

Center for Advanced Language Proficiency Education and Research
Position paper
October 2007

Teaching for Heritage and Domestic Language Learners in LCTL Courses

by

Karen E. Johnson and Joan Kelly Hall

CALPER Heritage Language Project, Co-Directors

Recent national and international events have resulted in a significantly increased need for speakers with advanced language proficiency in languages other than English, and in particular, in less commonly taught languages (LCTLs). Institutions of higher education have responded to this need by increasing the scope of their programs in languages such as Korean, Chinese, and Arabic. A recent survey undertaken by the Modern Language Association (MLA) on college and university enrollments in these programs shows that student interest in learning languages other than English is at all time high, with the total number of enrollments growing by 17% in the period between 1998 and 2002 (Welles, 2004). For some LCTL classrooms, the increase has been even greater. Enrollments in Arabic, for example, nearly doubled in this period from 5,505 to 10,584 (ibid, p. 9).

Along with the increase in enrollments has come a change in language learner demographics. No longer are language classrooms comprised primarily of domestic language learners, i.e. native English speakers whose primary if not sole exposure to the target language is in the classroom. Now, classrooms are more likely to include a number of heritage language learners, in addition to domestic learners. In some cases, the number of such learners is dramatic. According to Wiley (2004), for example, the number of heritage language learners in LCTL programs has increased three-fold in the last decade alone, surpassing domestic English speaking students at a ratio of about six to one.

Heritage language learners differ from domestic learners in several ways. First, because they are raised in homes and communities where the heritage language is used, they typically come to the classroom with well-developed native-like pronunciation and fluency in colloquial

registers and dialects as well as cultural-specific sensitivities needed for engaging in everyday social interactions (Valdez, 2005). However, their proficiencies in the standard or prestige variety of the language, both its oral and written forms, and specifically related to professional and academic settings are often far less advanced. Domestic learners, on the other hand, typically come with a limited ability to read and write the language, but they lack the oral and cultural skills, knowledge and experiences needed for interacting effectively with their heritage language peers. Heritage language learners are also quite diverse in terms of origin of birth, conditions and location of settlement, length and generational residence, age of arrival, educational background, and socioeconomic status all of which contribute to their development of varied identities as heritage language learners, even among learners within the same language group.

Alongside the change in learner demographics has come a change in how the profession views the goal of language learning. Traditional programs, geared only to domestic language learners, have had the fairly narrow, instrumental goal of developing in learners basic language skills, using the educated native speaker of the target language as the standard.

Advanced Language Proficiency as Translingual & Transcultural Competence

In recognition of the increasing need for speakers of advanced language proficiency who can communicate effectively in a wide range of contexts and situations, the profession has moved away from an emphasis on basic skills and toward a goal of translingual and transcultural competence (MLA, 2007). This view of advanced language proficiency is based on an understanding of language as a dynamic, sociocultural resource comprising “a range of possibilities, an open-ended set of options” (Halliday, 1973: 49), the meanings and shapes of which are systematic connected to the functions they play and their contexts of use (Hall, 2003). Furthermore, it recognizes that, given the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity of communities around the world, learners must develop skills, knowledge and experiences that will allow them to negotiate a range of regional, ethnic, and class-based cultural discourses that are increasingly multimodal, involving written modalities as well as “visual, audio, and spatial patterns of meaning” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000: 5).

Classrooms for which translingual and transcultural competence serves at the primary goal have three broad objectives (New London Group, 2000):

- To develop learners' linguistic, sociocultural, actional/rhetorical, and strategic skills and knowledge needed to participate in a wide range of practical and intellectual communicative practices considered important to educated individuals of which they aspire to be or are members;
- to develop learners' abilities to recruit the conventional linguistic, sociocultural, actional/rhetorical, and strategic resources for creating new patterns, practices, and meanings;
- to develop learners' critical understanding of how their communicative activities are historically, politically, and socially located and produced so that they may act responsibly and creatively in achieving their own individually-created personal goals as well as larger mutually-constructed social goals.

Furthermore, in developing learners' translingual and transcultural competence, the norm used in these classrooms to judge learners' performances is not the 'native speaker' of the target language. The norm, instead, is the bilingual or multilingual multi-contextual communicator considered to be expert in those communicative activities in which learners aspire to be competent (Hall, Cheng & Carlson, 2006). It is expected that in achieving these goals learners will have developed the ability to see from multiple perspectives, to be flexible in their thinking, to direct their own learning, to solve problems creatively, and, ultimately, to develop new ways of becoming involved in their worlds (Hall, 2003; Kramsch, 1993,1998; Valdes, 1998).

The CALPER Heritage Language Project

The mix of learners with widely varying linguistic and cultural skills, knowledge and experiences and the transformed goal to produce learners with translinguistic and transcultural competence have created unique pedagogical challenges in university-level language classrooms. There is, however, a documented shortage of qualified teachers – and especially LCLT teachers - with capabilities for meeting them (MLA, 2007). The CALPER *Teaching Domestic and Heritage Language Learners in LCTL Classrooms* project <http://calper.la.psu.edu/heritage.php> is a partial response to this need. Its objective is to create multimedia professional development materials for novice LCTL teachers. The multimedia case studies will be designed to bring to the

surface the unique linguistic and cultural instructional environments that comprise LCTL classrooms, and the strategic ways in which highly effective LCTL teachers support the development of translingual and transcultural competence in both domestic and heritage language students. Case studies will be made of two languages – Korean and Arabic - and contain digitally recorded *classroom instructional episodes* (selected 2-3 minute video clips) supplemented with *teacher commentary* (in English) that link the episodes to particular pedagogical objectives, and capture how the teachers adapt their interactional strategies, instructional activities, and curricular resources to meet the linguistic, cultural and pedagogical needs of both heritage and domestic language learners. Additional *teacher commentary* (selected 2-3 minute video clips) will be drawn from digitally recorded semi-structured interviews (in English) with teachers about their own linguistic and cultural backgrounds as heritage or domestic language speakers, their experiences teaching both groups of learners and the special pedagogical conditions created by their presence in the same classroom. Particular attention will be paid to teachers’ descriptions of the specific instructional and other strategies they use to create effectual learning communities based on the goal of promoting the development of learners’ translingual and transcultural competence. Additionally, each case study will contain digitally recorded *student commentary* (selected 2-3 minute video clips in English) on the particular linguistic, cultural and pedagogical challenges they face as domestic and heritage domestic language learners, the kinds of peer intercultural relationships such mixed classes afford, and the role these relationships play in their classroom language learning experiences.

Designed as interactive professional development materials for LCTLs teachers, the multimedia case studies will bring users into the minds and classrooms of LCTL teachers and their students, and expose, in their own actions and words, not only the complexities of these unique language learning environments but also provide richly detailed examples of effective instructional practices that support the development of translingual and transcultural competence for all LCTL students.

References

Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (2000). Multiliteracies: The beginnings of an idea. In Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (Eds.), Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures. (pp. 3-8). London: Routledge.

- Hall, J.K. (2003). Teaching and researching language and culture. London: Pearson.
- Hall, J. K., Cheng, A., & Carlson, M. (2006). Reconceptualizing multicompetence as a theory of language knowledge. Applied Linguistics, 27 (2):220-240.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1973). Explorations in the functions of language. London: Edward Arnold.
- Kramersch, C. (1993). Context and culture in language teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kramersch, C. (1995). The cultural component of language teaching. Language, Culture and Curriculum, 8(12), 83-92.
- MLA, (2007). Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World
- New London Group (1996). Pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. Harvard Educational Review 66 (1), 66-92.
- Valdez, G. (2005). Bilingualism, heritage language learners, and SLA research: Opportunities lost or seized? The Modern Language Journal, 89 (3), 410-426.
- Valdes, G. (1998). The construct of the near-native speaker in the foreign language profession: Perspectives on ideologies about language. ADFL Bulletin (29)3, 4-8.
- Welles, E. (2004). Foreign Language Enrollments in United States Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 2002. ADFL Bulletin 35, 2-3: 7-26.
- Wiley, D. (2004). Collaborative planning for meeting national needs in the less commonly taught languages: Defining criteria for priorities in the languages of the world regions. e-LCTL Initiative: Michigan State University:

The Center for Advanced Language Proficiency Education and Research (CALPER) at the Pennsylvania State University is one of 15 National Language Resource Centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education (CFDA 84.229 P229A060003).