage speaker questionnaires (see Table 6: Q#2, 6, 7, 8 and 9). The comments and perspectives of more heritage speakers could have added more insights. Despite this limitation, the perceptions of the heritage speakers and L2 learners in this research study may be valuable to instructors who are teaching upper-level mixed content classes.

Findings from the interviews in this study were also limited by the semi-structured design. In particular, while it was beneficial to employ already-designed questions and categories to examine the main topics in the interviews, the lack of more open questions narrowed the possibility of exploring other emerging themes.

Further related studies could also be done to examine the perceptions of Spanish heritage speakers and L2 learners working together across different levels of language instruction (Elementary, Junior High and High School). The age of the students could play a role in shaping the perceptions of students in mixed classes. In addition, related studies could look at different types of courses, for example, lower-level language courses at other universities and high school language classes, given that this study only examined upper-level content courses. Any further research in this area could investigate the perceptions of the students of the advantages and disadvantages of mixed classes as well as the strategies that instructors have to facilitate their interactions and learning experiences.

Also important would be to examine the perspectives of instructors at other levels of instruction as well as instructors with different years of teaching

experience. All four instructors in this study were experienced teachers who had taught mixed classes for years before this study was conducted. A novice instructor might not know how to handle the mix of heritage speakers and L2 learners and the different language skills, needs, and attitudes of these students in a combined class.

Additional studies are also needed to investigate the perceptions of the same groups of heritage speaker- L2 learners over a longer period of time to observe if the students' perceptions change as they establish friendships. Getting to know their classmates could decrease some students' feelings of intimidation and consequently, increase participation in discussions and willingness to collaborate with different members of the class. In addition, these types of studies could also examine the L2 learners' level of proficiency, which should also improve over a longer period, and thus observe the relationship between proficiency level and comfort with being in a mixed class.

The advantages of collaborative learning in mixed classes could be investigated by comparing the behaviors and the perceptions of learners in mixed classes where collaborative learning activities allow learners to interact with each other, get acquainted, discuss ideas, and learn from each other, with classes where instruction follows more traditional lecture and discussion methods. Any further research in this area could also examine in detail the interactions of heritage speakers and L2 learners working together in collaborative learning activities to determine in what specific ways students could help each other and also to analyze the benefits of interactions from a linguistic point of view.

Additional studies could also investigate the presence and the perceptions of native speakers in mixed classes. Although there are not usually many of them, the influence that this group may have on the dynamics of the class should not be ignored when looking at mixed classes.

The notion of power might also explain some of the findings in this study. For example, that there were more perceived benefits for L2 learners by both groups, and there did seem to be an assumption by the L2 learners that heritage speakers were more proficient even though some of the heritage speakers did not think that was always true. Any future research in this area should examine in more detail the group dynamics by taking into consideration who students consider as the expert(s) in their group. Although this topic was examined indirectly within the discussion on intimidation and respect, related studies should explore: (a) whether students see themselves as having equal power and authority, (b) how this issue influences the success of a mixed class, and (c) what instructors can do to “empower” students.

Finally, this research study is the first attempt to examine the perspectives of Spanish heritage speakers and L2 learners in mixed classes in the context of upper-level Spanish content courses in Canada. Future studies could examine and compare the perceptions of students in mixed classes of other university programs throughout the country. These investigations could reveal if provincial initiatives and support in promoting second language learning and multiculturalism play a role in determining students’ interest in learning languages and openness to cultural diversity. Similarly, these studies could also look at whether there is variation depending on how culturally diverse

communities are, for example, metropolitan cities versus smaller populations across Canada. Studies should also take into account critical perspectives on how genuinely open Canadians are to diversity and multiculturalism. In addition, another area of research could further investigate the perceptions of Canadian students in heritage speaker-L2 learner mixed classes in language programs other than Spanish in order to determine whether the perspectives of students differ across cultures as well as whether similar prejudices to those observed in the American studies are observed in other cultures.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

The primary purpose of the present study was to examine Canadian learners' perceptions in regard to being together in a mixed class of heritage speakers and L2 learners of Spanish. It also sought to investigate the instructors' opinions on the dynamics and the challenges of teaching heritage speaker-L2 learner classes. The secondary goal of this research was to look at the differences between Canadian and American learners.

Fifty- five students (11 heritage speakers and 44 L2 learners) enrolled in upper-level Spanish content classes and four instructors at a Canadian university participated in this study. A written questionnaire and individual semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. The general findings from this study showed that heritage speakers and L2 learners have positive perceptions on working together in mixed classes. Both groups acknowledged that they respected each other and appreciated collaborative opportunities, as it allowed them to benefit from each others' strengths. These findings were generally more

positive than those found in previous studies done in the US, possibly due to negative attitudes attached to being Latino in the US, while Canada enjoys a general openness to diversity and acceptance of others.

The study also provided evidence that the way the instructor handles the mix of heritage speakers and L2 learners is important to the success of the mixed class. By creating a supportive classroom environment, accommodating the needs of both heritage speakers and L2 learners, and providing the same opportunities to participate in class and work together, instructors could also foster interactions and acceptance among students.

Mixed classes are becoming increasingly more common in most elementary, high school, and post-secondary Spanish language programs in Canada and in many Spanish language programs in the United States. Moreover, immigration from Latin American countries has been growing in recent decades. Second language instruction cannot avoid this reality and needs to address the distinct language abilities, motivation, and needs of these two groups of learners combined in mixed classes. Continuing to examine the learners' perspectives on working in mixed classes could provide more insights into how to maximize heritage speakers' and L2 learners' learning experiences and could inform instructors on the best practices to accommodate both groups of learners.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### *Language Background Questionnaire*

1. What country were you born in? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is (are) your native language(s)?

Language	Language	Language
_____	_____	_____

3. Where do you use your language(s)? Check all that apply.

Language	Language	Language
_____	_____	_____
Home _____	Home _____	Home _____
Friends _____	Friends _____	Friends _____
Work _____	Work _____	Work _____
University _____	University _____	University _____

4. How old were you when you started learning your native language(s)?

Language	Language	Language
_____	_____	_____
_____ years	_____ years	_____ years

5. Where did you learn your native language(s)?

Language	Language	Language
_____	_____	_____

6. Were you schooled in your native language(s)? If so, write the number of years of instruction.

Language	Language	Language
_____	_____	_____
Yes/ No      ____years	Yes/ No      ____years	Yes/ No      ____years

7. Please use the following table to describe your experience with foreign languages (not native languages)

Language	Age started (yrs) For how many semesters/years?	Language study	Year of last course taken	Currently studying? If so, what course?	Study abroad or residence in a country where the language is spoken?
					Yes/No  If yes, for how long? _____  Where?
					Yes/No  If yes, for how long? _____  Where?

8. Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 7 for the following in SPANISH (1 is minimal, 4 is moderate, 7 is native-like abilities):

- Your ability to SPEAK Spanish \_\_\_\_\_
- Your ability to UNDERSTAND Spanish \_\_\_\_\_
- Your ability to WRITE Spanish \_\_\_\_\_
- Your ability to READ Spanish \_\_\_\_\_
- Your PRONUNCIATION in Spanish \_\_\_\_\_
- Your GRAMMAR in Spanish \_\_\_\_\_
- Your OVERALL ABILITY in Spanish \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix B**  
*Spanish L2 learner Questionnaire*

Please, fill out this questionnaire if English is your native language and you are currently taking or have taken Spanish courses)

\* A Spanish heritage speaker is someone who grew up in monolingual Spanish or bilingual Spanish-English households (in which one or both parents speak Spanish).

Please choose the option that best reflects your opinions in each of the following statements.

Questionnaire statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Having Spanish heritage speakers in my classes is good for my Spanish listening and speaking skills.					
2. I find the Spanish heritage speakers in my classes intimidating; I feel uncomfortable speaking in front of them.					
3. I am as happy to work in a group with a Spanish heritage speaker as I am to work with another second language Spanish speaker					
4. I especially like working with heritage speakers because I learn from their insights and contributions.					
5. When I work in groups with a Spanish heritage speaker, I feel the pressure to use Spanish.					
6. Having Spanish heritage speaking classmates makes me feel good because I'm reminded that even their language skills need polishing.					

<p><b>7. The fact that there are many heritage speakers of Spanish in class seems to influence my instructors' expectations for how much material we cover and how thoroughly we cover it.</b></p>					
<p><b>8. The presence of Spanish heritage speakers influences my ability to participate in class</b></p>					
<p><b>9. I feel that my heritage speaker peers respect my contributions to class.</b></p>					
<p><b>10. I learn a lot about Spanish-speaking cultures from my heritage-speaking classmates</b></p>					
<p><b>Will you be willing to participate in an interview?</b></p>	<p><b>Yes                      No (Write your email address <u>only</u> if you want to participate in the interview)</b></p> <p><b>E-mail address:</b></p>				

**Appendix C**  
*Spanish Heritage Speaker Questionnaire*

Please, fill out this questionnaire if you consider yourself a heritage speaker of Spanish, and you are currently taking or have taken a Spanish course. A Spanish heritage speaker is someone who grew up in monolingual Spanish or bilingual Spanish-English households (in which one or both parents speak Spanish).

Please choose the option that best reflects your opinions in each of the following statements.

Questionnaire statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I think that mixing L2 speakers with heritage speakers in upper-level classes is a good thing					
2. The L2 speakers seem intimidated by the fact that there are many heritage speakers in upper-level courses.					
3. I am as happy to work in a group with heritage speakers as I am to work with L2 speakers.					
4. I especially like working with L2 speakers because I learn from their insights and contributions.					
5. When I work in groups with L2 speakers, I feel the pressure to use English.					
6. The mix of students in upper-level courses allows us to learn a lot about our classmates' cultures.					
7. The fact that there are some L2 speakers of Spanish in class seems to affect my instructors' expectations for how much material we cover and how thoroughly we cover it.					

8. The heritage speakers in upper-level courses try to help the L2 learners.					
9. My L2 classmates respect me and appreciate my contributions to class.					
10. I feel impatient sometimes when L2 speakers try to express their ideas in Spanish in some of my classes.					
Will you be willing to participate in an interview?	<p>Yes                      No (Write your email address <u>only</u> if you want to participate in the interview)</p> <p>E-mail address:</p>				

## **Appendix D**

### *Possible Interview Warm-up Questions*

1. When did you start learning Spanish?
2. When were you first interested in learning Spanish? Why? What are your goals in studying Spanish?
3. How long have you been a student at this university? How long have you been studying Spanish at this university?
4. What other Spanish courses have you taken?
5. Have you always been in heritage speaker-L2 learner mixed classes in your courses at this university?

### *Possible Interview Questions for Students*

1. Do you enjoy working with heritage speakers/ L2 learners? Why?
2. Do you find working with heritage speakers/ L2 learners motivating/frustrating? How?
3. What things do you learn from working with heritage speakers/L2 learners?
4. How do you think that working with heritage speakers/ L2 learners help you learn about other classmates' cultures?
5. What language do you prefer to use when working with heritage speakers/ L2 learners? Why?
6. How do you see your instructor's expectations for how much material is covered in class and how thoroughly it is covered due to the fact that there are heritage speakers and L2 learners mixed in your class?
7. In your opinion, how do the heritage speakers and the L2 learners help each other in the class?

**Appendix E***Possible Interview Questions for Instructors*

1. How many heritage speakers and L2 learners do you have in your class?
2. How does the presence of the two groups in the classroom influence each other's motivation?
3. In your opinion, how do the two groups work or enjoy working together?
4. In your opinion, how does the presence of heritage speakers make the class more intimidating/ challenging for the L2 learners?
5. When do you notice that the heritage speakers get bored/find the class less challenging?
6. How motivated to learn are the L2 learners in your class?
7. How do you address the needs of the two groups?
8. How do you promote collaborative learning between the two groups?  
How?
9. Based on your own experience, what are the challenges of working with a mixed class?