

(UN)NATURAL BRIDGES, (UN)SAFE SPACES:
A CRITICAL QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SPANISH AS A FOREIGN
LANGUAGE EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF HERITAGE LANGUAGE
LEARNERS IN MIXED CLASSROOMS

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by
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(UN)NATURAL BRIDGES, (UN)SAFE SPACES: A CRITICAL QUALITATIVE
STUDY OF SPANISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATORS'
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CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT

Chicana feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa has been an integral part of research on hybrid identities and consciousness. In an increasingly multicultural and multilingual school system, educators of Spanish as a foreign language are faced with a different audience to the ones they were trained to teach: students who identified as heritage language learners, for whom the Spanish language is part of their community life and their cultural identity. This critical qualitative study aimed to gather information on perceptions, beliefs, and instructional practices as expressed by several teachers of Spanish in a Midwestern school district.

Informed by Anzaldúa's teorías of conocimiento and the Coyolxauhqui process of dismembering and (re)membering identities, this critical research explored teachers' perceptions and practices when students come from a Latinx backgrounds and therefore, belong to a linguistic community that constitutes the educators' subject matter. By analyzing linguistic guidelines in the field of foreign language education and engaging in conversations with educators, this research examined questions of representation, linguistic and cultural prescriptivism, and the impact of colonizing theories of languages and cultures on heritage language students.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies have examined a dissertation titled “(Un)natural Bridges, (Un)safe Spaces: A Critical Qualitative Study of Spanish as a Foreign Language Educators’ Perceptions of Heritage Language Learners in Mixed Classrooms,” presented by Marta Silva, candidate for the Doctor of Education degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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A mis estudiantes de herencia

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PERSONAL PATH TO CONOCIMIENTO

1997 arretrato

you drop the world and jump an ocean
you bring pañuelos, books, candles
an imperial language that extended donde no sale el sol
your seat is in front of dark eyes that tell stories of crossing
while you
you think you know
you put your immaculate words next to scratches
that sound like tajin and honey
your heroes are their slayers
you remain shaken
silence

nepantla

you travel west
discover minds like yours
your new stars bring words that exist in-between
spaces where water y aceite mix seamlessly
you learn surrounded by pillars that remind you of home
you keep the words of your ancestors covered in blood
and you start wiping the mess you left behind

Coatlícuē ...depths of despair

you fall into the abyss

the monstrous disease that does not mean anything but death
holds your own son captive
for days, weeks, months of breathing inward
of burning ground, of shaking hope, of nothingness
you both go down holding hands
you learn the labels for poisons that
one day will allow your child and your soul to ring the bell of esperanza
but you've been warned

Compromiso

You return to the pages, the printed letters that
build bridges towards artificial sanity, you devote your heart
to the words, you listen to monologues that reminds us of a future
you walk through passages among green branches and youth
you decide to cross the shaking puente over a cenote full of rage

Putting the Coyolxauhqui together

Un pueblo que no es tu pueblo te da la bienvenida,
You're once more an immigrant within a world of migrants
refugees
settlers
communities that offer a safe space of cuentos,
tamales, and elote bañado en queso cotija that is not yours
but tastes like a home
You owe them

You grow with them

You look for them in your dreams

while distancing the soul from the collective arrogance of your own household

it hurts

the division

you are thrown to a painful nepantla

you choose to stay

the blow-up

the story is not carved in stone

it moves, it preserves its myths and lets go of knowledge

your new self threatens to leave your clean letters behind

you think you have grown to be smaller

and then, in gatherings, when the mouths throw words as daggers

you feel powerless

the crack has opened again, the world that meant the world yesterday,

today reaches zero

you extend your fingers to them

and they are always there. They believe they need your voice

but you feed of their genius

They are everything

and they have never been broken

la naguala ... shifting realities

it's been six years

the bridges below held you safe
your kid did not fall again
the fear rests comfortably somewhere in your dreams
you shifted your attention to all the pages you could write
to the women who helped you find the right ink
the visible one
to the community that trusted your presence
you focused on your senses and found a rock inside
you engaged with your roots
every
single
day
from afar
you became the support you needed
and you complete a path
to a gate
to a natural bridge
to a safe space
you're here

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Borderlands: Background and Context

It is Spring 2022, and a global pandemic has publicly displayed the impossible idea of fixed, unsurmountable borders. A virus, COVID-19, has spread throughout the world and demonstrated how we live in a space of constant migration. When deaths to coronavirus approach one million only in the United States, a second crisis in Eastern Europe shakes the world with images of migration: the war on Ukraine. Stories of millions of Ukrainians leaving their country to find refuge in nearby communities have shaken the conscious of Americans. Meanwhile, a steady immigration flow from Mexico and Central America is constantly portrayed as an invasion of non-abiding law mobs. The narratives of migration change depending on racial and socioeconomic factors.

In this space of vague borders, Chicana scholar Gloria Anzaldúa, who lived physically and metaphorically an existence in a complex space (borderlands), provides a philosophical framework rooted in concepts of hybrid identities and consciousness that fits the current state of instability that has impacted educators and students across the globe in the last two years. Early attempts of confinement to control the spread of this deadly virus placed many of us, educators of students from Latinx backgrounds, in a position of continuous adjustment to what it means to operate remotely, to feel inadequate at the task that defined us, and to realize that the academic cultural distance that used to separate us from our students turned into a physical barrier. Many of us, teachers, lost connection with students who already inhabited their own borderlands. Educators experienced the weight of *des(conocimiento)*, the rupture of relationships, and entered a state of *nepantla* to reflect on personal and academic experiences in

classes where students differed linguistically, culturally, and social-emotionally from what the dominant narrative labeled the “norm.” Anzaldúa expressed situations of constant physical and emotional movement in her poem “Nopalitos”:

I left and have been gone a long time.

I keep leaving and when I am home

they remember no one but me had ever left.

I listen to the *grillos* more intently

than I do their *regaños*.

I have more languages than they,

am aware of every root of my pueblo;

they, my people, are not.

They are the living, sleeping roots. (1987, p. 135)

In this steady waves of human motion, international migration became a crucial matter in our globalized world. Per the International Organization for Migration (Macauliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021), an estimated 232 million migrants live outside their country of birth. Northern America, which, for the purposes of the IOM’s research, consists exclusively of the United States and Canada, is the destination for most of the migrants traveling through the corridor of Central America, which for the above-mentioned purpose, also includes Mexico. The United States is currently home to the largest number of international migrants of any single country in the world. In 2017, there were a record 44.4 million immigrants, making up 13.6% of the nation’s population (Radford & Noe-Bustamante, 2019). According to the same source, the “U.S.-born children of immigrants (second-generation Americans) make up another 12.0% of the nation’s population. By 2050, these two groups could account for 19% and 18% of the population, respectively.” The fact that educators in the United

States teach in increasingly multicultural and multilingual classrooms presents unique academic and sociological opportunities.

However, these opportunities have been perceived as challenges when Spanish as foreign language (SFL) educators are faced with a student population who drastically differs from their own socio-cultural identities, their experiences as language learners, and their pedagogical training as teachers of SFL. As scholar Gloria Anzaldúa stated, when Latinx students internalize sentiments of psychological struggle between their community and societal existences, they “feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one” (1987, p. 85). Although most U.S. schools express, in their mission statements, attitudes of welcoming multicultural students into their classrooms, a hidden wall is frequently built between home culture and language and school environment (Hollins, 2015).

The distance between both aspects has activated a crucial breach in the development of multicultural students’ identities and access to academic success. As indicated in extensive literature, exposing students to their heritage language and culture education in their country of residence supports the development of positive cultural identities (Nomura & Caidi, 2013) and strengthens overall academic skills development (Duff, 2008). Moreover, according to bilingual-education scholar Ofelia García, perceptions of multilingual students from an outsider point of view tend to categorize languages and learners according to stigmatizing labels. Such classifications are based on Eurocentric colonizing theories that have described language as an “autonomous whole, where one whole can be added to another whole” instead of “a system of complex and dynamic language practices in which speakers engage to make meaning, then named languages” (2019, p. 152).

Cihuatlyotl, Woman Alone: The Statement of the Problem

In her poem “Cihuatlyotl, Woman Alone,” Anzaldúa assumed a contradictory binary position that allowed her to define herself as an individual and community being. Although she identified with Cihuatlyotl, a precolonial Mexican Indian creatrix figure that represents the collective, ethnic features of her identity, she also defined herself according to her own binary struggles like sexuality and culture, between her Chicano and Anglo communities. This contradictory positionality also impacts our current multicultural classrooms, where educators of students from Latinx backgrounds tend to view multilingualism as divisive and a source of social dilemmas (Lee & Oxelson, 2006).

In my professional experience as a secondary school teacher of Spanish as a foreign language in institutions that serve students from a Latinx background, I witnessed and documented a continuous occurrence of academic failure and a problematic heavy use of disciplinary punishments directed towards the Spanish Heritage language learners (HLLs) community among other populations of color. This educational and behavioral crisis is reflected by data showing how the Latinx community experiences a large number of disciplinary referrals, in-school and out-of-school suspensions, overall low grades, and lack of enrollment in advanced science and mathematics courses (Dolan, 2009).

According to the Pew Research Center (Schaeffer, 2021), among all pre-K through 12th grade public school students, a record 27% identified as Hispanic during the 2017-2018 school year. Latinx youth represents approximately 18.1% of the total US high school population (Dolan, 2009). In some of this nation’s largest urban areas, the proportion of Latinx students is as high as 71% in Los Angeles, 46% in Dade County, Florida, 34% in New York City, and 33% in Chicago (Stearns & Watanabe,

2002). The problem addressed in this study relates to the fact that, despite their growing numbers, Latinx student populations continue to face significant obstructions to their academic success. In 2019, the high school dropout rate among Latinx youth was 7.7 % (NCES, 2021), which is nearly double as high as it is among white youths (4.1%). Interestingly, the dropout rate among Latinx youths is driven by the foreign born: 16.7% of foreign-born Latinxs are high school dropouts, compared with 5.9% of native-born Latinx youth who leave school.

In the context of the United States, the term heritage language learners refers to “community languages,” i.e., the languages spoken by communities originating in migration. This term was originally used in education to differentiate heritage languages from the other European languages taught in mainstream school curriculum (Kagan et al., 2017). Montrul describes heritage language learners to “the children of families who speak an ethnolinguistically minority language” (2010). Since teachers play an influential role in shaping students’ attitudes towards the maintenance of their heritage language (Corson, 2000; Lee & Oxelson, 2006; Nieto, 2017), there are indicators suggesting that a factor contributing to academic failure is linked to educators’ failure to differentiate for non-mainstream language students and their disregard of heritage language students’ ties to their native cultures and languages. Correspondingly, a lesser but relevant body of literature is emerging documenting the experiences of successful Latinx students (Antrop-González et al., 2005; Conchas, 2006). Corroborating the relevant role of educators, much of this research connects student success with effective teachers who, apart from showing features of educational excellence, utilize culturally sustaining practices in their classrooms.

Supporting this line of thought, Anzaldúa stressed the intimate relationship between language and identity, its struggles and compensations, the criticism from

purist scholars and communities from the dominant arena against the use of a hybrid language, Spanish and English (and their variations) not following “the laws of language” (1987, p. 12) and at the same time, the potentials to adjust to a variety of registers and audiences. She pushed the idea of hybridity or *mestizaje* (p. 6) on language as well as on identity, the possibility to address various sides of the self-based on our relationship to the other(s) and the context that surrounds our lives. These ideas that were central to her masterpiece, *Borderlands / La Frontera* (1987), have been translated to the field of bilingualism by scholar Ofelia García, who is a fierce advocate for translanguaging practices in the classroom to leverage students’ linguistic repertoires for learning (García et al., 2017).

In secondary schools, due to a generalized lack of programs oriented towards the acquisition and maintenance of heritage languages and cultures, there has been a widespread impact grounded in the assimilationist Eurocentric frameworks that constitute the guidelines of foreign languages programs in this country. As a result, heritage language learners are almost always enrolled in 6-12 foreign language (FL) courses, where they expressed feelings of inadequacy and neglect (Edstrom, 2007; Leeman, 2018).

Typically, students with no previous formal coursework in an international language are assigned to introductory language courses, i.e., Spanish 1 or Spanish 2. Sometimes, students are referred by their SFL teachers to be placed in higher level courses, i.e., Spanish 3 or 4, which has proved ineffective since HL students’ linguistic abilities do not necessarily match the expectations of academically advanced students (Potowski, 2001) who, on the other hand, have learned specific structures and strategies that ensure their academic success.

However, most secondary students in the U.S. school system are expected to fulfill a foreign language requirement, which is usually 1 or 2 years of FL instruction to meet graduation requisites. Consequently, unless schools offer courses for heritage language students specifically, most HL students end up in what has been described as mixed classrooms, i.e., classes designed for monolingual students, but shared by HL students (M. Carreira, 2016). Due to this combination of proficiencies and abilities, researchers started efforts to identify the linguistic differences between HL and SFL students (Blake & Zyzik, 2003; Caldwell-Harris, 2015; Edstrom, 2007; Gunderson, 2017; Kondo-Brown, 2005), but such ventures still seem to be in their early stages. For instance, Caldwell-Harris's (2015) article, "Emotionally differences between a native and foreign language: implications for everyday life," although not directed specifically towards education, addressed a crucial aspect for language learners: how heritage language speakers experienced a much higher level of emotionality than those students who were learning Spanish as a foreign language, and who, therefore, exhibited a noticeable emotional distance towards the subject area. In the field of heritage education, Leeman and Serafini (2016) described action research grounded in the conceptual framework of the relationship between identity and language, which addressed the "marginalization of HL and bilingual speakers in 'foreign language' instruction" (p.482).

Foreign language instruction at the middle and high school levels in the United States is generally directed towards monolingual English-speaking, college-bound students with little or no previous exposure to another language (Boyd, 2000; Valdes et al., 2014). In these courses, HLL's instruction is frequently not differentiated by cultural nor linguistic backgrounds (Valdés, 2015), which favors SFL learners (Henshaw, 2015). Moreover, HLLs' linguistic skills are often criticized as lacking

“correctness” or not following a standardized linguistic and cultural version of the reality reflected by textbooks and other instructional resources. HLLs’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds are broadly ignored or considered an obstacle by SFL instructors who fail to acknowledge their responsibility in supporting their students’ heritage languages and cultures maintenance (Gkaintartzi & Tsokalidou, 2011).

Research shows that the language learning behaviors and needs of HL learners are distinctly different from those of traditional FL students (Bowles, 2011; Caldwell-Harris, 2015; Kondo-Brown, 2005; Montrul, 2012; Montrul et al., 2008; Reynolds et al., 2009). The studies of Bowles (2011) and Correa (2011) suggested that HL learners’ knowledge is implicit in nature, since these students acquired language naturalistically in early childhood, while FL students rely on explicit knowledge and metalinguistic awareness. Zyzik (2016) proposed a prototype model of the HL learner as a way of understanding its heterogeneous population, which placed this group of students “at a disadvantage when exposed to materials that are intended to teach grammar to L2 learners” (p.25). In a study on HL teaching, María Carreira (2016) delineated the need to provide HL learners with a macrobased instruction responsive to HL learner’s linguistic and socioaffective needs. Macrobased teaching is based on the notion that instruction is established “as dictated by function or context” (p.125), which is the opposite direction to that of the L2 micro-based pedagogical practices.

Furthermore, research shows that teachers’ perspectives and implicit philosophies towards diversity influence student achievement (Bustos-Flores, 2001; Lee & Oxelson, 2006). SFL educators’ attitudes and their underlying ideologies concerning bilingualism and cultural diversity are crucial to understanding some of the reasons why (1) HL students are failing academically or dropping their SFL courses; (2) children who speak another language had the potential to become bilingual but

frequently end up as monolingual speakers of English (Nieto, 2009); and (3) SFL teachers don't usually provide students with a culturally and linguistically conscious curriculum in order to challenge and support their linguistic, emotional, and cultural development. A deeper understanding of the HL cultural and academic needs would lead towards a more "fruitful integration of the psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic factors that contribute to the acquisition and maintenance of heritage languages" (Montrul, 2012, p. 125).

Interface: Research Questions

This journey started with a series of *arrebatos*, what Anzaldúa described as "a spiritual hunger (that) rumbles deep in your belly" (2015, p. 122), which was caused by situations that developed in my workplace as well as in my home. Hearing stories from my Latinx students about how their languages and identities had been humiliated, comforting my own children after having been told by their Spanish teachers that their Spanish was not real. Being an immigrant locates you in an unwanted *nepantla* automatically, where there are two options: to assimilate or to follow the Chicana scholar and "question the doctrines claiming to be the only right way to live." I selected the second one and that choice led me to the following central and sub-central questions, in my *búsqueda del conocimiento*, of seeking experiences that gave me purpose, so that after "an arduous struggle in the dark woods, you return bringing new knowledge to share with others in your communities" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 143).

Central Question 1: What are the perceptions of Spanish language (SFL) teachers of Spanish heritage language learners (SHLLs) enrolled in their SFL courses in several Midwestern high schools?

- What are the beliefs of SFL educators about Heritage language acquisition?

Central Question 2: How do the pedagogical beliefs of SFL educators inform their practices in mixed classrooms?

- What instructional practices and strategies are utilized by SFL educators in their mixed classrooms when teaching SHL learners enrolled in their SFL courses?
- How are SFL educators' perceptions towards their SHL students related to their teaching practices?

As a researcher and following Anzaldúa's direction, my research questions allowed the removal of "layers and layers," the categorization of recurring themes, and finally the construction of a visible image. In this sense, my research questions led the investigation towards a detailed understanding of SFL educators' experiences in mixed classrooms, through the application of a set of theoretical frameworks that contextualized educators' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, their perceptions of multiculturalism, their academic formation in the field of foreign language acquisition, and their instructional practices in relation to the theory of culturally sustaining pedagogy.

Re-membering: The Purpose of the Study

Anzaldúa's work on Coyolxauhqui investigated Chicanas as subjects re-membering their indigeneity. This action represented the "struggle to reconstruct oneself and heal the *susto*¹ resulting from wounding traumas" (2015, p. 2). Following this path of re-membering, the purpose of this critical qualitative study was to describe the perceptions and practices of secondary level Spanish as a foreign language

¹ *Susto*: ritualistic process where the soul leaves the body. It can be caused by an impact of, "fright, trauma, or a disturbing event on the human body spirit, as well as a living universe that can be offended or that is so powerful that it overtakes a human being with vulnerable life force" (Gonzales, 2012, p. 203).

educator towards Spanish heritage language learners enrolled in their mixed classrooms in a Midwestern school district. This research examined how SFL educators experienced instruction in classrooms where cultural and linguistic contrasting educational approaches existed. Furthermore, this research explored SFL teachers' practices in a heterogeneous learning environment.

An objective of this study was to define recommendations in the field of Spanish as a foreign language acquisition teacher formation. These recommendations aligned with what Anzaldúa described as “the act of calling back those pieces of the self/soul that have been dispersed or lost, the act of mourning the losses that haunt us” (2015, p. 2). Based on Patton’s (2015) definition of unit of analysis, the current research focused on SFL educators’ perceptions of HLLs and their experiences in mixed-classroom instruction. A case study design featured individual teacher’s stories about their own experiences in a specific context of mixed classrooms. Many elements from case study approaches (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were pertinent to my investigation since they allowed for in-depth examination of participants’ critical reflections across several settings and in multiple modes in order to include a process of linking the data to the propositions and criteria for interpreting results.

This analysis was applied to the promotion of future designing and implementing of instructional and pre-service programs addressing crucial instructional requisites for educators of Spanish as a foreign language. The present study involved qualitative data collection and its corresponding analysis in response to the abovementioned research questions as a means to provide an in-depth understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Gates, Bridges, and (Un)safe Spaces: Methodology

Although in the beginnings of this journey, my scientific brain was directing me towards quantitative studies, the appearance of Anzaldúa in my studies unlocked the field of qualitative research, as stories that enabled me to “uncover and understand what lies behind a phenomenon about which little is yet known” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 19). In this study, I have drawn from various qualitative critical research designs to uncover the layers that conceal teachers’ perceptions of students who do not share their same linguistic and cultural backgrounds, with the purpose of understanding what lies behind a phenomenon of educational neglect and fears which has not been investigated in depth. My research began with assumptions and a biased worldview based on my theoretical frameworks of choice, but by using this method of inquiry, I could place emphasis on the process of “the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37).

This methodology inspired by the freedoms and respect found in Anzaldúa’s own research, allowed me to be aware of the process without rushing to establish outcomes. My conclusion chapter aligned the seven stages of Anzaldúa’s path to *conocimiento* with my own journey towards the careful work of studying narratives, listening to teachers’ voices, and placing their messages on multiple tables and visual representations to ensure a clear understanding of the answers to both research questions and their sub-questions without imposing pre-assumptions to the final outcomes.

As it will be described in detail in Chapter 3, the sources of this research were a series of nine documents gathered by the American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages along with an interpretation of the five major areas of FL instruction—

Communications, Culture, Comparisons, Connections, and Communities. The second part of the inquiry consisted of listening to the voices of seven teachers who engaged in one semi-structured interview, a focus group, and a written response to a follow-up question. The purpose of this data collection was to have a deeper understanding of the commonalities and differences these teachers expressed regarding their own experiences with heritage language students.

Interviews were held over Zoom due to the threat of COVID19, which in the end, made scheduling them easier since I did not have to travel to different schools after my workday. Zoom also provided its own recoding capability, which I used in conjunction with my iPhone voice recording app and a computer software, TapMedia, Since the examination of all interviews was so exhaustive, ensuring the recording of each session was of extreme relevance. The app Descript was used as a support for the transcription process, and all notes were part of the fieldwork to analyze.

Following the data collection and the transcription of interviews and focus group, I extracted information from each document and created a codebook based on the themes that started to emerge. Some of the themes overlapped the themes extracted from the document reports and some others differ, although there was a clear connection between most of the interpretive codes.

Overview of Dissertation Chapters

Following this introductory chapter, the theoretical framework for this research is presented in depth in Chapter 2. The areas of inquiry that are applicable to this study are: Borderland theory, Social Identity theory, perceptions of multiculturalism, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies, and Raciolinguistics. In my Chapter 3, a review of the literature developed over the topics of conceptualization of curriculum in foreign language education, heritage language education, diversity within the HLL

communities, experiences of HLLs in mixed classrooms, foreign language teachers' perceptions of HLLs, and a comparison between HL programs and HLLs needs.

Chapter 4 describes my methodology including the processes of data collection and analysis, while elaborating on themes related to my researcher positioning regarding questions of weaknesses, biases, and credibility. Chapter 5 is the first part of my data analysis and comprises the documents reports. I decided to divide my data examination into two chapters to enhance their comprehension and to ensure that the outcomes extracted from the documents that constitute the basis for our current foreign language education were independent from the voices of the teachers, who, in the end, are the ones making those messages have a space in the classrooms. Chapter 6 included the second part of the data analysis, specifically interviews and focus group. Finally, in Chapter 7, I shared my conclusions through an intellectual and emotional journey towards *conocimiento*. I also shared this study's implications for future research and training of teachers of Spanish as a foreign language.

CHAPTER 2

NEPANTLA: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The first chapter of this research explained the current experiences of heritage language students in Spanish as a foreign language courses, and the disparities between what educators are trained to teach in these classes and the reality they encounter. The situation of mixed classrooms would have its advantages if teachers of foreign languages received appropriate training in language ideologies and culturally sustaining practices that would ensure that language studies was not limited to pure applied linguistics, and the national standards created for this purpose was not merely based on acquisition of linguistic efficiency and technical mastery.

In this environment, heritage language students become disruptions in the normative development of foreign language courses. This research has looked at teachers of Spanish as FL since they are the implementors of such standards and proficiency expectations. I have chosen the following theoretical frameworks as lenses to interpret the data I collected through documents and conversations with teachers. Anzaldúa's vision on teaching, learning, engaging in interviews, interpreting the reality that exists and the one that comes from within, from our own cenotes, has been instrumental to hold the following frameworks together. Her understanding of the worlds we inhabit has impacted not only the interpretation of data but also the structural construction of this study. Therefore, each theoretical framework has been connected to an Anzaldúa's concept or group of concepts, forming an interconnected web of philosophies that work together creating a unique perception of the subject of this study.

A Crossroads: Borderlands Theory

As part of an interdisciplinary research project integrating educational theories grounded in the fields of curriculum and instruction, psychology, sociology, and linguistics, and Latinx Studies, specifically the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, this research took place in a space of *nepantla*, an area of questioning our own perceptions of literacy, culture, and education; a borderland theorizing territory that did not allow the academic authority of “white men and women solely to occupy” (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. 136) the rules of discourse and theory. This overarching umbrella I chose to develop my research was deeply rooted in Anzaldúa’s concept of “thinking subject” from the perspective of an immigrant, dweller of a diverse range of borderlands, and educator. This research took place from the positionality of this thinking subject, who, in Anzaldúa’s (1990) words:

It means being in alien territory and suspicious of the laws and walls. It means being concerned about the ways knowledges are invented. It means continually challenging institutionalized discourses. It means being suspicious of the dominant culture’s interpretation of “our” experience, of the way they “read” us. It means being what Judy Baca terms “internal exiles.” (p. 136)

The field of heritage language education gained special attention from scholars, policy makers, administrators, and educators at the beginning of the 21-st century, although the occurrence of heritage language instruction has been present for a long time in the United States (Brinton et al., 2017; Roca, 2016). This area of research has been positively impacted by the creation of educational initiatives such as the National Heritage Language Resource Center, the Heritage Language Journal, the Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages at the Center for Applied Linguistics, and conferences and seminars dedicated to address its corresponding matters. At the same time, journal articles, books, and dissertations have been developing in the last decades (Gunderson, 2017; Henshaw, 2015).

Nevertheless, most of the studies and workshops offered in the educational arena corresponded to the higher education scene, such as Carreira and Kagan's (2011) article, "The Results of the National Heritage Language Survey," which analyzed the responses of 1,732 university HL students on topics on language proficiency, language usage, personal attitudes towards their HL and goals, and other demographic information.

The topics integrated in this study combined research on Spanish as a foreign language teachers' (1) demographic information and its possible influence on their perspectives of language acquisition, (2) SFL teachers' educational background, and (3) SFL teachers' experiences in a mixed classroom, where SHL and non-SHL students are learning together. These topics are linked to a number of recent reports that have examined different aspects of HL and L2 learning and teaching, including teachers and students' perspectives on SHL instruction (Beaudrie, 2015); possible HL and L2 students' academic collaborations (Blake & Zyzik, 2003; Bowles, 2011; Edstrom, 2007); linguistic and learning differences and similarities between L2 and HL learners (Lynch, 2008; Montrul, 2010; Montrul & Perpinan, 2011); and experiences of HLLs in mixed classrooms (Caidi & Dali, 2015; Zyzik, 2016).

However, all these major studies that are key references in the HL education field examined experiences and perspectives of college students and/or instructors. In this sense, there is a noticeable gap in the area of elementary and secondary school heritage language education, which corresponds to the crucial time period of adolescence and identity formation (Oh & Fuligni, 2010). Taking all this background information into account, I proposed the following theoretical lenses to analyze perspectives and practices of educators of Spanish in secondary school settings towards those students who may self-identify as heritage language speakers.

Nos / Otras: Social Identity Theory

I have a term that is called nos-otras, and I put a dash between the nos and otras. The nos is the subject 'we,' that is the people who were in power and the colonized others. The otras is the 'other,' the colonized group. Then there is also the dash, the divide between us. However, what is happening, after years of colonization, is that all of the divides disappear a little bit because the colonizer, in his or her interaction with the colonized takes on a lot of their attributes. And, of course, the person who is colonizing leaks into our stuff. So, we are neither one nor the other; we are really both. There is not a pure other; there is not a pure subject and not a pure object. We are implicated in each other's lives. (Anzaldúa, 1999a, p. 243)

Below the overarching framework of Anzaldúa's conceptualization of otherness, the author introduced the concepts of who's *us* and who's *other*, or what the scholar calls nos / otras (Anzaldúa, 2015). In an interview with feminist scholar Reuman, Anzaldúa explained the kind of mestiza she was writing for: "What I'm trying to articulate is a kind of a mestizaje, a nos/otras, the nos is us/we/me/the subject; the otras is them/they/the object, and in nos/otras we are them they are us and we're contaminated by" (Reuman & Anzaldúa, 2000, p. 11). That tension between the individual and the collective identity related to how educators' identity is deeply rooted in their background and community experiences, which implied having to perform a conscious uncomfortable act of self-criticism and exploration in order to follow a path towards this conceptualization of a culturally shared space between students and teachers from different backgrounds and that usually are linked to dominant vs minoritized cultures is some sort of cross-contamination.

In order to clearly appreciate the negative impact of holding on to what I denominated "our identity certainties," i.e., those perceptions that we consider to be common truths, the first under Anzaldúa's frame of reference is Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory (1979), which examined three cognitive processes relevant to the individual being part of an *in-group*, or an *out-group*. This theory of social psychology of intergroup relations states that belonging to a certain group depends

upon specific circumstances, which are usually linked to prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory behaviors related to such perceived group membership. In a more recent book on social identity and intergroup relations, Tajfel defined social identity as “that part of the individuals’ self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (p.2).

In this sense, since most Spanish language instructors at high school level in the United States are middle-class Anglo-European females who learned Spanish in formal academic settings, there is a pre-existing disconnect between their perception of what linguistic and cultural learnings of Spanish should look like and what their heritage language speakers bring to the classroom setting due to their diverse cultural and experiential backgrounds (Jiménez Pérez et al., 2010; Linwood, 2017; Potowski, 2001). Tajfel and Turner (1979) stated that groups give individuals a sense of social identity, a sense of belonging in a larger social world. To increase our sense of self-identity, there is a tendency to divide the world between “them” and “us” based through a process of social categorization. The theorists label this classification as *in-group* and *out-group*.

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) asserted that there is a predisposition in the in-group to discriminate and hold prejudice views against the out-group. For example, stereotyping is based on a normal cognitive process of grouping features together and then, exaggerate the differences between groups and the similarities in the in-group. My research showed that language teachers behave differently towards L2 and HL students and set academic and disciplinary expectations that differ from one another without any specific argument.

In this sense, L2 or non-heritage students were part of the in-group since educators and L2 students shared similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and the out-group would correspond to heritage language learners, whose characteristics were more heterogeneous and distant than those of the in-group. In another study published on the same year, Turner, Brown, & Tafjel (1979) reached the conclusion that “in-group bias represents a striving for positively valued distinctiveness for one's own group” (p.8), which applied to SFL education established a degree of “threat” posed by members of the out-group. Anzaldúa, in her essay “(Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe spaces,” defined her new tribalism in these terms: “Though most people self-define by what they exclude, we define who we are by what we include” (2002, p. 245). Moreover, the Chicana author stressed the importance of leaving the ingroup, which she labeled “home”: “Staying ‘home’ and not venturing out from our own group comes from woundedness and stagnates our growth” (p. 246).

Molina, Tropp, and Goode (2016) expanded their analysis of social identity theory (SIT) and social dominance theory (SDT) by including the outgroup perspective within intergroup relations investigations. The authors examined how people from different backgrounds and groups interact with one another and concluded that it is crucial to observe the relations between dominant and subordinate groups “from the point of view of the disadvantaged and the privileged” (p.122). Applied to the field of foreign language acquisition, we consider the non-heritage educator and students as privileged members of the same ingroup, and the heritage language students are the “disadvantaged.” This characterization aligned with the linguistic study of prestige and stigmatized language uses and the racialization of the individuals who employ these languages.

The relevance of this theory from the field of psychology along with Anzaldúa's concept of *nos / otras* lays, from my perspective, on the fact that even though foreign language teachers shared a common linguistic space with their heritage language speakers, there was usually unresolved conflict between the two. This conflict arose from unconscious rooting in our own 'homes and inability or unwillingness to "open the gate to the stranger, within and without" (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 246). Along these lines, studies highlighted the importance of teachers' perceptions and practices on HL students' success in the classroom (Leeman et al., 2011; Moore, 2019; Phinney et al., 2001; Potowski, 2001). These perceptions and practices reflect our own "homes" and borders, continuing the Chicana scholar's terminology.

For instance, researchers Lacorte and Canabel (2003) published a study that examined classroom interaction between native and non-native instructors and HL students in higher education. The paper focused on three areas: (a) the sociocultural backgrounds of both HL learners and native and non-native instructors; (b) the pedagogical conditions of the language classrooms with HL students; and (c) the affective dimensions of the relationship between instructors and HL students. One of the conclusions from this study is that "the lack of shared knowledge could have a negative effect on the communication between teacher and heritage learners, if teachers do not sufficiently consider the particular linguistic and cultural characteristics of these students" (p. 118). Teachers and students in this study belonged to different groups, meaning that teachers did not share cultural nor identity backgrounds with their heritage language students, which was a crucial deter for their cultural communication.

According to the main originators of the social identity theory (Turner et al., 1979) ingroup favoritism and bias have been central emphases of experimentation on

intergroup behavior. The researcher described ingroup favoritism as a descriptive concept that referred to “any tendency to favour the ingroup over the outgroup, in behaviour, attitudes, preferences or perception” (p. 187). In our society, unfortunately we have tragic examples such as constant incidents of police brutality against persons of color as opposed to white individuals. In the school settings, there is ample research that has documented how students from minoritized communities are disciplined more harshly and for lesser causes than their white peers by mostly white administrators and teachers (E. W. Morris & Perry, 2016; P. A. Noguera, 2003; Rubin et al., 2009).

Generally, the school system research shows that students from minoritized communities are held to lower academic standards, subjected to harsher disciplinary consequences, and taught in ways that overlook or vilifies their cultural and linguistic resources (Boser et al., 2014). According to Ladson-Billings et al. (2013), the average “white 13-year-old reads at a higher level and performs better in math than the average Black or Latino 17-year-old. 3 Similar gaps exist for other important outcomes, such as rates of high school and college graduation” (p. 2). The so-called “opportunity gap” appears to be deeply related to the expectations the *ingroup*—mostly white middle-class female teachers and white middle-class male administrators—fosters for minoritized communities.

Mestiza Consciousness: Perceptions of Multiculturalism

Anzaldúa’s mestiza consciousness included multiples forms of dualistic self-awareness as responses to the large range of sources of power that oppressed minoritized individuals: women, queers, Latinxs. This double-consciousness embodied what the Chicana feminist characterized as a “Shadow-Beast that refuses to take orders from outside authorities . . . that hates constraints of any kind, even those self-

imposed” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 38). Outside impositions have been precisely the sources of a continued social and educational inequality rooted in our schools.

A second theoretical framework utilized for my research focused on educators’ perceptions of multiculturalism, from a pluralistic viewpoint to an assimilationist one. Berry (2011) focused on multidimensional culturally plural societies and distinguished between two models: “the mainstream-minority view is that cultural pluralism is a problem and should be reduced, even eliminated; the multicultural view is that cultural pluralism is a resource, and inclusiveness should be nurtured with supportive policies and programmes” (p. 23). Foreign language educators’ cultural attitudes were defined as pluralistic when:

(1) they understood that heritage language learners belonged to a considerably heterogeneous group depending on a series of factors, such as their family origins, their place of birth, their self-identification, their age at the time of the immigration, languages spoken in the family, or with siblings, formal education in the HL, frequency of use, and proficiency (Meisel, 2014; Montrul et al., 2008; Polinsky & Kagan, 2007; Scontras et al., 2015);

(2) were willing to help them maintain their cultural heritage, (Nieto, 2017; Valdes et al., 2014);

(3) had knowledge about their SHL students’ specific cultural backgrounds; and

(4) adapted their teaching to the specific needs of their SHL students, even if they are in a mixed classroom with SFL students (Kondo-Brown, 2005).

SFL educators’ cultural attitudes were defined as assimilationist when:

(1) they believed that all SHL students share identical characteristics,

(2) they demanded that SHL students to learn “correct” Spanish or the prestige variation of the Spanish language (Carreira & Beeman, 2014);

(3) they showed reluctance to acknowledge SHL students’ cultural backgrounds, or completely the opposite, ignorance of their multicultural realities (Leeman, 2015); and

(4) they held a conviction that SHL students should produce the same type of learning (assignments, readings, quizzes, oral productions, etc.) as SFL learners (Potowski & Carreira, 2004).

In this sense, pluralist educators perceive SHL students with a favorable attitude and are aware that they need to differentiate their instruction to reach and challenge them academically. On the contrary, assimilationist teachers often see SHL students as obstacles to the general development of the class and believe that they need to adapt to the SFL learners without interrupting the course of instruction. The perspective of this research is a pluralistic one that aligns with Berry’s (2011) idea of *social solidarity* among culturally diverse individuals and the fact that, on the researcher’s own words: “All contemporary societies are now culturally plural; no society is made up of people having one culture, one language, and one identity” (p. 22).

(Un)natural Bridges, (Un)safe Spaces: Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

More than two decades ago, Gloria Ladson-Billings introduced the term culturally relevant pedagogy. This theoretical framework was a response to what she observed as a “disparity in academic performance and literate competence” (1995) between white and African American students. The effects of this academic discrepancy were perceived in numerous instructional areas: higher dropout rates, suspensions, inclusion in special education programs, and extremely low participation

in advanced courses or gifted programs. Outside the school setting, the socioeconomic scene was equally somber. In the 1990s, one third of all African American families lived below the poverty level, which according to the Economic Policy Institute remained the same in 2010. A study from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development shows the United States to have among the lowest levels of “intergenerational social mobility and one of the highest levels of influence of parental socioeconomic status on students’ achievement and later earnings. The “opportunity gap” that exists across racial and associated class lines is expansive, and it widens as income and wealth inequality continue to rise” (Ladson-Billings et al., 2013, p. 2).

In her search for a comprehensive definition of multiculturalism in the roots of the word culture Gloria Ladson Billings (2004) claimed that “the very human endeavors that may be seen as normal or commonsensical are culturally bounded” (p. 51). Building on the work of Ladson-Billings, scholars such as Geneva Gay and Etta Hollins developed frameworks with a stronger focus on teachers’ strategies and practices. The term “culturally responsive teaching” was intended to describe a method of “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2018, p. 31).

Gay (2008) established a framework where explicit exposure and knowledge of students’ diverse backgrounds was imperative to meet their academic and socioemotional needs. The scholar used the analogy of a filter to explain how teachers needed to use the students cultural and experiential lenses so that academic knowledge and skills “are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly” (p. 107). Consequently, teachers needed to ensure

not only student engagement through the use of cultural knowledge, but authentic learning and retaining of academic content and skills. In order to do that, teachers needed to develop their research skills and work frequently outside their comfort zone.

Finally, in his article “Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice,” (2012) Django Paris questioned if the terms “relevant” and “responsive” really reached a strong enough conceptualization of the need of awareness and maintenance of the large number of languages and literacies and other cultural practices by our current multiethnic and multilingual students and communities. Paris stated that relevance and responsiveness “do not guarantee in stance or meaning that one goal of an educational program is to maintain heritage ways and to value cultural and linguistic sharing across difference, to sustain and support bi- and multilingualism and bi- and multiculturalism” (2012, p. 95). Paris and fellow researcher Alim then, embarked in a series of critiques of the previous methodologies, understanding that the United States’ teaching scene is constantly changing, and that pedagogies should teach students to “be linguistically and culturally flexible across multiple language varieties and cultural ways of believing and interacting” (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 96).

Paris (2012) offered this definition of the groundbreaking theory: “culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (p. 95). While the scholars maintain that culturally sustaining practice “has as its explicit goal supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students and teachers.” They also admitted that any pluralistic society such as ours needed to attend to “many and one to remain vibrant.” That is to say, culturally sustaining educators need to ensure that they foster the cultural and linguistic

backgrounds of the students' communities as well as offering a proper platform to access dominant cultural competence, which in the United States, would be, in the case of language, the Dominant American English (DAE).

Consequently, if SFL teachers considered their SHL students' cultural and experiential backgrounds as resources for instruction, they would enhance their learning process, academic engagement, and integration of their cultural potential. In my analysis of teachers' attitudes towards underrepresented Latinx students, I examined if teachers took measures to incorporate differentiated activities and content to their classroom practices to involve HL students and challenge them academically. In this sense, my study included questions on classroom activities, which, in the end, reflected teachers' attitudes and understanding of the heritage language community's needs.

Deslenguadas: Raciolinguistics (Flores, and Rosa 2016)

In her chapter "How to tame a wild tongue," Anzaldúa navigated a historical route of rejection experienced by Chicanos in different aspects of their lives. Since languages happen within historical contexts and consequently languaging is "inseparable from a community and place, and its history" (García, 2017, p. 258), a theoretical framework that focuses on the reality behind the relationship between language and identity is fundamental for my research. Within the school system, language often seems to be disconnected from these historical, racial, and sociopolitical frameworks. By viewing languages as pure standard linguistic forms and creating narrow artificial paths to access knowledge, schools are impeding minoritized populations the possibility of coordinating their actions using their own multilingual and multicultural resources.

Anzaldúa labels Chicanas, who grew up speaking what was considered “poor Spanish” by mainstream scholars, as *deslenguadas*:

Somos los del español deficiente. We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic *mestizaje*, the subject of your *burla*. Because we speak with tongues of fire, we are culturally crucified. Racially, culturally and linguistically *somos huérfanos*—we speak an orphan tongue (1987, p. 80).

A step forward from culturally sustaining pedagogies into language ideologies, educational linguist Nelson Flores and anthropologist Jonathan Rosa have written extensively on the topics of racializing language and languaging race. In their article “Undoing Appropriateness: Raciolinguistic Ideologies and Language Diversity in Education” (2015), the authors critiqued appropriateness-based approaches to language diversity in education. In their study, the scholars presented their case against setting specific cultural and linguistic standards as measures of linguistic proficiency:

Approaches to language education are implicated in the reproduction of racial normativity by expecting language-minoritized students to model their linguistic practices after the white speaking subject despite the fact that the white listening subject continues to perceive these students’ language use in racialized ways (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 151).

Consequently, linguists currently developing the field of raciolinguistics established that we should view race through the lens of language, but also, we should understand language through the lens of race. Over the last two decades, our American society has become more segregated since integration and numerous studies provided ample evidence of a society that Alim (2016) considers “hyperracial, or hyperracializing” (p.3), and language is a key component of this process.

Heritage education has often been labeled as “heritage language education” which establishes utterly linguistic objectives and a distinct direction towards the learning of a dominant version of the heritage language in a particular academic manner with the idea of completing or compensating for the lack of training of what is

frequently designated as “standard” language practices. Attempts to separate language and identity yielded to what Anzaldúa denominates “illness, lo que daña, whatever is harmful in the cultural or individual body” (Keating, 2013, p. 53).

Stigmatization has been imposed from actions such as the policing of English-language use by U.S. Latinx (Alim et al., 2016). In this sense, linguistic anthropologist Jonathan Rosa asserted that accents and Spanish-use are viewed “as reflections of abject foreignness, regardless of the long history of Spanish-language use across the Americas” (67). Stigmatization as a factor towards imposing a normative of non-belonging onto the Latinx community even for those who have been born and raised in this country hurts notions of identity. This sickness generates individual and community instability. When the mainstream system imposes on the person and/or the community a mandatory assimilation linked to the necessity to choose between a binary set of options (English vs Spanish, white vs brown, American vs immigrant) and does not contemplate a shared existence, those affected by the complexity delineated by a borderlands essence may ultimately become seriously afflicted. The effects of this sickness are real. Keating mentioned “sexism, racism, and other destructive beliefs, practices, epistemologies, and states of being that occur at interlocking/overlapping individual and systemic levels” (2013, p. 53).

Educational data demonstrated that students of color in general and heritage students in particular lack equitable access to academic resources which would allow them to achieve the levels of success necessary to be effective participants in decision-making processes that, in the end, would be the beginning of a long path towards a rightful establishment of social and racial justice system (Banks, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Nieto, 2010).

Language acts as a pivotal factor to modify the identity of an individual, especially of those who inhabit a space in the borderlands, a location where diverse forces pull by creating a linguistic instability based on double standards (Rosa, 2016). Moreover, the learning of the Spanish language is valued and romanticized when directed towards members of the privileged section of society, although its use is stigmatized and sometimes criminalized when members of the Latinx community speak it. These attacks on the Latinx community use of Spanish have increased along with other white supremacy aggressions since the past U.S. elections. Stavans in his essay “Trump, the Wall and the Spanish Language” (2017) wrote about our last president’s attempts to vilify the Latinx community in the United States by vanishing the use of the Spanish language in the country through public decisions such as bringing down the Spanish-language side of the white House website. These offensives resulted in a variety of outcomes. Those who dwell in the borderlands and refuse to adjust to a binary existence have used the oppressed mode of communication, Spanish, as a “tool of defiance” (p. 215).

As sociolinguist Jonathan Rosa stated in an article on language ideologies applied to linguistic practices of Mexican and Puerto Rican teenagers in the United States, “stigmatization occurs through the policing of English-language use by U.S. Latinas/os. Signs of accents and Spanish-language use are regarded as reflections of abject foreignness, regardless of the long history of Spanish-language use across the Americas” (2016, p. 66). Rosa presented a situation where Latinx youth was pressured into an imbalance when the system removed one of the key layers of one's identity: means of communication. This forced linguistic inequality drives the Latinx community in the United States to a life in the shadows, a sense of invisibility and

shame, a radical binary differentiation between their Spanish and English linguistic and social practices.

Chapter Summary

As immigration increases in the United States, our classrooms become more heterogenous and students bring significant contributions rooted in multiculturalism and multilingualism. Teachers, in their own foreign language acquisition careers, are often ill-equipped to provide with authentic safe spaces for heritage language students to reach their potential and support our school system in the necessary changes to eradicate divisionary challenges in classrooms and society. The theoretical frameworks chosen to illustrate the role of educators of Spanish as a FL provided a unified lens through which researchers can look at issues of belonging in heterogeneous spaces where translanguaging and multiple perspectives are encouraged instead of treated as threat to the homogeneity that comes with ideas of standardization. In the next chapter, I provide a review of the literature discussing the work of scholars who align with the theoretical frameworks presented in this chapter, and that I used to inform this research.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this section is to explore the body of established literature that supports my inquiry around the main idea of what schools and educators perceive as literacy and how foreign language educators utilize their training and experiences to address multicultural and multilingual experiences in their language classes. This section attempts to offer an overview of the conceptualization of foreign language curriculum and the place occupied by heritage language instruction; the historical development of the field of heritage education; its controversial definition; its place within the development of curriculum theories; the reality of the diversity of heritage language communities; the inclusion/ exclusion of HL learners in traditional Spanish as a foreign language courses; perceptions of educators of foreign languages of HLLs in their classrooms; and finally, this review will address the conflicts between existing HLL programs and HLL needs as it inspires future actions and research.

Scholars have been attempting to find an accurate definition of what it means to be a heritage language learner for over five decades. Although there are a variety of definitions and categorizations of the term, most researchers agree on differentiating between heritage language learners (HLL), Spanish native speakers (SNS), and students of Spanish as a foreign language (SFL) (Carreira, 2013; Montrul, 2012; Russell & Kuriscak, 2015; Valdés, 1997). The pedagogical significance of defining heritage language learners is essential in order to develop appropriate curriculum and instructional strategies that address the HL students' needs and adapt to the diverse features presented by the increasing Latinx population in the US classrooms.

Conceptualizing Curriculum in Foreign Language Education

Chicana writer and scholar Norma Cantú, in her most recent book, *Teaching Gloria E. Anzaldúa. Pedagogy and Practice for Our Classrooms and Communities*, included an article by Cantú-Sánchez, in which the following statement illustrates a crucial message: “In general, educators teach as they were taught” (2020, p. 243). Educational literature claims that any conceptualization of curriculum in general is commonly supported by educators’ ideological and philosophical conceptions of teaching and learning (Bellalem & Mizra, 2019). Therefore, educators’ epistemological beliefs about the nature of knowledge and how knowledge should be delivered and/or acquired guide how curriculum is understood and developed (Kumar et al., 2015). These beliefs are rooted in teachers’ cultural communities, the same communities that demarcate their cultural identities, beliefs, attitudes and guide their pedagogical practices (Fichtner & Chapman, 2011). Gloria Anzaldúa in her writing *(Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe spaces* (2009), states that “The knowledge that we are in symbiotic relationship to all that exists and co-creators of ideologies- attitudes, beliefs, and cultural values- motivates us to act collaboratively” (244).

Taking into account that, according to the National Center for Education Statistics’ report (Hussar et al., 2020), 84% of teachers in public elementary and secondary schools self-identified as white, while about over 50% of students’ population identifies as a race other than white in the US, the collaboration in terms of culturally constructed attitudes, beliefs and values that Anzaldúa mentions will influence not only their relationships with their students but the academic expectations that define what and how students should be learning (Potowski et al., 2012).

In the field of foreign language education, approaches to curriculum have been described by scholars as a continuum, from a narrow view that sees curriculum as knowledge transmission, to a broad view of a socio-constructivist curriculum.

A transmissionist curriculum is perceived as a syllabus that includes an explicit statement about the set of language skills to be transmitted from teachers to students (Kaymakamoglu, 2017). According to Bellalen and Mirza “knowledge in a transmissionist curriculum is unchangeable and static” (2019, p. 6). This vision aligns with the overwhelming scholarly authority of the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages’ proficiency guidelines, which are defined as “descriptors of what individuals can do with language in terms of speaking, writing, listening, and reading in real-world situations in a spontaneous and non-rehearsed context” (2006). Through the lens of transmissionism, educators are perceived as holders of knowledge and their students are its recipients. In this setting, language is considered more an end than a means towards an end, and language classes are usually teacher-centered and deeply focused on the delivery of prestige vocabulary and grammar. Scholar Ofelia García highlights how in schools “language is studied for its own sake in Language Arts classes, and its use of appropriate forms evaluated in standardized tests that serve as barriers to learn further” (2017, p. 257). Following this approach to language learning, foreign languages are taught as a restricted colonialist view of culture and language, with the tacit objective to keep monolingual students “subiendo” and heritage students “bajando” (2017).

On the other hand, a socio-constructivist curriculum is viewed as a process curriculum, where knowledge is socially oriented and the expertise of learning rests on the combined experience of the students working with a facilitator (Morley & Carmichael, 2020). Language learning is seen as a process of interaction towards the

construction of knowledge. The role of foreign language teachers in this last approach consists of the creation of opportunities for interaction and critical reflection, and students' participation in the process of knowledge construction and “decolonizing understandings” (García, 2019, p. 160). In this pedagogical framework, the methodology leading foreign language classes would be predominantly communicative and connected to the concept of social negotiation of meaning (Bellalem & Mizra, 2019; Kramsch & Thorne, 2002; Padilla & Vana, 2019).

Considering that languages are not taught as a product in isolation from their users' realities, language ideologies impacting foreign language acquisition curriculum are linked to issues centered on power, hegemony and social inequality (Flores & Rosa, 2019; Macedo, 2019a; Zentella, 2017). In order to build transformational spaces for educators, whose active learning experiences will eventually decolonize their teachings and create genuine multicultural settings, where heritage resources are recognized, respected, and encouraged as part of the conversation, Anzaldúa (2002) asserts the need to open gates and bridge out of our own “safe space.”

To bridge means loosening our borders, not closing off to others. Bridging is the work of opening the gate to the stranger within and without. To step across the threshold is to be stripped of the illusion of safety because it moves us into unfamiliar territory and does not grant safe passage. To bridge is to attempt community, and for that we must risk being open to personal, political, and spiritual intimacy, to risk being wounded (247).

Heritage Language Learner Definition

A general definition of heritage languages perceives language as part of an individual's family or cultural heritage, even if the HL is not spoken at home or the individual is not proficient in the language (M. Carreira & Kagan, 2011). In consonance with this broad definition, “the heritage language is equivalent to a second language in terms of linguistic competence” (Polinsky & Kagan, 2007, p. 369). Narrower definitions, which fit more appropriately the pedagogical aims of this

research, have been provided by diverse scholars focusing on the degree of linguistic competence of the SHL learner (Brinton et al., 2017; M. Carreira, 2014; O. Kagan & Dillon, 2001; Valdés, 1997).

The best-known definition of a heritage language speaker and the one that has been and most widely used by educators and researchers in the field of education is Valdés's (2012). The scholar describes a heritage language speaker as an individual who has been “raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken and who speaks or merely understands the heritage language, and who is to some degree bilingual in English and in the heritage language” (p.45). Language is perceived in its sociocultural framework as a tool to communicate with a specific group of individuals (He, 2010).

Diversity within the Spanish Heritage Language Speakers’ Community

Heritage language learners bring to the classroom a broad range of language exposure and proficiency, which is not equal for all HLLs (Beaudrie, 2012; Russell & Kuriscak, 2015). Montrul (2012) describes the process of heritage language acquisition (or maintenance) as an incomplete L1 adoption that “takes place in a bilingual environment rather than a monolingual one” (p.11). The linguistic performance of HLLs is described the mentioned scholar as “not uniform, not universal, and unsuccessful.” The deficit terminology employed by Montrul shows an attitude of inconvenience that many educators express when confronted with HL students. The inconsistency and lack of uniformity HL students bring along within their culture and experiential backgrounds can be also perceived by the HL learner as an ability that “may provide valuable personal, familial, and national resources, or it can be a linguistic and cultural liability” (He, 2010, p. 67).

Latinx families in the U.S. come from a variety of countries, each of them with distinct dialectal features that are acquired by the students at home. The Pew Research Center (Lopez et al., 2018) states that the US Latino population is the largest minority group (17% of the US population in 2013) and it offers data on its diverse origins with a list of the 14-largest U.S. Latinx groups by origin being Mexicans the largest community (64.1%) followed by Puerto Ricans (9.5%) and Cubans (3.7%). Educators need to be informed of this diversity and how it may impact their students' linguistic and cultural profiles. Moreover, there are dialectical differences within the same country which leads untrained educators to struggle with legitimacy of dialectal differences (Russell & Kuriscak, 2015). The implication is not that educators learn all lexical variations nor every single peculiarity of their students' families' countries of origin, but they should avoid making erroneous and often stereotypical assumptions about their heritage language learners. As stated by Russell & Kuriscak (2015): “The many definitions of HLLs explicitly or implicitly address their ability to use the language across a range of skills, tasks, and registers” (p. 415).

Apart from their linguistic profile, heritage language learners can be grouped into categories based on their relationship with their HL community and their personal connection to their culture through family (Carreira, 2004; He, 2010). Within the realm of heritage culture and its sociocultural link to the heritage community, students can be categorized as *active* or *passive* individuals who may or may not perceive their heritage as a way of self-identification in contrast with the mainstream culture. He (2010) affirms that there is a social tendency to suppress cultural and linguistic differences and it depends on the community and the individuals to take an active role in preserving it from disappearing. Consequently, when educators incorporate the HL students' culture into their classroom settings, they are participating in a larger cause:

to avoid the loss of a heritage culture and reinforce the endangered sense of identity of its speakers when living in a foreign country.

Curriculum and Programming for Heritage Language Learners

It means dealing with the fact that I, like most people, inhabit different cultures and, when crossing to other mundos, shift into and out of perspectives corresponding to each; it means living in liminal spaces, in *nepantlas* (*Anzaldúa 2015, p.3*)

Since curriculum theory is “closely connected with our views of what is true and important about ourselves and our world, [...] and in deciding what and how to teach our children” (Walker & Soltis, 2004, p. 24), the position of heritage language education within the traditional curriculum is problematic per se. Heritage language dwells in a borderlands space, but it is not recognized as such by our current national and state standards. In fact, heritage language has been forced within departments of the teaching of foreign languages. This artificial location that has been imposed on HL speakers defines the perception that the school system has chosen to enforce on students who come to our classrooms, not as empty vessels nor members of the mainstream, but as carriers of a diverse array of background knowledge and experiences. In her article “Decolonizing Foreign, Second, Heritage, and First Languages. Implications for education” (2019), Ofelia García states that “nation-states have co-opted the human potential of language as a meaning-making semiotic tool, relegating many speakers to a position of speechlessness” (p. 152).

Departing from the notion that heritage language education dwells in a *nepantla* space, between foreign language education, language arts, and social studies, my teaching philosophy aligns with Dewey’s (1981) idea of the continuity of experience, the connection between the student’s culture and the learning that happens in a school setting. By centering HL education as the teaching of exclusively meaning making or assimilating to certain literacy rules, policy makers and educators are

continuing to use language as autonomous structures that can be studied independently from culture and from other languages or “added as separate wholes” (García, 2019). This idea of exclusivity locates certain languages/cultures in positions of power and domination over other languages/cultures who continue to be considered a non-essential.

Currently, HL curriculum is defined by another problematic concept: biliteracy. The first scholarly studies of what may be considered heritage language literacy in the U.S. can be dated to Joshua Fishman’s seminal work on the sociology of language, *Language Loyalty in the United States* (1966). From the mid-1970s, Guadalupe Valdés (1981) has been a major force in the field with her work to maintain and preserve heritage languages among minoritized communities. In the late 1990s, this attentiveness to bilingualism and heritage language preservation expanded to the advocacy of providing instruction designed for heritage language speakers in the school setting (Kagan & Dillon, 2008).

In the 21st century, the accelerated progress of globalization and the diversification of our school populations presented economic, cultural, and linguistic challenges that pressed curriculum theorists and linguistic anthropologists to merge ideas of identity, education, and language (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Gounari, 2006; Gounari & Macedo, 2009). The current US directive towards standardized testing openly indicates that educational practices overwhelmingly endorse “compartmentalized, monolingual, written, decontextualized language and literacy practices” (Hornberger & Link, 2012, p. 245). Every aspect of this advocacy opposed the idea of translanguaging as a more democratic, inclusive, and culturally sustaining approach to heritage language education.

García (2019) argues that the result of how current programs are established for minoritized multilingual students is “the production of an inferior subjectivity that justifies their academic failure as their inability to use language ‘correctly’” (p. 153). Contrarily to this subjectivity and reduction to the academic realm, literacy is contemplated in this research not only as schooled literacy, but also as the community funds of knowledge (Moll, 2019). Moreover, when Chicana scholar Anzaldúa describes her identity formation, she includes the concepts of “reading” and “writing” always using quotation marks as an attempt to distance herself from the traditional perception of academic literacy. Writing has a special place in her life and work. In her Preface to *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, the author explains how writing “begins with the impulse to push boundaries, to shape ideas, images, and words that travel through the body and echo in the mind into something that never existed” (2015, p. 5).

In this sense, biliteracy is also grounded in the cultural, racial, and linguistic bodies of our HL students, and educators need to learn how to acknowledge the new ideas, images, and words that are produced in their classrooms. Along this idea, some researchers have associated HL achievement with HL identity formation or transformation (He, 2010) beyond notions of linguistic proficiency or traditional understanding of literacy.

Social Constructivist Studies of Heritage Language Education

The constructivist approach to the relationship between heritage language learning and its sociocultural dimensions focuses on “identities, attitudes, and motivation as accomplishments (outcomes) of linguistically encoded acts and stances” (He, 2010, p. 2). In this sense, identities are constantly changing and constructed through social interactions. A social constructivist approach regards language

acquisition and socialization as a unified process. This view coincides with Anzaldúa's constant shifting of positions, which in her own words:

It means dealing with the fact that I, like most people, inhabit different cultures and, when crossing to other *mundos*, shift into and out of perspectives corresponding to each; it means living in liminal spaces, in *nepantlas* (2015, p. 3).

Understanding that educational institutions provide “one of the major mechanisms through which power is maintained and challenged” (Apple, 2019, p. xxvii) and the relationship between heritage communities and immigration, and therefore, between power and nationalism, it is safe to say that schools are grounds of conflict when addressing heritage language instruction and its speakers. One of the ways in which such institutions enforce their power is through the pivotal role they play in designing a standard, normalized language rooted in colonialist sociolinguistic theories. HLLs are frequently wounded with messages of inferiority and the need to “improve” their defective language (Duff, 2008; Garcia, 1995; Leeman, 2018). Instead of recognizing the continuous transformation of the HL identity, in many foreign language acquisition classrooms HL students are imposed the learning of context-free linguistic forms instead of “the understanding of the situational and interactional contingencies of the use of those forms that indexes the learner's competence” (He, 2010, p. 72).

In this sense, the work of the most significant educational thinkers of the 20th century, Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky, aligns with the idea that students are not passive recipients of knowledge, but on the contrary, they should be given learning opportunities that enabled them to link their classroom instruction to their community and experiential knowledge. Applied to the heritage language education field, students' knowledge should not be dismissed as incomplete or incorrect, but teachers

need to adopt the role of facilitators and guides, giving HL students opportunities to develop their *conocimiento*.

Experiences of Heritage Language Students Enrolled in Foreign Language Courses

Differentiation is the essential pedagogical strategy that responds to the diverse HL population in our classrooms. Considering that most of the secondary-school age HL students are currently enrolled in L2 classrooms, differentiating their learning experience is crucial to meet their individual learning needs (Russell & Kuriscak, 2015). As expressed by Carreira and Kagan's (2011), "To deal effectively with issues of diversity, it is critical for instructors to understand their students individually as well as collectively and apply this knowledge to differentiating instruction by learner needs" (p.65). The implementation of a culturally relevant pedagogy that achieves productive learning experiences for HL students and differentiates their needs from the rest of foreign language learners requires "understanding how to make linkages between students' home-culture (experiential background) and classroom practices" (Hollins, 2015, p. 6).

Language becomes an indivisible section of the home-culture mentioned by Hollins (2015). In this sense, educators need to be aware of the diverse levels of linguistic proficiency and the distinctive dialectal backgrounds of their HL students so that they can implement instructional strategies and practices designed specifically for these learners (Beaudrie, 2012; Carreira & Kagan, 2011; Lee & Oxelson, 2006; Russell & Kuriscak, 2015; Scontras et al., 2015). Some scholars propose the inclusion of student profile documentation of HL students in the form of pre-assessment, questionnaire, or survey of background factors in order to maximize the powerful

linguistic and cultural resources HLLs bring to the classroom (Lee & Oxelson, 2006; Russell & Kuriscak, 2015).

Understanding and differentiating heritage learners by their linguistic profile becomes crucial in education. For some researchers, such as Montrul, heritage speakers are “a special case of child bilingualism” (2010, p.4) for whom the home language is weaker than the school one. Scontras et al. (2015) describe them as “unbalanced bilinguals”. Sociolinguistics distinguishes two types of bilingualism: *simultaneous* bilinguals are kids who acquire two languages at the same time at home, for example when they are raised by parents speaking more than one language; and *sequential* bilinguals are kids who acquire their heritage language at home first and their foreign language when they start school, around age five.

Most Spanish heritage speakers in the US are considered to be sequential bilinguals with strong aural skills but limited reading and writing skills (Carreira, 2016). Moreover, Montrul (2010) states that “incomplete acquisition is greater in heritage speakers who are simultaneous bilinguals than in heritage language speakers who are sequential bilinguals” (p.11). The concept of defective acquisition refers to the HL learners’ lack of exposure to the academic experience in the HL language. Therefore, educators need to recognize that these students are fundamentally pragmatic users of language but may show difficulties understanding grammatical rules or context-specific lexicon that does not correspond to their immediate community usage. Some scholars have described HLLs as *illiterate* learners (Montrul, 2002; Russell & Kuriscak, 2015) as opposed to their L2 peers.

Foreign Language Teachers’ Perceptions of Heritage Language Learners

Most scholars agree on the importance of the ideological perceptions of educators in general, and Spanish as a foreign language teachers in particular, with

regards to their student community and the individual learners to reach their HL population and to achieve success in their pedagogical endeavors (Beaudrie, 2015; Carreira & Kagan, 2011; He, 2010). Nevertheless, many studies show that teachers, mainly those without appropriate training, consider that they are not responsible for the maintenance of immigrant kids' language nor culture (Gkaintartzi & Tsokalidou, 2011; Leeman & Serafini, 2016). This indifference towards HL's needs represents a form of discrimination in the sense that HL students' unique needs are ignored and undermined.

Prejudice based on SFL educators' limited awareness of their HL students' linguistic, experiential, and cultural backgrounds can lead to marginalization of their identities and the reproduction of social inequalities and intimidating power relations in the classroom (Cummins, 2000). In the language discrimination area, SFL educators tend to wrongfully assume that their HL students' high aural linguistic skills match their written ones and their understanding of grammatical rules (Carreira & Kagan, 2011; Russell & Kuriscak, 2015; Montrul, 2010). On a similar note, SFL teachers fail to differentiate instruction by reducing Spanish to the standardized version imposed by foreign language acquisition textbooks and resources, enhancing language hierarchies and HL discrimination which may lead to linguistic and cultural insecurity (Beaudrie, 2009; Leeman et al. 2011; Potowski & Carreira, 2004; Russell & Kuriscak, 2015).

Language hierarchies are produced by "the wide range of linguistic and academic backgrounds represented among SNS (Spanish Native Speakers) students, and the limited knowledge base that teachers have about the academic skills and linguistic background of this student population" (Potowski & Carreira, 2004, p.429). The research literature shows that this limited knowledge influences teachers to focus

on linguistic issues as the leading cause of the negative attitudes that instructors hold about their HL students, some of them originating behavioral problems in the classroom (Potowski & Carreira, 2004; Russell & Kuriscak, 2015).

Heritage Language Programs vs Heritage language learners Needs

In surveys provided to secondary teachers reflecting on their attitudes toward HLLs, such as Russell and Kuriscak's (2015), participants consistently reported lack of time and resources as a common issue behind the lack of pedagogical efforts to differentiate classroom instruction. Some scholars advocate for a provision of a more adequate teacher professional development that focuses on linguistic, cultural, and experiential unique to HLLs (Beaudrie et al., 2009; Potowski & Carreira, 2004; Russell & Kuriscak, 2015). Other researchers, such as Lee & Oxelson (2006), wonder to what extent teacher training can develop the attitudes of educators toward students from a cultural background other than theirs. To which, Hollins (2015) proposes an exercise of personal heritage research for educators of diverse populations. This exercise can be extended to SFL teachers who are mostly middle-class Anglo-American women in order to remove the established distance between the standardized Spanish curriculum they have acquired during their own careers and professional experience and the HL students' naturalistic acquisition of language and culture.

Educators and researchers understand that there is a mismatch between SHLs needs and SHL programs, which is shown by the lack of HL programs in elementary, secondary and post-secondary schools (Beaudrie et al., 2009; Lee & Oxelson, 2006; Leeman et al., 2011; Potowski et al., 2012; Russell & Kuriscak, 2015). Potowski and Carreira (2004) reported that, at the time of their study, only 18% of the postsecondary surveyed programs offered a course directed towards heritage language learners. This deficiency is even more accentuated in secondary schools, although there are not

studies that show the number of heritage language programs at this level. The need for an adequate HL curriculum has been reported by educators and also by HL students (Beaudrie et al., 2009). When students enroll in SFL courses “the dominant monolingual ideologies often lead to marginalization and devaluing of students’ language varieties and practices as well as erasure of their multilingual identities and experiences” (Leeman et al., 2011, p.482). Moreover, there is also a need for heritage language methods textbooks, standards for HL educators training, state-sponsored certifications of HL teachers, and national language standards for HL speakers of Spanish (Leeman & Martínez, 2007; Potowski & Carreira, 2004; Wang & García, 2002).

There is a common agreement on the need of separate program for HLLs (S. M. Beaudrie, 2015; M. Carreira & Kagan, 2011; Leeman et al., 2011; Montrul, 2010; Potowski & Carreira, 2004; Russell & Kuriscak, 2015; Valdés, 2012). The lack of heritage language programs in the US schools leads to a monolingual and monocultural spread of ideologies among educators and students. Most HL students are enrolled in SFL courses where common feelings of disorientation and frustration are shared by teachers, HL students, and their non-HL peers (Potowski & Carreira, 2004). In mixed-classrooms, HL students follow the SFL curriculum where the Spanish culture responds to the dominant view of researchers and educators who have failed to include in the Spanish textbooks “the literature, history, language, and general contributions of U.S. Latinos” (Potowski & Carreira, 2004, p. 428). Moreover, the intense budget cuts that the US educational system is currently undergoing have influenced the scarcity of adequate K-12 programs to meet the needs of our increasing HL population, although according to the blog *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*

(Malveaux, 2003). Moreover, there seems to be an increase in the number of HL courses offered at the university level.

My research illustrates how systemic environments of hostility and discrimination have placed many heritage language students in situations where the system that is supposed to protect, teach, and impart notions of civic life ends up being the one that imposes assimilationism to a monocultural, monolingual organization, which at the same time denies its diverse members a path towards academic success and personal realization. This study intends to demonstrate how ideologies of language and culture “shape and inform official interventions in language use” (Martínez, 2012, p. 62). Language policies in many school districts of the United States have created a platform for these discriminatory practices and studies like the one I am proposing will add onto the literature of heritage language education tackling the educators and curriculum designers and coordinators’ responsibility instead of the students’ experiences per se.

Chapter Summary

This review of relevant literature aligned with the theoretical frameworks that grounded my research. It provided the necessary background information to understand who are described as heritage language students in our classes and what differentiates them from non-heritage students. Since the field of heritage language education has developed in the past decades especially in higher education, literature was provided explaining crucial philosophies such as translanguaging (García et al., 2017) as the ideal environment for our heritage language students to reach their potential. Additionally, studies on linguistic and cultural marginalization and attempts to decolonize the field are explained, together with the location of heritage language education within social constructivist approaches to language acquisition and

socialization. While an overview of the methodology was presented in the first chapter, the next chapter provides a comprehensive discussion of the methodology used in this study. The theoretical design elements of the study are described along with the research questions that guided the design of the current research.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this critical qualitative study was to provide an in-depth exploration of the perceptions, objectives, and classroom practices of SFL educators towards HLLs in their mixed classrooms in several secondary schools within a suburban Midwestern school district. This research is based on a transformative paradigm based on the assumption that heritage learners' reality has constantly been defined by the privileged white-American mainstream. In this sense, HLLs' existence is socially constructed by mostly non-Latinx language instructors who teach them about their outsiders' perceptions of culture and language. Mertens (2015) states how reality is built on a "conscious awareness that certain individuals occupy a position of greater power and that individuals with other characteristics may be associated with a higher likelihood of exclusion from decisions about the definition of the research focus" (p.216). It is precisely this feeling of exclusion what this study would like to examine by analysing SFL educators' attitudes toward their SHL students. It is my opinion that the adoption of a transformative design led not only to a cultural awareness of discrepancies between teachers' perceptions and pedagogical practices, but it also exposed the need of a general educational transformation within the SFL field.

Research Design

As my research developed, Anzaldúa expanded her reach to all areas of inquiry, allowing my voice and the voices of the participants to acquire significant meanings that otherwise would have been confined within artificial borders. Respecting the freedoms and responsibilities presented by Anzaldúa's ideology of *haciendo teorías*, and consciously embracing theories that depart from institutionalized

discourses of what rigor and bias mean, I intentionally positioned myself as a practitioner researcher connected to the Latinx community and to the educational field in ways that showed in this research's outcomes. Grounded in this creative critical ideology, I developed an investigation in the borderlands "partially outside and partially inside the western frame of reference (if that is possible), [...] articulating new positions in these "in-between," Borderland worlds of ethnic communities and academies" (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 137).

When addressing themes related to power unbalance and the distance created between educators and students, critical qualitative research approaches have been especially useful for teachers' perceptions and practices' studies, since this type of investigation preserves the significance of the context in which such educators behave, design instructional objectives, and develop their practices. Patton (2015) affirmed that "the particular niche and contribution of qualitative methods in uncovering unanticipated consequences come from the *openness of inquiry*" (p.11), which is a fundamental element of elaborating in-depth analysis of complex phenomena in the educational field. By conducting interviews and focus groups, and incorporating analysis of public documents to the study, I was able to examine the object of my research from a variety of perspectives and within a specific context defined in time and space. These are fundamental reasons for my choice of developing a qualitative investigation.

Within the ample field and possibilities offered by qualitative methods of research and understanding that "what is considered theory in the dominant academic community is not necessarily what counts as theory for women-of-color" (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 25), I have decided to draw from case study design as a natural methodology to investigate and understand complex issues in real world settings, or in other words,

“a strategy for methodological exploration” (Harrison et al., 2017, p. 2). In the field of education, case studies highlight the need to explore the impact of educational programs and present significant evidence for instructional policies and practices that sustain social and educational changes. The most relevant scholars to the field of education are Stake (1995, 2008) and Merriam (1998). Nowadays, case study research has evolved into a “valid form of inquiry to explore a broad scope of complex issues, particularly when human behavior and social interactions are central to understanding topics of interest” (Harrison et al., 2017, p. 4), which defines the nature of my research and its objective to describe the complexity that entitles describing the collision between educators’ perspectives, their objectives, and their practices.

By choosing to draw from case studies features to describe the collision between the objectives, perceptions, and practices of educators of Spanish as foreign language courses, my argument originated from the advantages presented by this methodology. Departing from the possibility of looking at a set of teachers from diverse angles and assuming that particularity and complexity are two major elements of case study research, as Helen Simons states in her paper *The paradox of case study* (1996), I embraced “the paradoxes inherent in the people, events, and sites we study and explore rather than try to resolve the tensions embedded in them ... Paradox for me is the point of case study” (p. 237).

As the primary researcher in this study, I was the sole investigator. As such, certain information regarding my own personal and professional relationship to the topic of teaching HLLs in mixed classrooms is relevant, mainly taking into account that I share common spaces with the participants but also with the HL students who are the recipients of the instruction and the perceptions of SFL teachers. On the one hand, I have been working as a Spanish teacher at the secondary school level for almost 20

years. In this position, I noticed a growth in the number of HLLs in my traditional SFL courses, and along with this group of students, a new series of instructional needs and challenges urged me to extend my knowledge of theory and practices in the teaching of HLLs.

My experience and academic background in Linguistics and Latinx studies have provided me with skills and knowledge to investigate how language is a powerful indicator of bias and the close relationship between linguistic and cultural grounds. My personal and professional experiences at home and in the classroom allowed me to examine various academic, cultural, and experiential situations where my own positionality needed to become clearly established in order to interpret the collected information respecting the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability.

As an immigrant and educator, I considered myself a multiculturalist whose job is inspired by culturally sustaining pedagogies, and who believes strongly in the importance of differentiation by background. One of the reasons why I decided to pursue the development of this dissertation is based on the frustration I experience on an almost daily basis when SFL educators criticize the lack of academic engagement of our Latinx student population in their Spanish classrooms, and when HLLs in my own school share with me their feelings of disappointment and linguistic insecurity when enrolled in such courses. For this reason, I made a conscious effort to utilize data collection techniques and data analysis methods that ensured the removal of as much researcher bias as possible from my findings.

Methods and Sources

Site Selection

The setting for this study was three secondary schools in a Midwestern suburban school district. The schools were selected using a purposeful criterion sampling method. One of the requirements for the participants was that they had heritage language students enrolled in their traditional Spanish as a foreign language courses. In this sense, recent immigration patterns have been steady in the researched area, which has increased the numbers of HLLs in our classrooms. This district consists of five high schools, ten middle schools, and 35 elementary schools. The district also offers two Early Childhood centers, a juvenile detention center, and a technical school, and other educational and support facilities. According to the State Report Card 2020-21, the majority of the school district self-identifies as white (67.19%), with a Latinx population of 17.84%, Black population of 7.8%, multi-racial population of 4.9%, Asian population of 4.5%, and a combination of Native American and Pacific Island population of 0.5%. The total enrollment for the district was 29,794 students as of September 20, 2021, according to their own website.

The diversity in the school district corresponds to the diversity in the area, although there are significant differences among schools, ranging from a high school with 27.82% of Latinx student population to another high school that number decreases to 8.24%. At the time of this study, the school district is focusing on how to improve standardized testing scores for the Latinx and Black populations, which aligns with my research on SFL educators, since their training and perceptions of the Latinx population determine academic expectations and support systems that could enhance this goal.

Moreover, this is the district I am currently working for, and I have chosen to conduct my research here for a variety of reasons. The first one is that this district complies with the abovementioned requirements of heritage language population rates. Another significant reason is that I have been working there for five years now and I have built a certain degree of relationship or trust with the World Language department teachers, which allowed me better chances of reaching out to them to participate in interviews and focus groups. Since I am already perceived as an outsider due to my immigrant and native speaker status, working in the same culture and teaching in similar conditions represented a window of opportunity to establish common grounds with the participants, which were more willing to disclose information (Mertens, 2015). I also understand that since teaching heritage language students in traditional Spanish L2 classes is considered a challenge by many teachers, and since I disclosed the ultimate purpose of this research, which is to advocate for a separate heritage language program in secondary schools, I believe that my participants felt unrestricted to share with me certain difficulties they experienced and that, otherwise would have not expressed so that the interviewer did not question their value as educators.

Participants Selection

The participants were selected employing a purposeful criterion sampling procedure. The chosen educators were teaching traditional Spanish courses where they also hosted one or several HL students. The cultural background of the participants was not a deterrent for their participation. A variety of data collection methods was employed to examine each SFL teacher's perceptions, objectives, and practices regarding their HL students. In order to understand each teacher's perceptions and how

these perceptions related to their instructional practices, a three-step procedure was followed.

Since I work in the district I was researching, I already had access to the contact information of Spanish teachers, who in my district teach grades 6-12. I emailed all Spanish teachers to explain the objective of my research and requested their voluntary participation. Once they started contacting me back, I created a schedule to start our first interviews. The fact that we were teaching virtually the year before and had just returned to an in-person environment this year was not a complete deterrent as I initially expected. Although some teachers expressed that their levels of stress and insecurity due to the instability of our current educational times hindered their participation, others stated that the fact that we could host our interviews and focus group virtually was an advantage to their collaboration.

However, these factors were considered in my data analysis process. After I received some positive responses to my introductory email, I welcomed my seven participants to this research. According to Patton (2015), purposeful sampling highlights the selection of information-rich cases. In case studies, it was important to carefully select the process of analysis, since a lot of time and resources were devoted to their research. Information provided by teachers with little or no experience with HLLs was not as impactful to this research as comments and experiences by educators who regularly teach students from a Spanish heritage background.

The third step consisted of the actual communication with prospective participants in the research. An initial number of seven participants were notified via email and their participation in the study was offered. An initial proposal explaining their time commitment and other features regarding interviews and focus groups was sent prior to sending them the definite Letter of Consent with more detailed

explanations of the process and its implications. Email was the method of choice for communicating with participants since we are living a time of social distancing during this COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

Documents

The significance of documents in qualitative research is crucial due to their unique faculty to provide the researcher an unobtrusive view of what cannot be observed. According to Patton (2015), fieldwork involves the process of finding and analyzing documents and documentation that, in many cases, can reveal information that is not retrievable in any other way. In the author's opinion, documents attest their value "not only because of what can be learned directly from them but also as a stimulus for paths of inquiry that can only be pursued through direct observation and interviewing" (p.377). This qualitative study implied the collection and analysis of the following public documents that are available in each of the organizations' websites—American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages and the National Standards Collaborative Board:

- ACTFL performance descriptors for language learners: 2012 edition (American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2012)
- ACTFL proficiency guidelines (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2012)
- World-readiness standards for learning languages (Spanish). 4th edition (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015)
- World-readiness standards for learning languages (General). 4th edition (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015)

Additionally, I included in my documents analysis a report that examined the impact of standards on educators and administrators nationally. Finally, I analyzed five

articles that reflected on each of the national standards and their features. All these documents proved to be a relevant foundation for interviews and focus groups questions and analysis.

- A decade of foreign language standards: Influence, impact, and future decisions: Survey results (Abbott & Phillips, 2011)
- More than a decade of standards: Integrating “Communication” in your language instruction (Cutshall, 2012a)
- More than a decade of standards: Integrating “Cultures” in your language instruction (Cutshall, 2012e)
- More than a decade of standards: Integrating “Comparisons” in your language instruction (Cutshall, 2012c)
- More than a decade of standards: Integrating “Connections” in your language instruction (Cutshall, 2012d)
- More than a decade of standards: Integrating “Communities” in your language instruction (Cutshall, 2012b)

Considering the unusual times we were living at the time of interviews and focus groups with the rise of the COVID19 variant, Omicron, and the impact absences had in our classrooms, I decided to focus on the abovementioned documents instead of requesting teachers to gather students’ documents to include in my research.

Interviews

Qualitative research interviews have been defined by Kvale (2008) as “attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of people’s experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (p.xvii). Through the process of planning, conducting, transcribing, and analyzing interviews, qualitative researchers gain a deep holistic view of the research

objective, although they may also pose additional obstacles and need to be addressed. Since I conducted a critical qualitative research with crucial elements from case study design, the value of interviews was undeniable and, according to Yin (2009) interviews became guided conversations, which can “reveal how case study interviews construct reality and think about situations, not just giving answers to specific questions” (p.264), which becomes important sources of evidence.

In this study, an interview guide approach was designed based on the initial document analysis and report, which provided with three major themes and several sub-themes, which were the standpoint of creating this guide. One major benefit of the interview process is its adaptability (Bell, 2010). During the semi-structured online interviews, I decided on the sequence and wording of questions (Patton, 2015). This type of interview favors the current study since I as an educator share experiences with the interviewees, have a deep knowledge of the subject, and could “establish a conversational style” (Patton, 2015, p. 438) while focusing on the fundamental issues that had been predetermined in the online questionnaire. The interview guide based on the responses to the questionnaire provided me with a list of issues linked to the two central research questions as well as to their corresponding sub-questions, but its open-ended format allowed for follow-up questions to ensure clarity or develop topics of interest. Interviews were conducted with the participants online to respect teachers’ will of social distancing, and their length ranged from approximately 45 to 70 minutes each.

Two recording devices, a recorder and online platform Zoom’s capability of recording sessions were utilized to record interviews and assure accuracy. Transcriptions were conducted using first a free application named Voice Recorder (TapMedia, 2017) followed by rigorous electronic and manual editing processes.

Although some researchers advise against the use of recorders because of the added pressure on the interviewee, who “may strain to say things only in a socially acceptable way” (Kasunic, 2010, p. 81), others establish that if interviews are part of a higher education process, such as this doctoral research, “full transcripts of interviews should be obtained” (Darke, Shanks, & Broadbent, 1998, p. 283).

Focus Groups

Grounding my methods of research on Anzaldúa’s idea that community interactions “feed our spirits” (2009, p. 182) and that “disconnected from *la gente*” we fade in isolation, I brought these interactions among educators in the form of focus groups to this study. Focus groups are group interviews that don’t follow a question-and-answer format but on the exchange of ideas among the members of the group. According to Krueger and Casey (2014) “a focus group study is a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interests in a permissive, nonthreatening environment” (p.2). These groups typically consist of a small number of participants who are guided through a discussion by a moderator using a structured interview protocol. If applied correctly, focus groups constitute a valuable tool to comprehend users’ perceptions and ideas about a topic or issue, without attempting to build consensus or to move participants in a certain direction through information or persuasion.

According to the previously mentioned scholars “focus groups are composed of participants who are similar to each other in a way that is important to the researcher” (p. 3). In my study, participants in focus groups were all Spanish educators in secondary schools who teach heritage students in their traditional Spanish as a foreign language courses. The homogeneity of the participants lied on their professions, and on them sharing a specific type of student population. Moreover, I also share these

characteristics with the participants, which is a factor that I took into consideration when moderating the conversation.

The participants in these focus groups were the teachers I interviewed before. Our conversation was based on a set of questions and scenarios that I created in relation with the topics that surfaced from the analysis of prior individual interviews, in the form of clarification of previous statements or if opposite or relevant ideas were expressed. In this sense, in my role of moderator and as *nepantlera* apprentice (Anzaldúa, 2015), it was key that I served as a leveling force that would allow participants to reflect on various arguments without pressure or to avoid certain dominant personalities to control the conversation.

Data Analysis Procedures

The goal of qualitative research is to identify some key themes that explain why and how a particular phenomenon operates in a specific context (Miles et al., 2013). In case study approaches, Stake (1995) does not suggest a specific time during the investigation when data collection and analysis should begin. However, based on my own experience with fieldwork, I considered crucial to start analyzing the data collected during the interviews before conducting focus groups so that a deductive analysis was implemented during this last part of the process.

Research scholars differ in their approach to data analysis. Stake (1995) bases his strategies on the researcher's intuition and impressions. Contrarily, Yin's (2002) definition of analysis "consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining both quantitative and qualitative evidence to address the initial propositions of a study" (p. 109). From a Yinian perspective, researchers need to carefully define and structure their data to support the validity and reliability of the study, which aligns better with my objectives for this study. Moreover, to answer

my research questions by making sense of the collected data, I was inclined to observe the combination of consolidation, reduction, and interpretation suggested by Merriam (1998) in her definition of data analysis. Merriam focuses on a “more thorough application of constructivist epistemology in research” (Yazan, 2015, p. 145).

Next, I will describe my plans on how I analyzed data from the three data sources: documents, interviews, and focus groups. I am pleased that I followed my initial plans of conducting consecutive data analysis starting with documents and ending with focus groups. Although considering the unpredictability of the times we are living in, I was flexible and open to the possibility of conducting parallel collection and analysis if the circumstances required it, so that I could adjust the study design to avoid reaching unjustified conclusions. Fortunately, a combination of days off due to the large amount of teachers' absences and lack of substitutes due to COVID19 and more snow days provided me with the time to diligently complete each analysis before starting the next step in the process, which resulted beneficial for my outcomes.

In general, coding is a key step in qualitative data analysis and my academic background as a linguist provided me with a significant set of tools to develop effective coding practices. During the analysis process, the data was broken up into manageable pieces, which I then reconstructed to reflect “a structured view of the examined reality” (Baskarada, 2014, p. 17). This process aligned with Anzaldúa’s explanation of the path to *conocimiento*, that includes seven stages of deconstruction and re-membling to arrive to a final vision.

The initial setup involved reading of documents, transcripts of interviews, and transcripts of focus groups conversations. This step led to the development of preliminary notes or memos that were used to formulate initial categories, themes, and relationships. I started developing descriptive codes which pertained to the broad

topics that emerged from the text and related to the research questions. Afterwards, these codes were organized into more abstract frameworks or interpretive/analytical codes, which supported final themes or topics. This information constituted a first draft of a codebook that was complemented by a sketch or visual representation that supported my vision.

The idea to create a drawing to illustrate the themes and subthemes surfacing throughout the research process originated from Anzaldúa's own sketches. Although I am not, by any means, an artist, I benefited from the freedom of sketching ideas and observing their connections. I decided to incorporate these sketches into my study as it was an integral part of the analysis.

This analytical process was applied to the documents' exploration. Then, throughout the data analysis processes for interviews, a preliminary data analysis consisted of a conscious process of first, recognizing emerging themes during the actual interviews, and then, focusing on recurring ideas during the data transcription and edition. Face sheets were created for interviews following Grbich's (2010) model as a "form of identification and of summary of this process" (p.22). Throughout the transcripts analysis, I attempted to differentiate what Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013) labeled as trivial, useless data or information that did not related to the research questions.

In summary, the purpose of these interviews was to gather information about the interviewees' experiences when teaching Spanish in a mixed-classroom environment and what their perspectives were regarding the specific group of students labeled as HLLs. This interview guide served as a theoretical framework to assist my research with information regarding the following key topics:

- Teacher's experiences with heritage language learners in mixed classrooms

- Teacher's previous training to meet the needs of HLLs
- Teacher's current perceptions of HL students in mixed classrooms (academic strengths and weaknesses, disciplinary issues, student's attitudes, and relationships with non-heritage language speakers)
- Teacher's current practices and objectives for HLLs in mixed classrooms (Instructional strategies, formative, and summative assessments)
- Teacher's self-awareness of their interaction with HLLs students

Throughout the design, implementation, and analysis of the data collected in these interviews, I was able to distinguish recurrent topics related to research questions. Additionally, an integration of the data collected by previously analyzing public documents and the initial code book from the interviews resulted in a viable manner of establishing connections between official standards and teacher's perceptions and practices.

The final themes presented a meaningful structure that added information to the theoretical frameworks —Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), Borderlands Theory (Anzaldúa, 1987), perceptions of Multiculturalism (Berry, 2011), Raciolinguistics (Flores and Rosas, 2015), and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Paris and Alim, 2017) — this research was based on.

As for the focus group, contrary to the coding processes I followed during the documents and interviews' procedures, I utilized a provisional list of codes prior to the fieldwork. This method is defined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013) as "deductive coding" (p.81), although I was certainly open to what my observation of interactions among participants could provide me in terms of new codes or complementary codes to the preexisting ones. As the abovementioned scholars stated, throughout the field experience some codes changed, others that looked pertinent at the

beginning of the study, ended up disappearing, and other ones that had been ignored, got stronger with time and research depth.

Researcher Positioning

El cenote: Weaknesses and Bias

I Had To Go Down

I hardly ever set foot on the floors below.

Creaking wood expanding. Contracting,
erratic ticking of the furnace
wild animal kicking at its iron cage
frighten me.

(Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 189)

Reflecting on weaknesses and biases meant a deep dive into my own cenote, the dreampool that embodied “ancestral information stored beyond the files of personal memories” (2009, p. 297). When the Chicana scholar refers to fear as she descends to the process of escaping to inner territories, I reflected on the sturdiness of the pillars that support the current research, and how my own vulnerabilities and years of experiencing how my heritage language students’ voices become racialized and, therefore, pushed to the margins, may have impacted the development of this research and its conclusions.

As I extracted bricks to construct such pillars from different research paradigms, I recognize what scholars Stake and Merriam described as researchers’ aim to achieve “the most credible interpretation or knowledge about the case” (Yazan, 2015, p. 147). To do so, I have worked to be aware of my own personal, ancestral, and cultural weaknesses and biases. Since I recognize that in my research, I addressed issues of personal perceptions of cultures that are different from the participants’, I

understood the need to pay special attention to matters of cultural and linguistic partiality. Moreover, I reflected a priori on my own prejudices and preconceptions, and the way they affected the design of the interviews, the methods chosen to collect data, and finally, the interpretation of the findings. As Anzaldúa expressed in her poem “I Had To Go Down,” I had to descend several stages to start acknowledging the grounds I stood on as a researcher and how this setting influenced the process and outcomes of my research.

These presumptions had their source in several main areas: (a) the fact that I am an educator of Spanish as a foreign language who also teaches mixed-classrooms; (b) the fact that I identify as Hispanic, which places me culturally close to the impacted party in my investigation; (c) the fact that I have children who are heritage language learners attending schools where they are enrolled in SFL courses; and finally (4) the fact that my education from Spain has marked me with deep scars of colonialist linguistic and cultural correctness. Questioning this last area has brought me into the research I have been conducting.

As a teacher of Spanish as a foreign language in a Midwestern school district, I share common experiences with the educators who participated in my research. I chose the issue of teachers’ experiences with heritage language speakers enrolled in mixed classrooms based, in part, on my own observations of discriminatory comments and attitudes towards students from SFL educators. Being conscious of my prior experiences, I was particularly careful not to impose my past occurrences on the results and interpretations of this study’s findings. At the same time, my professional practice also brought me near to the participants and this connection impacted my study by translating my own experiences to those of the subjects in question.

In this same realm of close distance with my participants, I decided to avoid any references to each educator in the narration of the interviews and focus groups' findings. Instead of referring to educators independently by their pseudonym or labeling them as Teacher 1, Teacher 2, etc., I was able to recognize shared narratives that became visual representations of categories, which in the end, represented the messages this research based its conclusions on.

Furthermore, my cultural identification as a Hispanic individual living in the United States connects me with the community of HL learners and distances me from the interviewed educators who self-identified as "white," "anglo," or "USA" when asked about their backgrounds. One educator self-identified as "mixed cultural background" and another as "Latina, Cherokee, Apache, English, Spanish, female." However, during our conversations, they never connected their experiences in the classroom to their identifications. Recognizing the distance between our experiences was crucial to avoid spaces where participants would have felt threatened, and therefore, might have tended "to reflect white sensibilities" (Sleeter, 2017). More importantly, the fact that my own children are heritage language students who have reported to me several discriminatory incidents during their schooling placed me in a space of accumulated pain that I had to set aside as much as I could.

Finally, having challenged my own colonialist upbringing as I questioned literacy practices and linguistic prescriptivism, I deliberately look at research from spaces within the margins rather than from the center (Pollard & Welch, 2006), from areas of criticism and resistance, from places that openly uses bias and weaknesses as powerful tools of understanding the cenote, "that deep dreampool, the collective unconscious" (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 297).

Although I realize that what academia considers “rigorous” study and methods follow specific paths marked by privilege and a level of elitism, I embraced my role as a creative researcher who shared space with other practitioner researchers, and I accept that this research was an attempt to access areas where scholars have been following such paths unconditionally. The influence Anzaldúa had on this research and on my own persona as a researcher is undeniable and has taught me to use my place as a foreigner and as member of a community that is not widely represented in higher education as a habitat from where to observe and contest what others contemplate from a mainstream viewpoint.

Nevertheless, during the process of my interviews and focus groups, I acknowledge that I needed to be exceptionally cautious not to let my positionality and experiences influence the lens through which I perceived this study, nor dominate the scene where educators provided their perspectives of the issue. In summary, it is my belief that being close to the problem addressed by this research may have challenged my subjectivity, but it also made me aware of nuances that allowed me to build strong follow-up interviews and document analysis, reaching solid evidence-based conclusions that will support future teachers in likewise situations.

Maxwell (2013) discussed how “it is impossible to deal with these issues [biases] by eliminating the researcher’s theories, beliefs, and perceptual lens” (p. 124). Instead, researchers need to acknowledge the importance of explaining threats to the study’s validity and how they are avoided, which is exactly what I accomplished by incorporating a detailed personal memo, methodical data collection, various data sources (crystallization), and reviews by peers (Patton, 2014).

Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Amansamiento: Credibility

Some qualitative scholars (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) have pursued a radical separation between qualitative design and the quantitative approach to standards of rigor (i.e., generalizability, validity, and objectivity). In the qualitative paradigm, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria to shape the framework that would determine the so-called rigor of a qualitative study: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Each of them implied strategies to address research, such as prolonged engagement, persistent observations, flexibility, triangulation (currently considered *crystallization*), member checking, and thick descriptions (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013).

However, advocates of both sort of tests fail to acknowledge that these scores or rubrics “can never reflect the tensions, contradictions, fears, doubts, hopes and deferred dreams that are part and parcel of living in a borrowed reality” (Swadener et al., 2009, p. 34). The concepts of validity and reliability lead to a “pedagogy of entrapment” or in Anzaldúa’s words:

Truth is relative. Different cultures believe different things. I object to one people / group claiming that they possess the “real” truth and using their claim to dominate others. Psychological destruction results in loss of identity, and identity loss means psychic extinction. Loss of self-esteem, self-authority, and authenticity leads to alienation (2015, p. 179).

Grounded in this understanding of the relativity of truth and perceptions, the credibility of my study was primarily established through a process that Anzaldúa calls *amansamiento*: “I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings” (2015, p. 103).

One of the steps in *amansamiento* is the use of a method of data triangulation, which implied collecting data from a variety of sources: semi-structured interviews, semi-structure focus groups, and documents. Triangulation is defined as strategy by which researchers study an issue utilizing three means of providing data that comes from varied sources. Consequently, this approach was used to obtain “deeper and richer understanding of the phenomena whilst building rigor, allowing creativity, and developing intuition for the interpretivist” (Stewart & Gapp, 2017, p. 1) researcher.

Ethical Considerations

I recognize that exploring the idea of attitudes towards marginalized groups includes a certain aspect of formal and informal power relations for educators, and that the fact that the participants in my study worked in my same district and some of them knew each other posed some confidentiality issues. The Belmont Report stated that research involving human subjects must be developed following three ethical principles: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Based on the principle of respect for persons, my study was completely voluntary and offered prospective participants accurate and true information about its objectives.

Since beneficence is expressed by the Report as an obligation to “maximize possible benefits and minimize possible harms” to the individual research participant, I intended to reduce any possibility of harm by assuring privacy and confidentiality and establishing a trusting relationship with the teacher participants. Neither names nor school settings or school districts’ names were mentioned in the research. On the contrary, I always referred to them as a Midwestern community of SFL educators. Furthermore, participants’ involvement in the research were coded with numbers

instead of names. All documents, interviews, and instructional data has been stored in a locked file cabinet to ensure data safety and confidentiality.

Although I did not observe any ethical issues among the participants in this research, I am aware of a fundamental weakness when studies are dependent on self-reported communication. In this sense, there might be a disparity between what SFL educators expressed when they engage in informal conversations with colleagues and when they are part of semi-structured interviews conducted by researchers. The design of the questions in interviews and focus group were carefully composed.

Consequently, as I have previously indicated, I included “multiple researchers, multiple methods of data collection, and multiple theoretical analyses to complicate rather than simplify knowledge production” (Freeman et al., 2007, p.28) and therefore, provide solid accounts for the claims that would build new *conocimiento* in the field of heritage language education.

Before beginning the data collection, I had already taken and passed the CITI test (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative), which is an online training program designed to educate researchers about issues involving human subject research. Upon the approval of this proposal, I received authorization from the University of Missouri, KC (UMKC) IRB office to start implementing my investigation. At the same time, I contacted the World Language coordinator and the IRB office at the school district where I conducted my research, and I received their authorization to conduct interviews and focus group with the district’s employees.

As stated by Creswell and Poth (2018) and to abide by the criteria established by the American Anthropological Association (1967), I took all possible measures to protect the anonymity of the participants, and I chose individuals who “represent a composite picture rather than an individual picture” (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Moreover, I clearly explained the purpose of my study without engaging in any type of deception about its nature, and I assured participants that all information shared with me during the process of my study was completely confidential. Additionally, the information gathered will not be shared with their department chair and/or their administrators. Accordingly, all participants in this study were provided with a written informed consent describing risks, benefits, and procedures included. Participants were informed that their involvement was completely voluntary, and that they could withdraw their contribution to the research at any time without any request of explanation (see Appendix B).

Regarding the focus group participants, since the nature of this process was such that confidentiality could not be guaranteed, I provided teachers with the procedures in place to maintain confidentiality of the research data and I included a non-disclosure statement for participants to sign agreeing not to repeat what was said in the focus group to others.

Finally, as I understand that the fact that I am indeed in close professional distance with the participants in this study, and that my interpretation of findings aligns their voices with narratives of colonialism, racialization of their HL students' identities and languages, and use of subtractive instructional practices, I have intentionally chosen not to isolate their declarations in my report of the outcomes. Instead of referring to participants by their pseudonyms (as originally planned) or by Teacher 1, Teacher 2, etc., I have decided to subscribe to a researcher's positionality that is committed to a practitioner doctorate, in which "the terminal degree sought is relative or often closely aligned with the scholar's identity as a professional practitioner" (Throne, 2021, p. 165). I believe that the categorization of teachers' reports on their perceptions and practices allows for some degree of anonymity, so

that, if this dissertation is read by any of the participants in the future or someone within the school district we all work at, the identification of the contributors to the study is less obvious, and therefore, less threatening.

However, as Anzaldúa states on our need of teorías that enable us not only to interpret what happens in the educational world, but also to produce “effects that change people and the way they perceive the world” (2009, p. 297), I consider that this set of knowledges provided by the conclusions of the research bears a certain degree of ethical responsibility towards the recipients of the experiences narrated by the educators.

Chapter Summary

Instead of perpetuating tendencies to separate and build physical and metaphorical walls between cultures and languages, this study was rooted in the mission of inclusive education in a multicultural, multilingual America. This country stands on grounds of fluid national and cultural identities and shifting linguistic codes and educators are responsible for ensuring that the norm in our classrooms is “to stop seeing cultural and racial differences as antagonistic and dichotomous but see them as dialectic and interdependent” (Yang, 2017). Heritage language students are not just Latinx students or Spanish speakers. They represent multiculturalism in America, they live within the cultural mestizaje Gloria Anzaldúa states as the consciousness that needs to be brought to light and cultivated (1987) instead of severed. In the end, “when it comes to American cultural identity, it is abundantly clear that there is not a cultural uniformity but warring cultural voices” (Yang, 2017); or in Sonia Nieto’s own words: “Multicultural education is not separated from education; that is, all education is by its very nature multicultural” (Nieto, 1993, p. 7).

Perceptions of Latinos in the United States are complicated and tainted with innumerable threats and messages of rejection. In this anti-immigrant context, aggravated by our former president, Donald Trump's constant comments on the perils of immigrations for the United States, there are increasing fears in the Latinx communities about how language, identity, and culture can survive if relegated to the shadows (Hamann, 2017; Stavans, 2017; Yang, 2017). Consequently, heritage language speakers in schools have been experiencing an increase in anxiety and returning to Anzaldúa's *encrucijada*, a crossroads that implies a lack of understanding our culture or in Hollins' (2008) words: "who we are in the world."

In this *encrucijada*, my research collected stories, perceptions, and practices of those who are currently a crucial piece in building safe spaces and natural bridges for minoritized students: their language educators. This mission becomes especially relevant for educators of a language/culture that heritage students breathe at home and spaces where they have grown. These educators own the potential to acknowledge the toolbox students bring to the classrooms or to dismiss every piece of equipment as useless or incorrect for the academic realm. The relevance of educators of Spanish lies on the key concept of developing relationships between them and students who have been raised in Latinx communities. Relationships can be based on trust and inclusion or on prescriptivism and authority. Shifting from the first pedagogical approach to the latter requires a sacrifice, and it might be "the biggest sacrifice of all, because to engage in community is to alter it" (Colvin et al., 2020, p. 147).

My research questions attempted to show a sample scene of these bridges from teachers' perspective. The goal that arose from this research was to gather information on how heritage language students are perceived in their Spanish classes, and what practices were provided to them within the academic field. From its results, new

questions of equity and linguistic discrimination surfaced, which might lead other educators, administrators, and researchers on a path through Anzaldúa's conception of the Coyolxauhqui process of disintegration and reconstruction, towards the creation of programs and courses where our heritage language students may use their multiple linguistic and cultural resources to investigate their borderlands identities, which are precisely the tools society need to make sense of its shadow.

In the next two chapters, I provide an extensive account of how the data from documents, interviews and focus groups was collected, examined, and the outcomes that resulted from this process. They are, in my opinion, the strongest sections of this study, since they are the result of a combination of theoretical frameworks, literature, and a methodology that adjusted the objectives of this study with real answers that can illustrate future changes in the field of foreign language education, and particularly, in the integration of heritage language instruction.

CHAPTER 5

TOWARDS (UN)SAFE SPACES: DOCUMENTS ANALYSIS

The previous chapter provided a comprehensive presentation of my research's methodology and how the constant presence of Gloria Anzaldúa path to *conocimiento* has supported my *camino* in the context of this study. This chapter presents the data gathered from the analysis of documents, articles, and reports that establish the theoretical framework that defines the teaching of foreign languages in the United States. Utilizing an exhaustive comparative method of analysis, major themes and a visual representation emerged from the documents.

The use of Anzaldúa's images led me to combine traditional coding practices with sketches where themes and their corresponding interpretive codes created a visual framework that offered multiple layers of answers to the two central questions that drove my research:

Central Question 1: What are the perceptions of Spanish language (SL2) teachers of heritage language learners (SHLLs) enrolled in their SL2 courses in several Midwestern high schools?

- a. What are the beliefs of SL2 educators about Heritage language students and their language acquisition?

Central Question 2: How do the pedagogical beliefs of SL2 educators inform their practices in mixed classrooms?

- a. What instructional practices and strategies are utilized by SL2 educators in their mixed classrooms when teaching SHL learners enrolled in their SL2 courses?
- b. How are SL2 educators' perceptions towards their SHL students related to their teaching practices?

This chapter provides an extensive theoretical base so that the voices of the educators who participated in the interviews and focus group can be understood and located within a systemic discriminatory structure. These documents represented borders created by colonizing establishment of scholars, whose perceptions of language classrooms molded the fences created around goals, strategies, and theories of language acquisition.

Borders were in the Chicana scholar's words "set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge" (p. 25). The analyzed documents established who were the "legitimate inhabitants" in foreign language classrooms, while their adoption by educators sent a message to students who did not identify with such demands: their presence in the thin edge of barbwire surrounding foreign language classrooms.

1,950 mile-long open wound
dividing a *pueblo*, a culture,
 running down the length of my body,
 staking fence rods in my flesh,
 splits me splits me
 me raja *me raja*

This is my home
this thin edge of
 barbwire.

(Anzaldúa, 1987, pp. 24-25)

La facultad: Documents

The analysis of documents establishing the theoretical objectives of a field of study was crucial in this qualitative research since it provides a fixed framework

utilized by professionals around foreign language education. Instructional documents, such as the reports I have chosen for the current research, were carefully designed by committees of scholars who consciously chose concepts under the premise that their texts would be adopted by educators nationwide to construct curriculum and ground universal pedagogical practices. These documents embody the borders enclosing foreign language education. Their standards represent definitive perspectives on what, how, and why students embark on learning languages. In this sense, analysis of guidelines, reports, and standards constituted the undeniable first step in my study, and its findings were a firm base for the conception of themes and questions that were posed to teachers in interviews and focus groups.

Without undermining the importance of these national documents, as heritage language students inhabit borders of foreign language education, special attention needed to be paid to the margins stated by Anzaldúa (1987), that “alien element” FL educators are often not trained to distinguish. For the purpose of my research, document analysis of public documents such as national standards for language learning, guidelines, performance descriptors, modes of communication, and rubrics, provided indispensable data. All this information was written evidence that “enables a researcher to obtain the language and words of participants” (Creswell, 2014, p.191), and provided common terminology and a theoretical framework of reference for interviews with participants.

This research consisted of case studies of the perspectives of teachers of Spanish as a foreign language when they host heritage language learners in their classrooms. I have chosen three sources of evidence –documents, interviews, and focus groups—to find growth in my findings and conclusions through a process of triangulation. Although there were divergent thoughts between distinguished scholars

in the field of case studies, document analysis was present in the three major representatives of the case study methodologies: Yin, Stake, and Merriam.

Taking these experts in qualitative research narratives into account along with Anzaldúa's concept of *la facultad*, or "the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface" (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 60), I inspected these documents, extracted thematic patterns, and applied interpretive and descriptive codes in search of logical commonalities that constituted the ground floor for the interviews with participants. At the same time, I was receptive to what the Chicana scholar calls "instant sensing," perceptions and inferences based on my own cultural and experiential background, along with my readings of Anzaldúa's work, and that were not linked to "conscious reasoning."

Furthermore, a crucial component of this document's analysis has been to make informed consistent judgments about "the significance of nonoccurrences" (Patton, 2015, p.379) or "*desconocimientos*" (Anzaldúa, 2009, p.244). Although the introductions of these documents pointed towards their adaptability to all students "regardless of where, when, or how the language was acquired" (ACTF, 2012, p. 3), heritage language education was barely mentioned, and when it was, there were no specific strategies that addressed HL students' backgrounds nor linguistic, emotional, and cultural needs and resources. This *desconocimiento* sent a message of disassociation between relevant aspects of foreign language pedagogy for L2 students and teachers, and HL students, who became part of what Tajfel and Turner's *Social Identity Theory* (1979) labeled as the *outgroup*. The fact that heritage language samples and strategies were not present in national standards was understood as a fundamental sample of distancing between instructors and heritage language students in their courses.

The official reports I chose to develop my analysis were the following:

- ACTFL performance descriptors for language learners: 2012 edition (American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2012)
- ACTFL proficiency guidelines (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2012)
- World-readiness standards for learning languages (Spanish). 4th edition (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015)
- World-readiness standards for learning languages (General). 4th edition (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015)

These four reports are considered the framework of the teachings of foreign languages in the U.S. The American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages is, according to their website, “an individual membership organization of more than 13,000 language educators and administrators from elementary through graduate education, as well as government and industry [...] Providing vision, leadership, and support for quality teaching and learning of languages” (ACTFL, n.d.). Therefore, I included the most recent and relevant reports addressing proficiency and performance descriptors, language pedagogical guidelines, and the general establishment of world language standards, which are currently followed by most FL educators in the US.

Additionally, I included in my documents analysis a report that examined the impact of Standards on educators and administrators nationally. Finally, I analyzed five articles that reflected on each of the national standards and their features. All these documents proved to be a relevant departure point for interviews and focus groups questions.

- A decade of foreign language standards: Influence, impact, and future decisions: Survey results (Abbott & Phillips, 2011)

- More than a decade of standards: Integrating “Communication” in your language instruction (Cutshall, 2012a)
- More than a decade of standards: Integrating “Cultures” in your language instruction (Cutshall, 2012e)
- More than a decade of standards: Integrating “Comparisons” in your language instruction (Cutshall, 2012c)
- More than a decade of standards: Integrating “Connections” in your language instruction (Cutshall, 2012d)
- More than a decade of standards: Integrating “Communities” in your language instruction (Cutshall, 2012b)

Throughout the analysis of these nine documents, three major themes, eight interpretive codes, and numerous descriptive codes were identified. The three major themes that defined the information provided by documents were *perspectives (gates)*, *objectives (bridges)*, and *practices (spaces)*. These themes displayed elements that related to the proposed research questions, which addressed the issues of how the pedagogical beliefs of SL2 educators described their practices in mixed classrooms. Themes aligned with concepts developed by Anzaldúa in the foreword of her collection of writings, *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation* (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2013), where the Chicana scholar presented a narrative of *gates* (perspectives), *bridges* (objectives), and *spaces* (practices), which in my research were connected to images of how teachers offered perspectives of their goals as educators of languages and the actual performances within their classroom borders.

In addition to the inquiry regarding practices of these studies, the analyzed documents were meant to provide a reference and guidance for teachers of Spanish related to proficiency-based approaches to teach the target language and prepare their

students to interact effectively with Spanish-speaking communities inside and outside of the United States. The next section describes the themes identified in the above-mentioned documents. I first defined the themes as they were described in the standards, followed by my interpretation of their meanings throughout the documents. Next, themes were grounded in literature, and finally, interpretive codes were described with quotes from the document to illuminate their meanings.

In the *World-readiness standards for learning languages* (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015), language was presented as “the primary vehicle for expressing cultural perspectives and participating in social practices” (p. 68). At the core of this report, language acquisition was strongly linked to cultural competence and understanding. Students’ attitudes towards languages were portrayed as those of “an explorer, using language to investigate, explain, and reflect on how perspectives are exhibited in the practices and products of a culture” (pp. 68-69). These perspectives were exclusively related to the target language users and represented the first overarching theme in the studied series of documents. It was also a key element in the “cultural framework” (Cutshall, 2012, p. 32) along with practices and products. In this sense, perspectives represented “that culture’s view of the world, including meanings, attitudes, values, and ideas” (p. 33).

Perspectives as Gates

The first emerging theme was the concept of perspectives and within this topic, three sub-themes were identified: (a) cultural knowledge acquisition, (b) the establishment of cultural comparisons, and (c) the ability to make appropriate interdisciplinary connections. The three categories were intrinsically connected to what Anzaldúa denominates thresholds or *gates*, a pathway that educators chose so that their students accessed a new understanding of worlds that differed from theirs.

In her poem, *Canción de la diosa de la noche* (Anzaldúa, 1999a, p. 196), the Chicano poet spoke of wandering on a path, passing through a gate, and finally becoming such gate. Similarly, teachers' perspectives of the world become thresholds through which students explore new realities and learn to delve into cultural and philosophical elements that affect their views of Spanish-speaking populations.

The first sub-theme was cultural knowledge, which according to the *National standards'* report, focuses on understanding the relationship between cultures and context, and was presented as “the philosophical perspectives, the behavioral practices, and the products of a society” (Cutshall, 2012e, p. 32). Cultural perspectives highlighted the understanding of worldviews, attitudes, and belief systems that framed cultures. Cultural practices are the “patterns of social interactions or behaviors accepted by a society” (p. 33). And finally, cultural products were described as “items required or justified by the underlying beliefs and values of that culture” (p.33). This cultural framework established the first pillar of a threshold built by educators and the resources chosen to illustrate how languages and cultures were deeply linked. The act of choosing what practices, products, and perspectives educators provide their students implied a powerful narrative of perpetuation of colonizing ideas about Spanish-speaking societies as presented throughout textbooks.

In his article “Rupturing the Yoke of Colonialism,” Macedo (2019b) stated how foreign language textbooks “celebrate the great deeds of empires and colonial powers” (p. 16). In this sense, most Spanish language textbooks portrayed, for example, Christopher Columbus as a great and brave explorer, failing to inform that he was also “the architect of horrendous genocide that practically wiped out all the Indians in the island of Hispaniola.” When educators use textbooks' materials and their cultural framework as the basis of their introduction of cultural perspectives, they are

building a threshold grounded in dominant ideologies instead of creating critical pedagogical spaces where students and teachers can unpack historically suppressed products, practices, and perspectives outside colonizing limiting views.

The process of reconstructing cultures that needed to be dismembered to truly shift our perceptions was what Anzaldúa called the *Coyolxauhqui* imperative, a theory named after the Aztec goddess of the moon to explain a lifelong process of healing after deconstructing and putting back together pieces of our understanding of life principles. This action, according to Anzaldúa, is excruciating, since it shakes our most inner beliefs: “The problem is deciding which chunks of our inner struggle and pain to cannibalize and incorporate into the text” (1999b, p. 248).

The second sub-theme related to *cultural comparisons* as the establishment of the distance between the individuals in the classroom—language learners—and the communities portrayed by the target culture. In this sense, throughout the documents, I distinguished a binary comparison system that highlighted language and cultural differences between teacher and L2 students on one side and target language cultures, which included HL students, on the other. Cutshall (2012c) in her analysis of the national standards for language learners, stated that through the process of comparing one’s language and/or culture to another, students “develop not only a greater understanding of their language and culture—but also of language and culture in the broad sense” (p. 32). Therefore, students are learning to hypothesize about cultural systems in general. Unfortunately, the authors of these national documents agreed on the fact that during these processes of comparison, generalizations leading to negative stereotypes were common in language classrooms. These generalizations were grounded in superficial comparisons. From my perspective, and following Anzaldúa’s framework, the main feature pushing for this deficit view of cultures other than the

American culture goes much deeper than the use of one-dimensional characterization of other cultures.

Cultural comparisons are highly impacted by the sense of American exceptionalism in our society. Macedo (2019) in this article pushing for the decolonization of foreign language education stated that the American FL education system has only embraced post-colonialism at a superficial level, which implicates the surge of a “neo-colonial globalism” (p.13) that originated in the first objectives that fueled the desire for American FL education: “national-interest.” Cultural comparisons grounded in notions of colonialism and deficit views of the “foreign cultures” represented a second pillar to the gate that separates L2 students from the cultural perspectives they were supposed to embrace in their language courses. As such, this same scholar advocated for the need to actively question colonizing views of cultural perspectives, even if this action is perceived as inflammatory or subversive: “Thus the very proclamation that language education should be apolitical constitutes, in my view, a political act that supports the status quo that must be acknowledged by all educators” (Macedo, 2019, p. 33).

The last sub-theme describing the cultural threshold labeled as perspectives related to the area of interdisciplinary connections, which focused on how cultural knowledge and perspectives worked as connections between different areas of interest. Within this category, I observed how content-based instruction was a crucial motivation for language use to acquire information. In the field of content-based pedagogy, language was viewed as a tool or vehicle to reach information instead of the outcome per se. Students were encouraged to keep in the target language as means to connect with other disciplines and teachers were requested to use real-world materials and tasks to engage students in communicative activities.

Objetives as Bridges

Yo soy un puente tendido
del mundo gabacho al del mojado
lo pasado me estira pa'trás
y lo presente pa'delante,
Que la Virgen de Guadalupe me cuida
Ay, soy mexicana de este lado
(Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 25)

The second theme that emerged in this process was objectives and within this topic, three sub-themes: (a) bridges to bilingualism, (b) bridges to academia, and (c) bridges to self-enrichment or self-enjoyment. This notion of building a bridge towards goals was often presented by Anzaldúa in her writings. Bridges for the Chicana scholar embodied not only structures of connection but also “thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness” (2002, p. 1). The use of bridges in feminists of color literature has been deeply linked to the idea of interconnectivity between identities, and often oppressions (Malhotra & Pérez, 2005). Throughout the analyzed documents, bridges were designed almost exclusively for L2 students to access resources that benefited them, such as college credits, prestigious certifications, requirements for their future careers, even self-enjoyment in the form of celebrations and cultural products like food, music, or art. The idea of interconnectivity between identities was relegated to heritage language students taking their community language as a foreign language and learning about their culture as the culture of the other.

Bridges to Bilingualism

The first sub-theme that supported a communicative bridge was bilingualism. The national standards for learning foreign languages, their guidelines, and

performance predictors focused on the achievement of linguistic proficiency. Even though the standards consisted of five different areas: (1) communication, (2) culture, (3) comparisons, (4) connections, and (5) communities, the report conducted by ACTFL Task Forces—*A decade of foreign language standards: Influence, impact and future directions* (Abbott & Phillips, 2011)—stated that “Communication receives the most attention in terms of teaching emphasis and professional development, followed by Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities being less prominent” (p. 6). This statement reinforced the idea that the most crucial objective for teachers in a foreign language classroom was indeed the learning of the language per se, as an outcome, the bilingual superpowers.

The analyzed documents highlighted a dominant belief of linguistic acquisition as the most relevant objective in a foreign language course, which implied that grammar-based instruction is a method that, although rejected as traditional and ineffective by many scholars, is broadly used by L2 educators. Moreover, there was a strong presence of the prioritization of the so-called standard language versus idiolects or community languages used by HL students. There is extensive literature within the raciolinguistics and sociolinguistics fields that questions the existence of standard language and examines the racialized relationship between ideologies of language standardization and what Rosa calls “languagelessness” (2016, p. 162). The sociolinguist stated that language practices whose objectives are to educate students in linguistic systems considered prestigious or standard intend to “stigmatize particular linguistic practices perceived as deviating from prescriptive norms” (p. 163) to the point that students from minoritized backgrounds, who in this research would be Latinx students exposed to the Spanish language in their communities, are excluded to the standardized notion of literacy has been perceived as “incapable of producing any

legitimate language.” In her powerful essay “How to tame a wild tongue” (1987), Anzaldúa labeled this violent act of imposed acculturation and assimilation as “linguistic terrorism” and highlighted the impossibility of separating languages from identity.

So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate. (1987, p. 81)

In this sense, ACTFL proficiency ranges fall under these discriminatory practices, specifically when heritage language students are assessed using rubrics where their community languages were considered deviations from the norm. ACTFL guidelines identified five levels of proficiency: Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. These levels “describe the continuum of proficiency from that of the highly articulate, well-educated language user to a level of little or no functional ability” (2012, p. 3). Literature exploring linguistic profiles of heritage speakers using ACTFL proficiency assessments such as the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) pointed out results that aligned language users’ assimilation to standardized linguistic practices with acceptable communicative patterns. For example, in a study exploring the linguistic profiles of Spanish and Russian heritage language speakers using data from the *2009-2013 ACTFL-UCLA NHLRC Heritage language project* (Swender et al., 2014), the authors highlighted the following outcomes:

- Native-like fluency and pronunciation “do not compensate for a lack of sustained functional ability” (p. 435) as defined by *ACTFL proficiency guidelines*.

- Heritage language speakers or their teacher’s overconfidence in their abilities might be an obstacle to such students’ linguistic skills improvement.
- Spanish HL speakers in the Advanced level showed issues addressing topics that required abstract thinking or the complexity expected at this level.
- Spanish HL speakers “evidenced patterns of structural errors and incorrect linguistic formulations” when they had to use the subjunctive and conditional modes.

Moreover, language acquisition or linguistic skills were presented as if they could be extrapolated from the HL speakers’ identities and racialized existence in our heavily colonizing educational system. This documents analysis questions the fundamental premises where these studies were based, their initial lens or approach to the issue of proficiency and the utilization of markers such as “educated speaker” (Swender et al. p. 437), or “well-educated native speaker of a non-stigmatized dialect” (Martin, 2010, p. 171).

Bridges to Academia

A second category within the theme of bridges as objectives was the notion of bridging towards a future academic setting, which included three descriptive themes: (a) language learning as a way of receiving college credits, (b) language learning as part of college admissions requirements, and finally (c) language learning as elements that benefit college scholarships. The pragmatic objectives presented in these documents were focused on L2 students who would attend college and for whom, language endorsements were presented as a sign of prestige.

The *World languages readiness standards* (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015) highlighted how learning a foreign language such as Spanish held important academic and intellectual benefits such as “the development of

reading abilities and print awareness, improved cognitive abilities, problem-solving skills, and higher academic achievement on a variety of standardized test measures such as the ACT and SAT exams” (p. 8). Many foreign language programs at high school level promote ideas of academic success especially to monolingual students while multilingual students are bombarded with ideas of how English proficiency (monolingualism) is the only path towards “the opportunity to participate fully in society” (ACT, 2016).

Bridges to Self-enrichment and Self-enjoyment

The third and last sub-theme within the notion of bridging was self-enrichment and self-enjoyment. Experiences such as (a) traveling abroad, (b) studying in a Spanish-speaking country, and (c) enjoying leisure activities such as food, music, art, etc. were presented in the documents as powerful advantages for students who persevere in the learning of a foreign or second language. In her article reflecting on ACTFL’s communication standard, Cutshall (2012a) posed this observation: “I think it’s important for any teacher to answer the question, ‘What do I want my students to be able to do with the language?’” (p. 35).

Throughout the documents, there was an underlying theory that foreign languages are intrinsically linked to life “abroad” and it was reflected when some FL educators’ abilities to teach languages and their cultures were criticized for not spending time in the target culture, understanding target culture as what happens outside our US borders. One example of this criticism was stated by a professor from Auburn University quoted by Cutshall in her article discussing cultural knowledge: “One of the biggest problems is that too many teachers don’t go abroad, and they just read culture notes out of a textbook” (2012b, p.33). Moreover, the affirmations that:

They maybe went abroad 15 years ago but the world is a different place today, and perhaps they only went to one location. Basically, they don’t have the

background so they themselves don't understand the culture. Then they may teach their students stereotypical information, which does more harm than good.

The assumption that Spanish-speaking cultures do not include US Latinx communities is another example of Anzaldúa's *desconocimientos*. Furthermore, the implication that teachers need to have been physically exposed to a particular culture to be able to fully understand it accentuates the perception of distance within a binary system of America and the rest of the world. In this sense, when surveyed in a report by ACTFL ten years after their standards were launched, educators expressed their feelings of inadequacy when teaching students to explore different cultural perspectives. For example, a Spanish teacher from Grayson High School in Loganville, GA stated that "as a non-native speaker, I don't feel extremely expert myself. So, this has always been a challenge" (2012b, p. 34). The teacher was talking about bringing culture in "authentic" ways into her classroom.

Traveling and studying abroad are signs of prestige and possibilities that many students and/teachers can not enjoy. When language and cultural knowledge are presented in the classroom as something that occurs in a place different from the one students occupy, the impact on students whose communities represent that culture and is damaging. When my own language is presented to my peers as practices that take place outside my place of residence, the implicit message is one of non-belonging.

In this same theme, ACTFL's use of the nomenclature "foreign language" to refer to Spanish in classrooms where heritage language students are present accentuated the feeling of disconnect. In March 2020, this national association published an announcement where they introduced an "updated brand, one that better positions us to engage members and other stakeholders, globally" (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2020, p. 10). ACTFL recognized that the use

of the term ‘foreign’ sent a message of unfamiliarity and questioned how Native American languages or ASL could be included. The new brand keeps the acronym ACTFL, as it is recognized globally, and added “Language Connects” to “demonstrate how language acts as a bridge to cultural competence, career readiness, and empathy” which are versions of the interpretive codes found within the second theme of bridges in this documents analysis.

The shift from explicit pedagogical ideologies that framed the learning of languages as otherness or foreign to the use of terms such as foreign or world languages implies a fundamental reconsideration of how words matter. However, it is critical to emphasize that the standard language and national ideologies of American versus Spanish-speaking communities are deeply rooted in nationalistic frameworks that are replicated in our classrooms.

Contrarily to these attempts to avoid explicit references to the use of ‘foreign’ applied to the teachings of languages in our American schools, in their article “Time for a paradigm shift?” (2020), Reagan and Osborn deliberately rejected the use of world languages as it has been adopted by school departments in the United States. By embracing the label ‘foreign’ the scholars wanted to make clear that instruction of languages has been and still is perceived as foreign. In their opinion “this perception is in fact only strengthened, we believe, by encouraging the use of what is seen as a politically correct label (i.e., ‘world languages’)” (2020, p. 100). The risk of adapting nomenclatures that do not fit the actual perceptions and behaviors in the classroom is that changes of labels help educators breathe more comfortably in a space where they sound like they are more culturally and linguistically sustaining than what they really are. Therefore, no need for profound changes is detected or intended.

Apart from activities grounded in the use of language through traveling or studying abroad, a final descriptive code that emerged during the analysis of documents was the pursuit of self-enjoyment. These are activities that Anzaldúa, in “How to tame a wild tongue” (1987) calls *vistas, corridos, y comidas* (p.81). Enjoyable and engaging events included going to multicultural restaurants (in the Hispanic community, overwhelmingly Mexican restaurants), cooking ‘foreign’ food, enjoying books written by Spanish-speaking writers such as Gabriel García Márquez’s *Cien Años de Soledad* (2009) (after his inclusion in Oprah’s Book Club), listening to popular music such as Bad Bunny, Maluma, Shakira, or Fonsi, or watching famous TV series like *Money Heist* (Pina, 2017) or *Who Killed Sara?* (Ruiz, 2021).

Within the theme of self-enjoyment, scholars researched music and language motivation among L2 students linked not only to linguistic factors, such as vocabulary and expression repetition, grammatical structures, etc.; but also related to the field of social-emotional learning (SEL). Some non-linguistic benefits of foreign language acquisition through music connected with learning styles (Gomez-Dominguez et al., 2019); reduction of second language production anxiety (Fortin, 2020; Naser Oteir & Nijr Al-Otaibi, 2019; Palinkasevic & Brkic, 2020); and motivation increase (Lushchik et al., 2021). Documents did not show occurrences of any specific methodology that addressed self-enjoyment for heritage language students. Most resources and strategies presented by the various articles referred to in the documents were focused on an audience of monolingual, monocultural students with no personal experience outside a homogenous dominant mentality setting.

(Un)safe Spaces as Pedagogical Practices

Finally, after crossing gates and establishing connections through bridges that instituted objectives for students of Spanish as a foreign language, the analyzed

documents described places where actions as practices occurred: a space surrounded by an “unnatural boundary” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 25). In this final theme, two areas of study surfaced: (7) linguistic communication, and (8) communities.

Linguistic Communication

Linguistic communication represented a crucial space for teachers of Spanish as a FL. As expressed in the second theme, bilingualism was presented as the most desirable objective for students of Spanish. Linguistic communication was defined by five descriptive codes: (a) language performance descriptors, (b) proficiency levels, (c) modes of communication, (d) language domains, and (e) comprehension and comprehensibility.

The performance descriptors’ objective is according to ACTFL’s documents “to describe language performance that is the result of explicit instruction in an instructional setting” (2015, p. 3). Descriptors presented three ranges of performance: Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced; and they were designed for teachers to create activities and tasks to be implemented in the classroom where students practiced them in a safe environment. Descriptors were based on explicit instruction, practiced or rehearsed in the classroom, based on familiar contents or contexts, and assessed in the same communicative manner as language was learned.

A second sub-theme was linked to proficiency levels, which, although could be embedded within performance descriptors, were described as “what a language user can do regardless of where, when or how the language was acquired” (p. 4). Therefore, language was learned and rehearsed in artificial spaces within the linguistic communities where students felt encouraged to use it without risks of being judged. However, proficiency levels represented places where students’ range of abilities was determined according to a set of expectations that reflected how students could “use

language skillfully, and with accuracy, efficiency, and effectiveness” (American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2012, p. 4).

The preface to the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines* (2012) indicated four modes of communication students are expected to effectively use the Spanish language (speaking, writing, listening, and reading), and five levels of proficiency: Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. The major levels Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice are subdivided into High, Mid, and Low sublevels. From a raciolinguistics view, these labels send damaging messages towards learning a prestigious version of languages that does not mirror HL users’ cultural nor linguistic identities.

The leading scholar around SHL education, Guadalupe Valdés (1997), critiqued these dominant pedagogical approaches to language teaching, which, in her opinion, were designed to eliminate speakers’ home language varieties by replacing them with a more reputable ‘standard’ variety. Forty years later, students in Spanish classes still face a curriculum that expects them to acquire linguistic competence that does not reflect their identity or communicative repertoire. This design is illustrated by the levels of the ACTFL guidelines as they “describe the continuum of proficiency from that of the highly articulate, well-educated language user to a level of little or no functional ability” (2012, p.2).

Although researchers have recognized a move from eradication to an expansion oriented SHL curriculum (S. Beaudrie et al., 2021; M. Carreira, 2013; Leeman, 2018; Martínez, 2012), the setting of objectives for students as to achieve language proficiency associated with the “highly articulate, well-educated language user” questions the meaning of linguistic articulation and its correspondence to HL linguistic repertoires. Moreover, although ACTFL is making noticeable progress in its portrayal

of what linguistic proficiency means, “language ideologies are embedded within larger social management systems that buttress fundamental assumptions about the source and the substance of legitimate knowledge and are thus closely tied to a more overarching politics of knowledge” (Leeman & Martínez, 2007, pp. 36–37). The idea of ‘legitimate language and knowledge’ set the rules of communication throughout the streets and roads of this (un)safe space emerged from the documents responsible for establishing the norms of circulation and the consequences for those who do not respect them.

A third sub-theme within the linguistic communication category related to modes of communication, which included (a) interpersonal or negotiation of messages between individuals in spoken or written forms, (b) interpretive or interpretation of written, visual, or oral messages, and (c) presentational meaning the production of written, spoken, or visual messages to inform or persuade individuals.

Additionally, there were seven categories or language domains divided into two groups in the document *ACTFL Performance descriptors for language learners*, connected to two descriptive codes. The first three were labeled as language domains and described the parameters for the language learner’s performance in each range: (a) functions, (b) contexts and content, and (c) text type. Functions refer to the tasks the language user performed in the learned language, such as asking questions, narrating, or describing situations, making inferences. Secondly, contexts refer to situations in which language use takes place (oneself and one’s immediate environment), and content illustrates topics of conversation or understanding (general interest, work-related, concrete, or abstract topics). Finally, the text type is related to the linguistic structure of the language used by the learner and can range from words and simple phrases to connected sentences and paragraphs.

The second group of domains were part of the code *comprehension* and comprehensibility, which according to this document, answered the question “How and how well is the language learner able to be understood and to understand?” (p.9). This code related to four sub-categories, which determined the level of specific linguistic competence of the language learner: (a) language control, (b) vocabulary, (c) communication strategies, and (d) cultural awareness.

Since explicit explanations of how HL students are impacted by instructional objectives and frameworks were infrequent throughout the analyzed documents, I decided to include the following quotation on the issue of performance outcomes and their variations depending on native language and modes of communication:

Heritage speakers of a language learn to use their heritage language through a variety of means, often through family and community interactions, some-times more formally in an instructional setting, The modes of communication provide educators of heritage speakers with a useful analytical tool to determine an instructional emphasis. Interpersonal communication and interpretive listening tend to be strengths for many heritage speakers. At the same time, some heritage speakers may benefit from focused support in the modes of presentational writing and interpretive reading if prior language experiences were not in an instructional setting.

The different expectations from HL users between interpersonal communication (conversational speaking) and interpretive listening (oral understanding), and the modes of communication that are commonly associated with the “academic” fields: reading and writing, were employed in formulating questions for the first series of interviews of educators to answer the research question of perceptions of heritage language students’ communicative skills. The issue of academic language versus community language was an overarching theme that often-relegated students whose community language is Spanish to what Anzaldúa calls her “home tongues (...) the languages I speak with my sister and brothers, with my friends” (1987, p. 78).

Communities

The last sub-theme within the theme of (un)safe spaces was the concept of communities. ACTFL's most recent report—*World-readiness standards (Spanish)* (2015)—highlighted the influence of the Spanish culture and heritage in the global context and in the local context of the United States. These newly adopted standards showed an understanding of integrating local communities as part of objectives and frameworks, at least theoretically. In their mission statement, the *World-readiness standards* stated that they designed a “roadmap to guide Pre-K-16 learners to ‘develop competence to communicate effectively and interact with cultural competence to participate in multilingual communities at home and around the world’” (2015, p.11).

The existence of a variety of Spanish languages and their cultures, and their impact on the United States culture was portrayed as an asset for monolingual students to access “unique opportunities to interact with those peoples and to access authentic materials in the language” (p.15). Although there was an undeniable attempt to depict communities of Spanish-speaking backgrounds as part of the U.S. society, there was still a certain sense of binary perception of who “those peoples” are and to what extent they are an integral part of the American population.

The field of communities aligned with one of the five Cs from ACTFL. As such, it included two standards: (a) school and global communities and (b) lifelong learning. For purposes of this research, I have included the concept of lifelong learning within the second theme of bridges in the category of bridges towards self-enrichment. Moreover, the category of communities included six areas of interest: (a) school community, (b) local community, (c) global community, (d) service learning, (e) stereotypes, and (f) distance between educators and members of the heritage language community.

The first area where linguistic communication takes place is the school community. As it was mentioned in the theme of bridges or setting objectives, linguistic communication has been perceived as the primary mission within the classroom walls. As reported by the survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Education on the impact that standards had on educational programs around the country, “communication received the most attention in terms of teaching and professional development” (Abbott & Phillips, 2011, p. 6). This prioritization of communication was a relevant piece in the creation of a community whose goal was to learn and practice a language that was not required to communicate with most members. Within this artificial space, ACTFL has been recommending that “language educators and their students use the target language as exclusively as possible (90% plus) at all levels of instruction” (2010). The almost exclusive use of the target language in the classroom creates an expectation of unity that alienates students whose borders between languages are not as clearly defined as those of a monolingual student.

The second area expands to the local community, a larger space that extended beyond the school boundaries. Interestingly, Cutshall (2012e) emphasized in her analysis of the communities’ goal area that according to the “Standards impact survey,” many teachers found this field “to be one of the most challenging areas to teach and that it often receives the least attention in language programs and teacher education” (p. 32). The area of communities has been reported as being so neglected that, at the 2010 ACTFL Annual Convention in Boston, one of the plenary sessions’ title was “The ‘lost C’: The communities goal area” according to Cutshall (2012). In the 2011 report that surveyed FL educators and district coordinators on the impact of ACTFL Standards, 25% of interviewed teachers reported having attended professional

development sessions where Communities were presented, as opposed to 90% who received training in the area of linguistic communications (p. 32). In this same report, teachers considered communities to be “the most difficult goal area” because it requires them to “take students into the local community” (p. 8). Some teachers stated that their community was not diverse, or they didn’t have resources to transport their students out of the classroom. Others mentioned the lack of time or questions of school safety. Finally, another reason for this goal area to be considered so challenging was the fact that “is not assessable.”

These perspectives contrasted the opinions of educators such as Pablo Muirhead, who is quoted by Cutshall (2015) in her analysis of the field of communities. Muirhead stated that teachers did not see community experiences as part of their instructional responsibilities. His thoughts aligned with how standards, proficiency guidelines, and performance descriptors were displayed in all the documents included in this study. Educators are requested to assess based on rubrics that evaluate students’ language control above the other four fields or “Cs.” Consequently, communicative skills are the focus of our foreign language education, leaving outside the educational scope key aspects of learning languages, such as acknowledging multicultural, multilingual spaces as an integral part of everyone’s society, no matter how diverse our most immediate environment is or is not.

Another aspect that emerged when analyzing local communities is the reoccurrence of the notion of ‘service learning’ as a crucial element of interaction. Narratives that surfaced in most documents presented the Spanish-speaking community from a deficit perspective in need of saving. Local Latinx communities are depicted as populations in need and monolingual students who learn Spanish as superheroes who can use their “superpower” of bilingualism to attend the necessities

by volunteering their bilingual “talents” and resources to support the community. The following are some examples of how FL students may connect with the target language communities according to a series of interviews with FL educators:

“We have pushed for trips that have a service component, a real-life language component, so that students get a hands-on connection to the language in the country.” (Cutshall, 2012, p. 33)

“These efforts (taking students on field trips) work best when they are not just a day trip out of the classroom but are more of a service project where the language can be used and culture explored in greater depth.”

“Often students have to complete community service hours to graduate and that can be a great opportunity to find a volunteer activity where they can use their language skills.”

In the *World-readiness standards for learning languages (Spanish)* (2015), there were also examples that linked the goal area of communities to service to the community:

“Strong school programs will prepare learners to carry their knowledge of Spanish into the community. Intermediate learners may engage in community service, working with elderly Spanish speakers in a local community center.” (p.16)

“This might mean finding and setting up situations for learners to interact with Spanish speakers in the community, arranging field trips to Spanish-language films or special exhibits in museums, or establishing contacts with a family services program for immigrants that will allow community service projects”. (p. 59)

Narratives that support ideas of local Latinx neighborhoods as communities in need aligned with a deficit perspective based on the assumption that Latinx families are language-deficient and therefore less capable of learning (Fallas-Escobar & Herrera, 2022; Flores & Rosa, 2019). This idea related to what has been described as the “*pobrecito* syndrome,” (P. Noguera, 2010). The word *pobrecito* is a Spanish word that is often used as an endearing term to refer to someone who is poor or for whom you feel sympathy. The *pobrecito* mindset establishes a stigmatization based on the notion that well-meaning educators don’t expect much from students who belong to minoritized communities. This syndrome promotes a deficit-perception of

multicultural, multilingual students and its impact was strongly supported by this study's interviews and focus group. HL students' bilingualism is viewed as problematic rather than a strength (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

Deficit ideologies connect the linguistic realm to the cultural and societal, and hidden in the studied documents the ideas that Latinx local communities were inherently deficient emerged through the portrayal of good intentions to serve and support those who experienced systemic inequities. Instead of correlating how students can interact with their local communities through volunteering and service, a culturally sustaining approach grounded in ideologies of community cultural wealth (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001) would transform the (un)safe spaces represented by this deficit mindset into safe spaces for all students, especially for the multilingual learners "carrying the best of all the cultures" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 225).

The third type of community that emerges in these documents is the global community of Spanish speakers. Anzaldúa, in one of her interviews with Andrea Lunsford, spoke about the notion of world citizens as individuals that need to learn to move among cultures, countries, and customs. The Chicana author stated that "the future belongs to those who cultivate cultural sensitivities to differences and who use these abilities to forge a hybrid consciousness that transcends the "us" versus "them" mentality and will carry us into a *nosotras* position bridging the extremes of our cultural realities" (2020, p. 255).

In the studied documents, this domain was observed from perspectives that related to two of the descriptive codes previously analyzed. First, global was associated with the idea of global opportunities in the field of financial globalization, referred to in the 'Communities' standard of school and global communities as an asset for the students' future career. Language learning was presented to compete in

international markets. For example, in the *World readiness standards* (2015), the term global was linked to the field of economics as shown in the following quotes:

In our global economies, well-developed language and cultural applications increase not only the marketability of the employee, but also the ability of the employer to meet the expectations of the customer. (p. 102)

Dual degree programs combine the traditional liberal arts education with a professional field in preparation for working in a global economy. Dual degree programs often combine study or internships abroad so that students gain the cultural, linguistic, and pragmatic job experiences that enable them to become effective citizens of the world. (p. 22)

The increasing interconnectedness of the world's economy requires the United States to continue shifting from a manufacturing-based economy to one increasingly based on information, technology, and service in global environments. (p. 99)

The second meaning associated with global communities represented worldwide problems, which, in the Advanced Placement (AP) curriculum, was presented as a thematic unit labeled 'Global Challenges.' In an international strategy document presented by the U.S. Department of Education (2012), learning languages was portrayed as a necessary skill to prepare students to "address global needs and trends and aim to develop a globally competent citizenry" (p. 2). Global challenges were referred to as "issues, phenomena and catastrophes that cut across borders, like the spread of disease, climate change, natural disasters, and financial crises" (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, p. 2). Moreover, Cutshall, in her article on communities, included recommendations for teachers who needed inspiration to incorporate this standard into their language courses.

Throughout the first three locations—school, local, and global communities—two areas acquired a crucial role: (a) language learning as service or volunteer opportunities, and (b) stereotyped deficit views of Spanish-speaking communities grounded in white saviorism colonizing mindsets. These two concepts were deeply interconnected and overarching the former three, but I placed them in a separate

section to facilitate challenging questions and/or scenarios for interviews and focus groups.

Lastly, another overarching field of separation between teachers and the communities studied in their classrooms connected to binary perspectives observed in Tajfel and Turner's *Social Identity Theory* (1979) labeled as *ingroup vs. outgroup*. In fact, fields of colonizing binary separations forcing individuals and communities to belong to one or the other and not recognizing the resourceful life in the *entremundos*, characterized the narrative in *Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza* (1987).

Anzaldúa portrayed issues of identity and cultural distance between linguistically and culturally minoritized individuals (HLLs) and the dominant society (mostly white teachers). In her theorization of exclusion, borders were looping structures that could be replicated on several scales (Rosa, 2019). As opposed to this binary existence, the Chicana writer depicted her life in South Texas, the borderland, as culturally blended between the U.S. and Mexican culture and at the same time, profoundly segregated from the United States and from Mexico. In this unique physical and metaphorical land, Anzaldúa constructed an identity that struggled with the concept of cultural, linguistic, and sexual belonging while she searched for answers to define an existence that defied borders and segregation. In Cantú's words: "it is possible to both understand and reject, to love and detest, to be loyal and to question, and above all to continue to seek enlightenment out of the ambiguity and contradiction of all social existence" (Cantú, 2011).

Conclusions

The analysis of documents depicted a framework where learning education was closely related to notions of language status determined by socioeconomic ideologies of social and financial utilities. Language regulations aligned with ideas of normative

linguistic practices, which did not include concepts of social justice from within, and not as a charity towards minoritized populations. Language curricula was defined as influenced by prestigious conceptualizations of purpose and self-enrichment. Finally, the documents analysis exposed a division of communities, feelings of exclusion, and an intentional *desconocimiento* of natural safe places, where deficit and binary perspectives were implemented to impede the creation of heterogeneous spaces that recognize, sustain, and embrace pedagogies perceived through a lens on *nepantla*, where a static cultural and linguistic identity is not possible, nor desirable.

On the next chapter, these three levels of language education—gates, bridges, and safe spaces—were brought to life by the voices of seven educators, who explained their positionalities and practices in their own foreign language classrooms, and during their interactions with heritage language students.

CHAPTER 6

CANDADOS EN LA BOCA: INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS

Like consciousness, *conocimiento* is about relatedness—to self, others, world. (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 150)

In her recompilation of Anzaldúa’s interviews, A.L. Keating, mentioned how for the Chicana author, interviews were “another dimension of writing” (Anzaldúa, 2020, p. 4), Keating noticed how their time framing process and the dialogue or conversational formats had “an immediacy rarely found in written work and a potential openness and self-exposure that perhaps even exceeds the openness Anzaldúa strived for in her publications.” This ‘potential openness and self-exposure’ represents a valuable reason behind the choice of incorporating interviews and focus groups to my research.

Through the process of planning, conducting, transcribing, and analyzing interviews and focus groups narratives, I have gained a deep holistic view of the investigation objectives and at the same time, I evolved in my own path to *conocimiento*, by questioning my prior assumptions on the perceptions of non-Latinx teachers of HL users in their classrooms, or quoting Anzaldúa, I deepened into my “reflective consciousness” through the process of engaging in conversation with the participants in this research. Moreover, their outcomes posed additional barriers that pushed my follow-up focus group to spaces where these new areas were addressed.

Some scholars considered as obstacles the fact that interviews include “not just facts but reasoning, memories, and emotions as well” (Baskarada, 2014, p. 11). This statement proved to be especially accurate when addressing issues grounded in backgrounds that established a disconnect between teachers and students. However, grounded in Anzaldúa’s framework, I welcomed these memories and emotions as integral part of research, of creating new knowledges of what it meant to describe

perspectives that were interconnected to our cultural and personal experiences.

Throughout the interviews and focus group process, I made a conscious attempt to escape the high intellectual walls surrounding white research, which is described by Anzaldúa as “an insidious desconocimiento, [since] it refuses to allow emotional awareness and its threat into their consciousness” (2015, p. 145).

Interviews Analysis

In my first interviews, I posed questions where educators needed to explore their thoughts and feelings about not just their curriculum but more importantly about how they perceived the ways their work may have impacted a minoritized group of students, namely heritage language students. Since the current study presents the experiences of seven white teachers, consequent issues of race related to levels of authority and cultural distance impacted responses.

Apart from the framing of linguistic diversity and the racialization of bilingualism (Flores, 2019), qualitative scholars have pointed out problems qualitative interviewers encounter during their studies, such as “misinformation, evasion, lies, and fronts” (Douglas, 1976, cited by Walford, 2007, p. 147). The issue of misinformation is closely related to Anzaldúa’s *desconocimiento*, which was an overarching area that affected this study’s documents analysis. Patton (2015) referred to how some important topics “may be inadvertently omitted” (p. 438) and if the interviewer did not follow the interview guide, the results were “substantially different responses” which could diminish their comparability. During the analysis of my participants’ interviews, I paid close attention to these nonoccurrences as powerful indicators of how teachers had the power to reject responsibility and, on some occasions, hid behind systemic expectations or standards to accommodate the discomfort of feelings of inadequacy. In

the Chicana's own words: "*Conocimiento* hurts, but not as much as *desconocimiento*" (2015, p. 137).

No matter the challenges, the value of my interviews was undeniable and, according to Yin (2009), they become guided conversations, which can "reveal how case study interviews construct reality and think about situations, not just giving answers to specific questions" (p.264), which becomes important sources of case study evidence. In this report, an interview guide approach, where topics related to teacher' perceptions and practices in mixed classrooms with heritage and non-heritage students were specified in advanced in a table-format. During the research process, I used a combination of visual representations and tables as my own sacred kernels of corn: "Este saber, this knowledge, urges you to cast una ofrenda of images and words across the page como granos de maize, like kernels of corn" (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 117).

Prior to the semi-structured interviews, I decided on the sequence and wording of questions (Patton, 2015, p. 438), and during our conversations, these documents were utilized as pillars and unifiers so that all interviews navigated similar paths, respecting how each interviewee chose to venture in their own personal spaces. Besides, this type of interview favored my study since I, as the main researcher, shared roles with the interviewees, had a deep knowledge of the subject, and could "establish a conversational style" (Patton, 2015) while focusing on the main issues that had been predetermined. The interview guide provided me with a list of themes linked to the two central research questions as well as to their corresponding sub-questions, but its open-ended format allowed for follow-up questions to ensure clarity or develop topics of interest.

I hosted interviews with seven educators who currently teach Spanish in the same school district as me, and in three different high schools. All interviewees had

experience teaching students who are considered heritage language learners in their traditional Spanish as a foreign language courses. Only one of the participants has taught a class specifically for HL students but commented not having received any training. Due to the restrictions imposed by the current crisis of COVID19, I decided to conduct interviews via Zoom, a videoconferencing platform that also offered recording capabilities. The length of each interview ranged from 40 to 75 minutes depending on the participants' availability and conversational style.

In her own interviews, Anzaldúa stated that “online technology can be used to mask identity as well as to free it up” (2015, p. 187). I would like to recognize that the physical distance between the interviewed teachers and me due to our virtual connection added and subtracted elements to the interview process. An (un)natural bridge was built between us, which eliminated the feelings of closeness when two people interact in the same location. However, the possibility of being able to see the other person's full face without a mask added two crucial emotional factors: (1) the opportunity to develop a conversation in a safe platform from the educators' own home spaces, which added some conditions of vulnerability and comfort, and (2) the connection created by being able to read facial expressions.

Apart from the Zoom recording functionality, two other recording tools were used to ensure accuracy and avoid errors: the computer recording application, part of the Microsoft software, and a phone recording app called Voice Recorder (TapMedia, 2017). Although some researchers advised against the use of recorders because of the added pressure on the interviewee who “may struggle to say things only in a socially acceptable way” (Kasunic, 2010), others established that if interviews were part of a higher education process, such as my doctoral research, full interview transcripts may be expected (Darke et al., 1998).

For transcription purposes, I used Descript, a software in automatic transcription for the initial rough draft, and then, I edited the sections that needed revision, for example those paragraphs where interviewees used a mix of Spanish and English, which this program was not able to recognize. The transcribing process and the possibility of being able to read and analyze the content of interviews in written form was undeniably crucial since in my letter of consent, I had informed the participants that I would provide them with a written transcription of their interviews for their review and approval, which I did immediately after I finished transcribing each interview. Moreover, as a visual learner, having written copies of each teacher's answers and narratives was key to be able to clearly identify main themes and subtopics emerging in each interview.

Understanding that “cases are units of analysis” (Patton, 2015, p. 536), and as such, the analysis process “results in a *product*: a case study,” I followed Anzaldúa's path to *conocimiento*, as a journey of internal and external awareness. Through the process of interviewing, transcribing, and analyzing teachers' narratives, I experienced a shift that pushed me into questioning the assumptions I realized I was carrying into the interviews. The process included a preliminary data analysis that consisted of a conscious process of first, recognizing emerging themes during the actual interviews, and then, focusing on recurring ideas during the data transcription and edition.

In summary, the purpose of these interviews was to gather information about the interviewees' experiences when teaching Spanish in a mixed-classroom environment, and what their perspectives were regarding the specific group of heritage language students. The interview guide served as a framework to assist this research with information regarding the following key topics:

- Teachers' own experiences learning Spanish

- Teachers' experiences with the Latinx community outside the school setting
- Teachers' experiences with heritage language learners their traditional Spanish classrooms
- Teacher's previous training on heritage language education
- Teacher's current perceptions of HL students in their Spanish as a foreign language class (academic strengths and weaknesses, disciplinary issues, student's attitudes, and relationship with non-heritage language speakers)
- Teacher's current practices and objectives for HLLs in Spanish as a foreign language classrooms (instructional strategies, formative and summative assessments, standards)
- Teacher's self-awareness of their interaction with HLLs students

Throughout the design, implementation, and analysis of the data collected in these interviews, I was able to distinguish recurrent topics related to three main themes and two sub-themes, which were considered by the participants from diverse perspectives, but that showed overlapping elements. Additionally, an integration of the data collected by the previous documents analysis and the initial code book from the interviews resulted in a concrete manner of establishing connections between national standards and teacher's perceptions and practices. The final themes constructed a meaningful structure that added valuable information to the theoretical frameworks my research is based on: Borderlands Theory (Anzaldúa, 1984), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), Perceptions of Multiculturalism (Berry, 2011), Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Paris and Alim, 2017), and Raciolinguistics (Flores and Rosa, 2016).

Interviews Findings

New *conocimientos* (insights) threaten your sense of what's "real" when it's up against what's "real" to the other. But it's precisely this threat that triggers transformation. (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 147)

Since conversations were grounded in the findings from the documents analysis, I could follow a similar visual representation that developed during their study. Therefore, a parallel structure of three major themes or *conocimientos* emerged throughout the coding process of the interviews. However, some variations indicated a distance between the theoretical frameworks established by the researched documents and the perceptions and practices expressed by the educators. In the first place, the first theme that surfaced in the documents analysis was represented by a *gate* formed by three elements (cultural knowledge, interdisciplinary connections, and cultural comparisons) establishing that these pillars determine the point of departure in foreign language acquisition practices.

In the case of the interviews' analysis, the first theme that appeared was related to the personal experiences of the interviewed teachers: (1) their experience learning the Spanish language, (2) their educational training processes, and (3) their past and current connections with the Latinx communities. Instead of the gates or thresholds before the bridge, which Anzaldúa connected to the idea of transformation, the narratives of the teachers reflected the "inner landscape awakening un saber (a knowing)" (2015, p. 138), which appears in my research's visual representation as a *cenote*, "a mental network of subterranean rivers of information that converge and well up to the surface" (p. 98). Besides, the third theme— (un)safe spaces—acquired a key role during this part of the process. Within the community or *barrio* designed in the document analysis, I imagined a house, *una casa*, as the classroom where educators create their own learning space. Within this home, teachers alluded to three framed

objects that can be found in every house: (a) *ventanas* or teachers' perceptions of their HL students, (b) *espejos* or teachers' self-reflection as a teacher of multilingual students, and (c) framed pictures depicting realities that happen in the classroom routinely.

Within these three *conocimientos* and their sub-themes, I identified ten interpretive codes and numerous descriptive codes. All the three themes from the document report analysis corresponded to the interviews' themes, and eight interpretive codes from these themes overlapped with the interpretive codes identified in the interviews.

Similarly to my previous analysis of the documents, the fact that there is a noticeable detachment between what the standards expect educators to implement and the practices reported by the interviewed teachers also represents a crucial piece of information; what Patton (2015) portrays as “the significance of nonoccurrences” (p.379) and which, in this case, could be described as the significance of the lack of cohesion between theory, perceptions, and practice. In this sense, there are two themes that were part of the interviews but could not be developed since almost all teachers had not personal or academic experiences related to them. The first one was their training in pedagogical methods and/or strategies applied to heritage language education, and the second relates to their current involvement with local Latinx communities.

Cenotes or Rivers of Information

The first theme, *los cenotes* or teachers' cultural, educational, and experiential backgrounds, added significant pieces of evidence to how educators' previous formal or informal training and/or experiences meant a defining factor in their perceptions of their own students' processes of learning the language, i.e., navigating the

subterranean paths they once did in similar ways. Anzaldúa borrowed the term *cenote* from Mayan sacrificial practices and Jungian psychology. Cenotes are sinkholes that connect to underground water, and in a metaphorical sense, to our own intuitive knowledge that is grounded in our past and our “connections with various realms” (2015, p. 242), which also refers to the culturally sustaining pedagogical concept of collective knowledge (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 55) or collective identity (p. 95).

Within the first theme, three interpretive codes emerged: (a) the teachers’ processes of learning the Spanish language, (b) the teachers’ educational studies, and (c) the teachers’ past experiences with the Latinx communities. In addition, I would like to include a relevant interpretive code that is grounded on Anzaldúa’s concept of *desconocimiento* and that was included in all interviews: (d) the absence of teachers’ formal training in pedagogical strategies directed toward the HL population.

Learning Spanish

The first topic addressed teachers’ processes of learning the Spanish language. Within this experiential concept, two ideas emerged: (i) the origins of their language learning process, and (ii) their school experiences as Spanish language learners. The beginnings of the interest in learning Spanish for most teachers were related to what they considered a natural flair for learning languages, which was a factor in their future professional choices, and happened during their schooling experience. One of the teachers mentioned that she had “a knack for it” [Spanish] and another said, “I enjoyed my classes, and it came easy to me.” From my seven participants, three of them shared a family connection to someone who spoke Spanish: A Mexican grandmother, an Argentinian mother, and a father who was a Spanish teacher. For these three teachers, learning Spanish occurred as a natural consequence of their environment, but only one

of them developed communicative skills based on this family relation. None of them defined themselves as HL users.

A second memory within the topic of learning Spanish described teachers' recollections of their own Spanish language learning in school. Throughout the interviews analysis, I observed a consistency in teachers mentioning how their training was very much grammar-focused, even for the youngest of the participants, which implied that although foreign language acquisition instructional theories have drastically evolved from a more grammatical emphasis to a communicative purpose, the teachers in these interviews received training that was mostly anchored in understanding and learning the logistics of the Spanish language, with few opportunities for a less controlled environment, where accuracy would take second place to communication. One teacher summarized her experience learning Spanish in school as:

So we've got the real side and then the grammar side and then, a lot of literature. The more like ... what current research says, you know, more about the acquisition and teaching the culture. But it was one of those things. You hear the words coming out of their mouths, but I didn't see that in practice.

Likewise, another teacher mentioned the distance between the way she was taught Spanish and the ways she currently teaches in her classroom:

I would say that 95% of the Spanish I learned was probably more like school-based Spanish. It is very different from the way I teach right now. Simply because I don't focus on the grammar as much as they did.

An important detail is that, although I made assumptions that teachers would criticize this overly grammatical instruction and memorization techniques in favor of the current communicative trend, most of them emphasized their comfort with this type of learning and even their replication this style of teaching in their own classrooms:

It was very grammar focused. But I really liked what they did.

It was a lot initially of memorization, but I'm pretty decent with memorization.

I remember grammar or notes and like technical conjugating and stuff. I do remember that. And I always show my students that.

There so many times where I'm like, God, I wish I remembered how I got verbs down.

Finally, within this interpretive code of learning Spanish, I observed who some participants highlighted their own relationship with the Spanish language in affective expressions such as this participant who started learning Spanish in college:

I went to college [...] and I decided to start in Spanish 101 [...]. I loved it. It was a great program. I applied to the Spain program, went to Spain, loved it. From that point on, Spanish is what I wanted to do.

From these conversations, I noticed how teachers may express a relationship with the Spanish language without necessarily including the fact that languages are part of certain communities and identities. Based on my own background in linguistics and the culturally sustaining pedagogical framework used in these case studies, I realized of the disassociation between concepts of languages and identities or languages and communities, which leads to teachers' perceptions of languages as fixed sets of rules and structures that can be learned independently from their communities' sociohistorical and contemporary contexts.

This approach to linguistic knowledge differs from Anzaldúa's deep connection to the concept of how languages are layers of identity, streams that run underground as cenotes and that construct not only our perceptions of the world, but how we are perceived by others:

Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. (1987, p. 112)

Teachers' Education Studies

The second area that emerged from conversations around teachers' background experiences becoming Spanish language educators is connected precisely to their college education studies. Most participants studied education influenced by affective factors. Three of the participants' parents were educators themselves, one of them was a Spanish teacher. They also concurred in how having "good teachers and a lot of good friends that were also taking those courses" impacted their decision to pursue a teaching career.

Over half of the participants ended up in education from an initial different path, after majoring in Spanish language and literature, Economics, or Business. In general, our conversations around teachers' recollections of their educational careers were not very extensive. However, several teachers mentioned attending conferences and professional development sessions as major sources of training for them, even more than the required courses taken to complete their careers. Moreover, there were no references to specific theories of foreign language acquisition nor any other educational frameworks as foundations for their own teaching practices.

Teachers' Connections with Spanish-speaking Communities

There is a noteworthy body of literature that argues that learning to be a teacher and forming a teacher identity are as important as learning how to teach (Flores & Day, 2006). Since identity formation does not occur in a vacuum, in the field of foreign languages, teachers experience some identity conflicts due to the prevalent native/non-native speaker distinction. A key notion that reinforces the idea of disassociation between languages and communities as presented by the interviewed teachers was the lack of current connections with their local Spanish-speaking communities, which implies a level of disengagement from the cultures that use such

language as tool of communication. Although most teachers highlighted their positive past experiences when studying or traveling abroad to Spanish-speaking countries, six out of the seven teachers admitted not having any significant relationship with local Latinx communities. Intentional distancing from Latinx groups aligned with previous messages of linguistic acquisition prioritization over participation in its corresponding societal groups.

This distancing may be related to the racialized perceptions of Spanish language users and the strong Eurocentric influence of Spain in the field of foreign language acquisition. From my own colonizing background as a Spaniard immigrant to the United States, I was disconcerted to learn that six out of the seven interviewed teachers have studied abroad almost exclusively in Spain, which has a relevant implication regarding not only the linguistic background that the Spanish language from Spain has in the teaching of Spanish in the United States, but also the historical and cultural references Spain entails in the community of Spanish language teachers. Even if due to my emotional connections to Spain, I might have felt flattered that most interviewees had chosen my home country to improve their linguistic skills and travel, my reaction was the opposite. I questioned the reasons why universities offered study abroad experiences in Europe as opposed to the closer, more financially logical choice of Mexico or any other Central American or Caribbean country.

Teachers highlighted their wonderful experiences in Spain and their love for the Spanish culture, language, and people, all of which was portrayed in our conversations as fun and exciting. Even the teacher whose mother's family lived in Argentina, described to me her intense relationship with Spain and the people in Spain. Another of the interviewed teachers excitedly noticed that based on her travels to Spain: "their Spanish is beautiful. The people are beautiful, ... the nightlife was so

much fun.” The theoretical frameworks grounding my studies lead me to acknowledge that the glorification of Spain aligns with a racialized ingroup vs outgroup mentality, and the fact that Spain has been and still is depicted in FL acquisition textbooks and teachings as more desirable than other idiolects and cultures. The existence of an academic pretentiousness over language ‘purity’ is a damaging factor for the heritage language students who, research shows, might have faced situations where their Spanish has been portrayed as inferior to that of their “White colleagues who learned a Peninsular variety (from Spain) and who perceived their variety as more prestigious” (Macedo, 2019, p. 7).

Another relevant fact extracted from these interviews in relationship with the teachers’ experiences with the Latinx community is that only one of them frequently attended events involving Spanish speakers, which in this case it refers to weekly religious services: “So I go to the Spanish church there and because of that, I have a lot of friends that are Spanish speakers.” But even in this case, there was a self-perception that she was choosing to participate in this community’s events to practice her Spanish. Another interviewee reported being married to a person from Spain and maintaining long distance conversations with their family and friends abroad. Two teachers mentioned their Latinx colleagues as the most constant interactions they had with members of Spanish-speaking communities, but as one of the participants noted, “I don’t have any friends who are Hispanic here, that I hang out with.”

The detachment of language from its communities was another instance of how interviewed teachers’ experiences were grounded in circumstances where the language used in the classroom with students, including HL students, and teachers’ lives were not connected, which had implications for their objectives, perceptions, and classroom practices.

(Absence of) Teacher Training in HL Education

To the question of how much training teachers had in teaching Spanish to HL students, none of the interviewees had an affirmative answer. Responses included: “nothing, never, no,” “I had no training at all,” “No, never, never. Nope. I know that is bad, isn’t it?” Following Anzaldúa’s concept of *desconocimientos*, I decided to include this as the last interpretive code within the cenotes.

When I made some follow-up questions to explore the reasons behind this overwhelming lack of training, most of the teachers responded with one of the following explanations: (a) lack of training offered by their district, (b) lack of instruction during their college career, (c) lack of information on where to access such training, (d) lack of time, and (e) lack of interest since they didn’t teach a large HL population.

One of the teachers summarized their lack of training with the following words:

I worked at two other districts that were much smaller and one of which was less populated with Hispanic peoples. So, they didn’t provide that kind of training [...]. So I feel like there may have been those opportunities in the past, but maybe I wasn’t in a place ... maybe it was my first year at the school, and I didn’t have time to do them if they were ever even offered.

Even the only teacher who had experience teaching a course designed for middle school (grades 6-8) heritage language students admitted putting together his own lesson plans based on what he thought students needed at that time and an online fifth-grade textbook from Mexico he downloaded. He also commented the lack of support he received from the high school teachers, who “didn’t want me to teach very much cause they didn’t want students coming in at different levels.”

The narratives presented by the teachers were unanimous and definite. They aligned with the work led by scholars Lee and Oxelson on teachers’ attitudes toward

students' heritage language maintenance, which highlighted that “teachers who did not receive training as heritage language educators expressed negative or indifferent attitudes towards heritage language maintenance and did not see a role for themselves and schools in heritage language maintenance efforts” (2006, p. 453). Their studies targeted K-12 teachers in California who had experience teaching students whose primary language at home was not English, although they were not necessarily teachers of Spanish as a foreign language. However, their outcomes were relevant to this study since the absence of specific HL teacher preparation aligned with the lack of interest in this training as expressed by most of the participants in my research.

This explicit responses by teachers led me to what Anzaldúa calls “arrebato—a violent attack, rift with a loved one, illness, death, betrayal, systemic racism, and marginalization—(that) rips you from your familiar “home” (2015, p. 125). Acknowledging my own biased positionality of working exclusively as a Spanish as a HL courses educator, conversations with colleagues who openly expressed their intentional indifference towards a field that I consider to be a fundamental piece in our roles as active members of a professional community who must revert dominant ideologies of assimilation and racist linguistic practices are upsetting. This absence of interest, the mentioning of lack of materials or instructional opportunities in the era of open online resources and constant virtual webinars and workshops, some of which I have offered to all my colleagues in the last 5 years, shook my consciousness and led to the drafting of follow-up questions in our focus group. These (un)conscious *desconocimientos* place my participants in roles of theoretical practitioners of whitewashed ideologies of foreign language acquisition, which proves the relevance of the current line of research.

(Un) Natural Bridges or Teachers' Classroom Objectives

The second theme coincided with the second theme that emerged in the analysis of documents, in the first part of the data analysis chapter. Bridging is a key concept in Anzaldúa's work and refers not only to the connection of cultural, linguistic, and experiential backgrounds to teaching practices, but also to a bidirectional space for transformation. As determined by the document reports, bridges represented teachers' objectives for their classrooms. My analysis indicated that the analyzed documents, which are considered the theoretical frameworks guiding foreign language education in the United States, were designed almost exclusively to meet the needs of non-heritage language users. While interviewing my participants I made a conscious effort to differentiate questions regarding the teaching of "all students" versus the teaching of heritage language students, as if our new bridge had a bikers' lane.

My questions and the analysis of the teachers' answers were grounded in a culturally sustaining framework that searched for narratives that disrupted the prescriptivism where minoritized students suffered the consequences of a system that does not welcome critical diversity within, but that presents it as something "exotic" that belongs to other communities and countries. My questions and analysis searched for links to Paris and Alim's (2019) query:

What if the goal of teaching and learning with youth of color was not ultimately to see how closely students could perform White middle-class norms, but rather was to explore, honor, extend, and, at times, problematize their cultural practices and investments? (p. 3)

Three interpretive codes emerged within the theme of establishing bridges or objectives in the Spanish classrooms: (a) Linguistic objectives, (b) Cultural objectives, and (c) Socioemotional objectives. Differences between objectives for all students and objectives for heritage language students were examined in each one of these

categories. The overwhelming insistence by teachers to place the socioemotional objective of their HL students above the other two categories had relevant consequences for this study.

Bridges as Linguistic Objectives

Bridges for all. When asked about their general pedagogical objectives for the Spanish classes, participant teachers emphasized their alignment with their district's expectations of communication, which also sided with the most current ACTFL Language Connects' framework for the teaching of foreign languages, and the use of a newly adopted textbook. Some teachers talked about not expecting perfection in the students' communicative efforts, but the fact that for all teachers, growth in students' communicative skills was the key purpose of their classroom practices was relevant for this study since it centers linguistic acquisition as the main purpose of the course. The implication of this goal is that it is based on a presumption that every student in the classroom will engage in this process of linguistic development and all students will perceive this goal as the path towards academic success.

Teachers who taught novice levels of Spanish explained that their basic objective focused on establishing strong foundations on grammatical & vocabulary knowledge:

So, at the end of Spanish 1, very simple is things like, be able to talk about themselves and be able to talk about preferences, um, be able to respond to basic questions about themselves and speak in the present tense, that kind of thing.

For one of the teachers, who taught intermediate to advanced levels of Spanish, developing more spontaneous ways of speaking communication seemed to be the central learning goal. She highlighted the relevance of adherence to Can-Do Statements (ACTFL Language Connects), which are goals that aligned thematically and grammatically to various units as presented by textbooks.

There was a tendency to respect the district’s guidance and alignment of objectives with what teachers are expected to complete according to the goals established by the national organization of FL acquisition: ACTFL Language Connects. The integration of expectations is summarized using the adopted textbook in each district. One of the teachers explained it with these words:

I’m trying to get them to do the same things that the other classes are doing: the four Cs (Communication, Culture, Comparisons, Connections, and Community). I tried to do a lot of communication. I want them to be able to talk in Spanish. I want them to be able to conduct basic conversations. [...] I think the book does a very good job with objectives and outcomes.

Most teachers expressed their frustration with the proficiency levels of their current students, as they were impacted by a year and a half of remote and hybrid learning due to the COVID19 global pandemic. The shared irritation implied how following proficiency guidelines that determine linguistic abilities was key for FL educators, and how when *arrebatos* such as the last two years of educational disruption, shake our normalcy, there is a strong tendency to return to an even more rigid status quo, and apply prior structures and objectives to restore sense of control. As one teacher stated when asked about her instructional objectives:

When we look at the can-do statements and we look at the rubrics, the district rubrics, and kind of, you know, the proficiency level where every class should be at, ... you know, we're behind. And so, I feel like I've had to do more grammar catch-up.

Bridges for heritage language students. The first issue that caught my attention as a researcher and HL advocate was a teacher’s answer to my question on what her linguistic objectives for her heritage language students were: “You’re the first person I’m having a discussion about this.” Her answer connected to the first section of this interview analysis—*cenotes*—and specifically to the last interpretive code that talks to the nonoccurrence of HL training among the participants. Although this was the only teacher who verbalized this statement, the rest of the teachers’ answers were grounded

more in hopes and wishes than in actual thought-out plans, as opposed to the last section of linguistic objectives for L2 students. This lack of prior knowledge and/or instructional experience defined most of the teachers' answers. These are some of the responses to my question of linguistic objectives for HL students:

I don't have a specific goal.

I don't feel like his goal is to really learn Spanish.

We might read a book together.

I hope they're learning.

I don't know because I have not been trained.

Another observation was that the responsibility of learning Spanish was set more on the HL student than on the teacher. The recurrent mentioning on how students could be given independent reading activities and not follow through with them, while L2 students' activities were carefully guided and constant feedback was given to them, set the scenario of a student-centered classroom just for HL students, while the rest of the class participated in traditional well-structured teacher-led activities. Since there were no consequences for not completing the provided alternative activities, the results were usually reported as non-existent. Interviewed teachers never mentioned an anecdote where an HL student succeeded in independent learning practices. However, several of them included them in their differentiation practices. This teacher's comment illustrates a myriad of issues educators often face when presented with HL students in their traditional FL classroom:

My objective for all my students is that they're able to use their Spanish, but there are some kids that have more of a motivation or more of a reason..., like they want to be able to communicate with their families. And, and I think that's a really noble goal and intention, and it puts more pressure on me to make sure that I'm giving them a good education so that they're able to do that.

In this first set of interviews, teachers had a similar narrative regarding the need of differentiation for heritage language students. Many answers highlighted how some HL students' participation in class was more dependent on their personalities than on their linguistic levels of proficiency. Overall, none of the teachers indicated that they had specific linguistic objectives for the HL students in their classroom for a variety of reasons, being *desconocimiento* or pedagogical and sociolinguistic ignorance one of the most mentioned causes of this deficiency.

Differentiation strategies were presented more as reactive activities to situations when HL students did not seem to be engaged in learning than proactive plans to ensure that, as culturally sustaining pedagogies explicitly explains, schooling for our minoritized HL students should be a site that offers support to young people “in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities” (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 33). This support needs to be intentional, planned, and part of an explicit curriculum.

Bridges as Cultural Objectives

Unlike the documents report, which included an interpretive code within the bridging theme related to academic objectives set by ACTFL Language Connects for all students of FL, responses in the studied interviews did not show any mention of academic expectations for heritage and non-heritage language students. Nonetheless, my questions led participants to the topic of cultural objectives, since culture, apart from communication, was recognized as the second most relevant objective by the survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Education—*Standards impact survey* (2010)—on the effect that FL national standards had on educational programs around the United States.

When asked about teaching culture in their classes, one teacher recognized how culture is a great asset for learning languages and the one element that “made me (the teacher) fall in love with Spanish.” Feelings of appreciation for cultures are linked to the first theme that emerged in our conversations, specifically to their connections to local Latinx communities. As previously indicated, six out of the seven teachers who participated in this study mentioned having studied and/or lived abroad in Spain, and one of them, in Costa Rica. When they brought up their own cultural experiences, they were referring to these countries, which differed from most of our HL students’ communities of origin.

Moreover, educators’ narratives around the teaching of cultures portrayed sympathetic scenarios based on celebratory practices such as Day of the Dead (mentioned by almost all interviewees), artistic products and their artists, gastronomy, customary practices, and some linguistic variations. One of the teachers included growth in the students’ perspectives of the world through their exposure to her language class. The change in her students views of their own culture was also part of her cultural objectives:

I want my students to realize that there's a whole big world out there and I want them to be cognizant of ..., they don't have to know about all the different cultures and what all the different things are registered but recognize that there are all these distinct cultures with different, um, holidays and foods and accents and customs and, um, and see them get interested in that is really cool. And then to see them question, or not question, but view their own culture differently is something I try and hit on a lot.

Generally, there was a profound binary approach to the teaching of cultures in the classrooms of these interviewed teachers. Languages as well as cultures were presented not from the point of view of translingual or transcultural realms in a transitional place of *nepantla*, but from a perspective of division between the ingroup (English-speaking students with similar language learning experiences as the teacher)

and the outgroup (Spanish-speaking cultures perceived as a monolith in simplistic and homogenous ways). Comparisons between cultures were designed to establish boundaries between a dominant societal norm, and the others, placing students whose community language is Spanish in a place of distance from the idea of American citizenship, by dismissing the idea of in-between spaces.

This binary approach surfaced in comments such as the following one when the interviewed teacher commented on cultural objectives for the HL students:

I want them to get the same basic things that any other student would get. I think the art history thing is kind of a neat twist that maybe will be good for them. Maybe not. You know, there are students that are really into it. There are students that just really are not. You're going to get that everywhere, the appreciation for cultures that I think the book does foster in *Entre Culturas* ... if they say, what are some similarities between Spain and Colorado from Mexico and North Carolina, from Paraguay and Texas, you know?

Only one teacher stated that his objectives for HL students were “completely different,” and that his main cultural objective for HL students was for them “not to be ashamed of their own culture.” This assertion implied a high degree of deficit perspective, and at the moment of the interview I did not proceed to ask my participant to explain what actions or narratives had led him to such conclusion. Nevertheless, that became a key departure point for follow-up questions and scenarios that took place during the focus group session.

Bridges as Socioemotional Objectives

Throughout the documents report, socioemotional aspects of learning a foreign language were embedded in sections related to the topics of self-enrichment and self-enjoyment. Students of Spanish as L2 were presented within a privilege view of how a FL provided critical professional assets for “U.S. students—not only by helping them thrive in a global economy, but also by boosting their marketability in the workplace” (American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2019, p. 17). Moreover,

such reports also focused on the enormous personal and cognitive benefits that linked FL learning to greater working memory, enhanced attention, problem-solving skills, primary language comprehension, and even delays in cognitive illnesses as dementia or Alzheimer.

Throughout the interviews, there were just a few comments regarding the previously mentioned benefits. However, one of the teachers spoke about her goals for all students to develop patience and resilience:

I think perseverance is really important because language learning can be really frustrating [...] my hope is that I'm teaching them to be patient with themselves. It's really important to me that they enjoy the process and see that they're making progress.

Another teacher commented on her objective to ensure that her students enjoyed the process of learning a foreign language and that they did not quit when activities became challenging:

I'm definitely more interested in the process and the growth. What really frustrates me as if they're start asking each other or they start giving up [...] I try to get them to enjoy the process and not be so hard on themselves.

Meanwhile, interviewed teachers' socioemotional objectives for their HL students aligned with research about how well-meaning Spanish teachers of HL students can hinder their academic success by enacting subtractive ideologies, even when they are unaware of such practices, i.e., they (un)consciously show signs of *desconocimiento*.

Affective dimensions of successful schooling are grounded on previous cultural and experiential backgrounds. Within the constraints imposed upon HL students by a monocultural, monolingual school society based on binary divisions of ingroup (white middle-class Americans) versus outgroup (non-white poor foreigners), socioemotional objectives emerged in this study's teachers' narratives around a main idea of safety, choice, low academic expectations, and equality. Comments targeted the question of

providing students a “comfortable” safe space free of stress or worries. Based on the literature provided in this study, well-intentioned objectives concealed low performance expectations by teachers who perceive HL students as emotionally and/or academically deficient, for whom they must adjust their environment to accommodate an assumed collective trauma. The following comments dominated the conversations around the question “What are your specific objectives for the heritage language students in your classroom?”

Honestly, at the end of level 1, if they just had a comfortable environment to spend an hour in each day and a good relationship either with me or their peers.

I don't feel like his goal is to really learn Spanish. I feel like because we've talked about it. I think his goal is just ... he wants to be in there and have a fun time. So my goal for him is ... I want him to be in there and have a fun time.

I wanted them to have a class where they felt like they could shine and just kind of be who they were. That was my goal. I don't know that that always worked, but that was what I was trying to do.

I wanted to make it as good of an experience as I can. [...] I think the best place for any student is with their friends.

My only, my biggest concern is that they're comfortable in class and that they don't feel excluded.

Secondly, there were some acknowledgments that HL students might have chosen the class to receive “an easy A” and the teachers’ objectives were strongly linked to their intention to make their class a space where students could experience success without effort. Consequently, teachers expressed how lowering their academic expectations for their HL students fulfilled this socioemotional objective:

And I'm like...get of a good grade. If it's an easy A, and that they want to call it? Awesome. Go for it. If that helps your GPA's ... sweet.

So that's really what I want them is to feel comfortable in my class and along the way, hope that their Spanish improves somehow.

I would also say that in some cases, that class is a welcome break for them. If they don't have to work as hard in that class, maybe that's what they wanted in it, on their schedule. And that's why they're not in a heritage class.

In the third place, teachers also respected HL students' decisions regarding what course they wanted to take, even when they acknowledged that the level of language taught in their classes was much lower than what students needed to grow academically.

Maybe they see the Spanish 1, regular track is just an easier way through, and I'm not totally thrilled about that, but I respect it. You know, they have the choice to be in which class they want to be in. I wanted to make it as good of an experience as I can. And yet at the same time, they've made their choice.

I think ultimately, they, are where they want to be. In some cases, they would rather not be in that heritage class, they would rather just be in a regular class. And if it's easy, so be it.

I'm so glad I had that conversation with them and was able to give them a choice. And say, hey, you're welcome here, does not matter what you choose, but here's another option. So, you're not bored and miserable in this class because that's the last thing I want. But if you're happy, not bored, chilling,

Finally, teachers expressed their commitment to make their HL students feel like they were no different than the rest of their students displaying messages like the "All Lives Matter" and colorblind ideologies. By targeting assimilation as an equitable goal for students, teachers expressed positive emotions towards those students who integrated with the rest and were treated as such by their peers.

My pressure for me is I want them to feel included with everybody and not feel like they have to start speaking English to feel like they're fit in with everybody else or to feel that they're different because you know, obviously they're heritage learners. I don't want them to feel weird ...

My goal is to make the kids feel comfortable in the classroom and not make them feel that they are different, you know, because of that one experience I had my second-year teaching. I don't want them to feel that they don't belong.

These four goals, (a) emotional safety, (b) low academic expectations, (c) student choice, and (d) assimilation, defined the intentions of the participants in this study and tacitly subscribed to *pobrecito* ideologies, discussed before. The ways teachers understood their HL performances and discourses as opposed to their goals for monolingual students was crucial to understand how they perceived the HL

population beyond presumed identities and stereotyped stories of trauma and deficit, and considering the complex ways our Latinx students get placed within dominant narratives about failure and underachievement.

(Un)Safe Spaces or Teacher Perceptions and Practices

The last theme that surfaced from the interviews with these seven teachers focused on their own practices of creating learning spaces safe or comfortable for their students. Teachers' perceptions and practices are the two main pillars to answer this study's research questions. The documents report showed a similar third theme where the narratives included in documents that are national guidelines for teachers of foreign language acquisition. In that case, codes aligned with the area of linguistic communication and communities set the context for the creation of a space where students would experience safety and growth.

The analogy representing this space was a neighborhood where roads and streets displayed connections between disciplines and cultural communities, and buildings or houses represented such communities. Throughout the analysis of the interviews, three interpretive codes pointed out to a visual representation of a household, a place where the teacher observed through *ventanas* (windows), looked into *espejos* (mirrors) to reflect on their own image as educators of heritage language students, and displayed *fotografías* (pictures) of their practices in frames corresponding to their classrooms' activities.

The three interpretive codes represented images that shared the element of a frame, as I understood that teachers' perceptions and practices do not occur in an ideological vacuum, but on the contrary, they are limited by the two previous frames: *cenotes* or personal and professional experiences and *bridges* or objectives.

Ventanas or Perceptions of HL Students

For the most part, FL classes are designed for monolingual students. Most of the students taking Spanish as a foreign language intend to fulfill a graduation requirement and, as our first theme indicated, most teachers of Spanish as a FL do not have any training in pedagogical strategies to meet the needs of those students who have had prior community exposure to the Spanish language. Therefore, teachers' experiences with HL students in their classroom become the main source of training and highly depends on the factors mentioned in the last two analyzed themes. Moreover, teachers' attitudes towards multiculturalism as opposed to assimilationist practices impact perceptions of HL students' (a) *ventanas abiertas*: the languages teachers hear, (b) proficiency skills, and (c) stories of belonging.

Ventanas abiertas / Open windows: the languages teachers hear. HL students are different to monolingual students and to native speakers, since they bring into the classroom varying levels of proficiency in oral and written Spanish apart from community languages idiosyncrasies that differ from what is usually presented as standard Spanish in textbooks and school curricula. The problem with the glorification of standard language and literacy rankings (such as proficiency levels) is that it alienates students whose linguistic and cultural resources are pushed aside in the name of correctness and prescriptivist practices. False expectations of certain linguistic assimilation to the language educators learned and now teach, place HL students in a liminal space (*ni de aquí ni de allá*) where their community language is presented as deficient and their cultural practices as unusual or diverse.

Throughout the interviews with teachers, the following topics showed descriptive codes that supported my path of *conocimiento* towards teachers'

perceptions of what their HL students brought into the classroom, how they engaged with their peers, and what they thought the reasons behind students taking their traditional Spanish courses were in schools where Spanish for HL courses are offered.

In the first place, teachers, as they mentioned in their academic objectives for HL students, stated that academic success was not something that their HL students strived for in general. They mentioned that they did not observe much academic growth in their students' linguistic skills, specifically in writing: "I don't feel like they tend to progress a lot with the writing. I feel like they maybe learn more words and they can communicate more." They also voiced their concern on how HL did not improve their Spanish deficiencies: "I feel like the students who come in that have a lot of those mistakes in Spanish. Like, I feel like they just don't tend to change a lot."

The reasons behind this lack of linguistic improvement in traditional Spanish courses, according to some of the interviewed teachers, arose from two areas: (a) lack of motivation: (about a HL student with a D in Spanish 1 class) "It's just because she's not as motivated to pay attention in class and do the work and stay on top of everything as my other students are;" (b) impact from outside factors: "I feel like that there's a lot more going on in their lives;" and (c) Spanish class being perceived as non-relevant: "And that if they're going to focus on any class, it shouldn't probably not focus on mine."

None of the teachers implied that the responsibility of making sure that their HL students engaged in their courses was on themselves, the educators. On the contrary, of the teachers mentioned: "I don't feel like it has anything to do with me, so it doesn't frustrate me." Their narratives implied that HL students were given the option to switch to a HL course and if they decided not to, they needed to abide by this

decision, even when the reasons behind avoiding this change were sometimes grounded in the students' fear of not being good enough for the HL course:

I had one who is a SPED student and she wanted to stay because she was really afraid that it would be too hard in heritage and that she would have a much easier time in here. And she, I think ended up with a D for the semester. And it's not because she can't Spanish. It's just because she's not as motivated.

Another descriptive code that surfaced throughout the interviews was the teachers' perception of HL students' languages: Spanish and English. There was a common narrative that HL students' use of Spanish in the classroom depended more on the personality of the students than on any other factor. Some teachers mentioned how gender could impact students being more outgoing with their Spanish, but since some teachers mentioned girls being more talkative in Spanish and others mentioned how girls were quieter and boys more expressive in Spanish, these comments did not produce any specific information for the study.

I'm not sure if it's just personality difference. The girls will stick with English, the boys, they'll they love speaking to me in Spanish. They like the idea that they can communicate with me and say something that the rest of the class has no idea what they're saying.

Some teachers expressed their impression that most students "were reluctant to speak Spanish" with their peers and they would choose to talk to the teacher in interpersonal activities. Since most interviewed teachers taught novice and intermediate low proficiency levels, it was understandable that HL students struggled to communicate with their L2 peers, who would not have enough linguistic skills yet to engage in conversations. One of the teachers mentioned how a "quieter heritage learner who tends to sit to the side, he'll speak to me almost exclusively in Spanish."

Another perception teachers expressed was how HL students' unwillingness to speak Spanish in front of their peers was linked to negative experiences where their language and/or their accent had been criticized by other HL students or native

speakers in their communities. Finally, a teacher mentioned that some students felt that the rest of the class did not like them using a language they did not understand.

Likewise, another participant revealed how HL students used English constantly with their peers in an attempt to be accepted in the community of monolingual students. Her reaction in this case was:

I have to constantly tell him: No, español ... I'm like, what are you doing? It's just really crazy. I think he's just trying to be friendly. He knows his friends are all English speakers and I think he just wants to fit in.

“They show up and wing it”: Teachers’ perceptions of HL proficiency. A common comment among participants in this study was that HL students comprised a significantly heterogeneous group, and although some generalizations were made or some comments were shared among teachers, the narrative of the inaccuracy of speaking about HL students in general was evident: “It depends on the student. I think it would be easy to make a blanket statement were writing is harder, but it's not for all of them.”

Overall, there was a consensus to consider HL students listening and speaking skills as the strongest ones on a proficiency scale, as reflected in the following comments:

Her Spanish is pretty limited. Like her, her mom doesn't really speak Spanish, but her grandma does and she's kind of picked some up.

[...] her accent is really good. Um, but she really doesn't know a whole lot, so she is a heritage speaker, but she's her skills are pretty low.

They're better at speaking for sure. Their accent is better and listening. Um, I'd say that those are their strengths over reading, and writing.

I would say their writing is very good. Not necessarily the best of my students, but very good. But their speaking ability is definitely the best.

They know more vocabulary or this fluidity, you know, just speaking for reading.

Although the narrative of avoidance of generalizations was present in many instances during the interviews, many teachers expressed their surprise to notice how HL students had a lower command of the language than they had expected. One teacher referred to this discovery as an “eye-opener:”

And these heritage kids really struggled a lot, um, with, with the grammar and not just spelling. I mean, they just didn't know. And I'm not even talking about, you know, oh, it's called preterit or imperfect. They just, I found some online stuff and they just didn't know.

Teachers pointed out how their initial perception of HL student's overall linguistic proficiency was inaccurate, and that they just had a comprehension advantage: “they have all the answers, but the reality is like they just have an easier time understanding what is happening because of the pre-exposure.” Nevertheless, the linguistic advantages, as reported by the interviewees, aligned mostly with the speaking and understanding abilities, and not with what teachers label as “stronger literacy skills—reading and writing.”

“What are you doing here?” Teachers' perceptions on HL students belonging.

Teachers mentioned in their objectives that HL students had a choice to remain in their traditional Spanish courses or move to a HL course, since these are offered in all the schools where the interviewees work. Those who stayed experienced a variety of behaviors according to these first interviews.

Only two teachers reported having witnessed some instances of racism against their HL students in their careers, both implying that the student did not belong in the Spanish classroom. One of them mentioned the fact that L2 students did not like HL students speaking a language they could not understand and fearing they might be talking about them. The second story referred to an issue when a student was told “Hey, we're going to have to deport you.” Both incidents were reported by teachers as anecdotal and not representative of a classroom atmosphere. However, narratives of

anti-Americanism surround the belief that Spanish and Latinx cultures get in the way of learning English and therefore, be a part of the dominant American society.

According to teachers, some HL students behaved in ways where they did not throw attention towards themselves, either by sitting along and not interacting with anyone, or by using the English language as a tool to be part of the community of monolingual English-speakers. Teachers in this study did not show awareness of the association between not speaking English and low intelligence or negative academic outcomes when they narrated their efforts to make their HL students use only their Spanish linguistic repertoire in class.

Then it's almost like the native Spanish speakers will revert to English. And I was like, no guys speak in Spanish with me. You know, don't revert to English just because these other kids. Maybe it's because they wouldn't feel like they fit in more.

Stories of HL students not calling the attention of peers by reaffirming their Latinx identity has been explored in depth by researchers Carreira and Beeman in their book *Voces: Latino Students on Life in the United States* (2014), and aligned with what scholar Valenzuela calls “subtractive schooling” situations whereby schools offer a devastating picture of Latinx students as unwelcomed members of an “academically impoverished and emotionally bruising school environment” (2016, p. 5). This final comment by one of the teachers summarized the naïve view of the reasons why teachers perceived students hid their identity as if the community was not exhibiting continuous signs of hostility against any deviation from the Eurocentric linguistic and cultural norms:

It's like, in my experience, they just kind of want to blend in. It seems like, they don't want to call out attention to it. Um, necessarily it's not like they're ashamed or they're trying to hide anything. I just, don't get the sense that they recognize the value that they bring to the class or the perspective that they bring. I think that they just kind of want to go with the flow and, you know, get their grade like everybody else.

After analyzing interviews, I have come to the realization that teachers, due to their lack of training in heritage language education and language ideologies, perceived HL courses from a purely linguistic point of view. Therefore, when their students expressed their desire to remain in regular Spanish courses, they did not see a problem, although these courses drew a picture of Spanish language and culture that differed from the Spanish languages and cultures our HL students bring into classrooms, while validating stories of hostility, incomprehension, and neglect. This final comment from one of the teachers recalling why some students chose to remain in their Spanish as FL class reflects that fact:

I think most of the ones that stayed are the ones that would have been most like me in high school where they're technically a heritage learner because Spanish takes place in the home, but it's not a main source by any mean. And so, then you get stuck in this weird place of oh, I know more than that, but I don't know this thing that they are learning and things like that.

Espejos or self-perception as teachers of HL students

Interviews confirmed the common misunderstanding among teachers that only teachers who are native speakers or heritage language speakers can support students' HL learning. To the contrary, research has indicated that positive impact also happens when teachers, no matter their cultural background, express genuine interest in the heritage language and approach their HL students as resourceful and not as deficient. When asked about their qualifications to teach Spanish to HL students, teachers' answers were classified into three main categories: (a) lack of appropriate training, (b) fear to unconsciously hurt HL students, and (c) linguistic deficit causing embarrassment.

The first descriptive code that emerged within the interpretive code of *espejos* was the teachers' recognition of their own unpreparedness to be able to develop efficient learning experiences for their HL students: "I don't always know what to do

with them to keep them engaged enough with what we're doing.” Two teachers stated that our interview was making them reflect on their role as a teacher of HL students for the first time, and that it had made them wonder if what they were doing in their classrooms was enough for their HL students. This was an indication that without proper training, many teachers did not even question that their pedagogical ideologies might differ from L2 to HL students. One of the teachers, after explaining one of the activities she did with all students, paused and wondered aloud: “What’s the students motivation? Like, what are they wanting to get out of the class?” which is a profound question to reflect on and will hopefully lead to future more culturally sustaining conversations between this teacher and her HL students.

The second category was grounded in white guilt: the fear white educators often exhibit of “saying something wrong,” and causing unintentional harm to HL students. In her book, *So you want to talk about race*, Ijeoma Oluo (2019) explained how ignoring these uncomfortable situations where white teachers need to act in ways where they do not perpetuate racist practices are necessary for educators to grow and to be part of the decolonization and humanization of our diverse classrooms. Failing to do this, choosing to remain neutral and embrace the standards that do not address the myriad of discriminatory practices our HL students have been and are subject to, make teachers part of the problem. As Oluo mentions in her book chapter “What if I talk about race wrong?” “You’re going to screw this up royally. More than once” (p. 44).

One of the interviewed teachers was tormented by an experience that she had in her second year of teaching Spanish, more than 20 years ago. This was her first experience with a HL student, who in her words “was a football player. He was very well liked, very popular.” According to this teacher, she asked the student, who was Mexican American, to share some information about his family, country, and culture.

The kid shared it, but shortly after he dropped the classroom. The teacher showed tremendous regret for the harm done to this student:

I thought he wouldn't mind it. I said, Hey, tell us more about, you know, your family, your country, your culture. And he did, but then, later on, I found out he didn't like that. And I was like, okay, maybe he perceived himself as being different, but that was learning experience for me. And I was like, I can't, I'm not ever going to do that again. Um, or ask permission first to see if they're comfortable first.

Later in our interviews, teachers expressed their discomfort if asked to teach a class for heritage language students exclusively. The descriptors they used to define their feelings were “embarrassed,” “nervous,” “stupid,” and “uncomfortable.”

I wouldn't want to teach a native speaker because I would feel like embarrassed or like I had nothing to teach them or that they would know more than me.

There's still a part of me that feels like I don't want to look stupid in front of these kids.

Only one of the seven teachers had been in a situation where he was requested to create and teach a middle-school level course for heritage language students, which he did without any prior training nor resources. Although he used the word “unprepared” to refer to his experience, he soon switched his narrative to a more positive approach:

I remember just feeling like ... I was excited because I really wanted them to have that opportunity if they wanted to be there. I didn't feel frustrated because I was excited cause I really enjoyed it, but it was so much work.

This same teacher, when asked about his relationship with his current HL students, also showed an optimistic approach to their interactions and an appreciation for the students' interest and engagement in the class:

I feel like it was probably a little better because I just feel like they are super motivated. [...] I love when students ask questions. I love when I get to help them. And they are the ones that always have questions.

A second teacher showed confidence in her linguistic abilities and her potential to make sure that the HL students enrolled in her classes had a positive learning experience: “I still think that they have a lot to learn from me and I feel comfortable

with my skills and the knowledge I bring to the classroom.” Additionally, she expressed her own benefits from working with HL students and her appreciation for the knowledge these students bring to her classroom: “And I’ve really come to appreciate their perspective and the way they say things and their culture and their country or the way their mom says things. I think it’s really interesting.”

Fotografías or Educational Practices

Within the theme of (un)safe spaces, within this house where teachers looked at students through windows and at their own practices on mirrors, a third framed code emerged in the form of actual classroom practices as described by the interviewees. These practices were visually represented by three *fotografías* that corresponded to the descriptive codes arisen from the interviews. These pictures or educational practices are (a) a family studio photography, (b) a Europe travel photography, (c) a firework photography.

“They seem to be happy:” Family studio photography. In this photography we could imagine a stereotypical white middle-class family dressed alike and displaying their best smiles in a controlled background. This picture represents the pretentiousness over language purity present in our current Spanish textbooks, which are the ones most teachers in this study reported using for their classes. The homogeneous portraits of white, heterosexual, middle class families that surfaced when I googled American family are what our heritage language students perceive when they attend courses where a labeled prestige version of their community language is taught. The field of FL education, as demonstrated by the previous documents report, is mostly directed to the instruction of white, middle-class, monolingual students (Macedo, 2019), which is per se a discriminatory practice by

neglecting the existence of an increasing population of communities that do not respond to this elite group of citizens.

Throughout the interviews, teachers expressed what they considered an equalitarian treatment of all their students by providing the same final assessments and curriculum, under the assumption that HL students benefited from being treated the same as their peers. One of the teachers commented: “I just treated them the same ... I had them do the same work.” Most teachers considered that differentiating for their students meant pointing out their differences in a negative way and drawing attention to the fact that they belonged to cultures other than the white American one that unified their classroom, as if this distinction were something damaging. The following comments demonstrated the homogeneity of practices as reported in the interviews:

They show up. They do what they're supposed to do.

They had the same thing that everybody else did (Final Assessment).

I have them do a lot of writings and stuff. So, I had them do the same curriculum.

In the end, a comment returned to the idea of low academic expectations to protect Latinx kids who are perceived as suffering higher socioemotional hardships than the rest of the students: “They seem to be happy with the class itself. no one really expressed like I want more. If they did, by all means, I'd be like, all right, let's go.” This comment also addressed a prior notion that talked about how the responsibility of demanding differentiated practices fell upon the HL students, and not upon the FL educators.

Some comments mentioned how teachers provided certain punctual activities for HL students, such as open-ended questions instead of multiple choice, follow-up questions during speaking assessments, pointing at specific spelling errors, or finding some articles for HL students to read independently. Once again, the target of

differentiation is placed on the linguistic process, forgetting about the identities and cultures HL students bring to the classroom. See comments below:

They do their work, and they are more than willing to participate and do everything else. I'm like you do the task, you get a hundred.

I guess the one time where I'm like, all right, this is what we're going to focus on is with writing, where you can improve. But honestly, I did my first one with my level ones and they weren't that bad.

The teacher who oversaw a HL course in middle school also explained his differentiation practices. As noted in the comment below, the decision to choose independent activities was on the student. In this case, the educator noted that allowing this choice benefited his students:

I always went out of my way at that school to have different assignments [...] you can do the grammar we're learning today. Or you can write a story with your friend, or you can present what we're going to do to the class. Like they had all kinds of options. And most of them really enjoyed that.

A topic that was initially mentioned in the *espejos* section, reappeared during conversations on instructional practices, and then was elaborated during our focus group. It pertained to the feelings of unpreparedness of teachers of Spanish as a FL when they have to adjust their pedagogy to teaching HL students. One of the teachers started planning for a future differentiating strategy with her Spanish 3 HL students, while making a remark that anything different than what the curriculum already includes, was a nuisance:

So for them [HLs], in order to not make my life horribly more difficult, I think I would find some kind of article or something along those lines in Spanish about the topic that we ... for instance, unit 1 in Spanish is identity and unit 2 is school. So, I might find something about identity for unit 1 and school for unit 2 and have them read an article and then write their response to it. And not just be the entirety of the exam for them, but have them write an actual, decent-sized paragraph. That was my idea, but I haven't done it yet.

“I felt in love with Spain:” Travel abroad photography. The word Spain appeared 83 times in the interviews while words like Mexico (29 times) or Latin America (5) were significantly less common. This difference was not a coincidence. The fact that

six out of the seven interviewed teachers did a study abroad program in Spain, when Mexico is our next-door neighbor, is not a coincidence. The fact that teachers of Spanish as a FL quoted the Spanish Real Academia as an undebatable point of reference for correctness is not a coincidence either. In this picture teachers have placed in their own classrooms/houses, Spain emerged as a place of prestige not only linguistically, but also culturally. The implication of displaying this portrait without questioning current colonizing racist agendas was worrisome.

Macedo (2019) in his analysis of the teaching of Spanish as a FL in some urban universities surrounded by HL communities of immigrants, denounced how students are seldom encouraged to participate in local communities' events. On the contrary, "The expectation is that they will go to Spain to be fully immersed in the "model Spanish" reflected in the curriculum, visit the Prado Museum in Madrid, and admire the ruins of Roman monuments left behind in Spain" (p. 10). In our interviews, some teachers mentioned how their own experiences of studying Spanish in Spain had impacted their own classroom Spanish, and how they had to make a conscious effort to adjust their language to a "more Latin American Spanish because that's what the curriculum uses." One teacher mentioned how she intentionally used Spanish from Mexico she spoke to her HL students "because I think that's what will be most useful to them."

Since none of the educators thought of their Spanish as a language that was linked to their culture and therefore, their identity, there was a certain fluidity when they spoke about their use of different Spanish versions with their students. This topic was significantly expanded during our conversation in the focus group. The following comment focused on the teachers' awareness of the socio-affective impact of using a certain cultural version of a language:

I think my Spanish is a little bit of a chameleon. It kind of changes depending on what I'm doing, I'm trying to switch to central American Spanish. [...] more of that like dialects. So, I am intentionally choosing words from those areas over words from Spain, because I have a lot of words from Spain in my brain, and I'm not trying to forget them. If I ever go back to Spain, it will be useful, but I feel like it endears me more to my students if I use their dialect and their word choice. Although because I'm not from any country I can. I don't know where my dialect is. So totally.

Linguistically, when teachers were asked how they reacted if HL students brought terminology that did not coincide with the vocabulary taught in the classroom, most of them demonstrated receptiveness. However, the use of devaluing terms such as “dialect” denoted how other languages that are not Spanish from Spain were interiorized by some of the interviewees. The messages of correct and incorrect language were noticeable although not in explicit ways. Teachers presented the vocabulary from the textbook as the classroom norm and allowed the presence of “other versions” as add-ons to the narrative.

I don't think it's close to what they use at home, but I always have a caveat of “we're learning these words, and these words are right. But if you use something else that doesn't mean it's wrong. It just means you use something else and we can both be right.” And so, if there's anything that ever please feel free to share like, oh, I use this other word or whatever.” I don't have very many students who do that. But I think it's more because they're generally isolated in class.

“We watched a video:” Fireworks photography. This last picture that I labeled “fireworks photography” represents how culture seemed to be presented by the interviewed teachers as cultural celebratory practices. Three out of the seven teachers provided the example of the Day of the Dead celebration when asked about what cultural practices were part of their classrooms. Another teacher mentioned art, such as the Spanish Baroque, 19th-century paintings, Picasso, Miro, Dalí, etc.

This year, we watched Coco for a Day of the Dead, but in class, we talked about the images and like some of the traditional products. That holiday in conjunction with watching the movie.

We watched a video about how they spend their holidays in Spain. So it's more like it can be something I spend two or three days on, or it can be something that is just. Like a one-day video and let's talk about it for that day a thing.

Culture teachings were mentioned in the document reports as falling in areas of generalizations and superficial comparisons with the American society. Such report highlighted the prestige departure point of the American teacher and/or student when illustrating products and practices from Spanish speaking countries, mainly if these countries were Latin American ones, as opposed to the glorification of the Spain culture. The report also mentioned the lack of research of cultural perspectives or the Latinx cultures that have populated the United States since the colonization era and that has been increased by a continuous immigration from neighboring Latin American countries.

During interviews, three teachers mentioned that they would not request their HL students to share their cultural practices with the class. They based their statements in the abovementioned fear of harming the students' feelings while making them stand out from the rest of the students:

I'm not putting them on the spot or on display or anything like that. But I'll ask them sometimes if they're okay with it, I'll be like, what do you do in your family? Like on the Day of the Dead, I asked one of my girls, what do you do in your family? And, you know, she told everybody what she did in her family. And one of my boys was like that. They didn't do anything for the Day of the dead, even though, you know?

The analysis of these seven interviews provided with a great amount of information that depicted *cenotes*, bridges, and spaces where our HL students grow learning where their place is in the school system and what their own heritage language and identity practices fall within the foreign language classroom field.

Focus Group Analysis

The current focus group analysis was based on Anzaldúa's concept that community interactions "feed our spirits" (2009, p. 182), and that "disconnected from

la gente” we fade in isolation. Our virtual gathering where teachers were given a chance to develop, explore, and contrast ideas that had been part of our first conversations during interviews, was a space that allowed me as a researcher the unique experience to observe from the margins the interactions among educators. These discussions added details to the *ventanas*, *espejos*, and *fotografías* that drafted a complex painting of the perceptions, objectives, and practices of teachers of Spanish as a FL who hosted HL students in their classrooms.

The focus group lasted one hour, and six out of the seven participants were present via Zoom. Like the first interviews, interactions were recorded using Zoom’s recording functionality. I also used my iPhone recording app—Voice Recorder (TapMedia, 2017)—to ensure accuracy. For transcription purposes, I used Descript once more since this software in automatic transcription proved to be of great assistance for my previous interviews. Transcriptions were then manually revised, and I switched the participants’ names to pseudonyms, and recognizable places were also changed into asterisks.

As a moderator I employed a technique that took advantage of the technological possibilities Zoom offered. I was able to share with the educators a presentation that included six questions and five scenarios, which were created based on the interviews analysis themes and interpretive codes in the form of clarification of previous statements or if opposite or relevant ideas were expressed. I chose the information that was closest to the areas of perceptions and practices with the purpose of aligning the participants’ narratives to my research questions. Coding of focus groups’ narratives followed an opposite direction to the process employed to create the document reports and the interviews’ analysis.

In this case, I used the provisional list of interpretive and descriptive codes that emerged when the corresponding narratives were being examined. This method is defined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013) as “deductive coding” (p. 81). I accompanied the two tables where I had recorded themes, interpretive and descriptive codes for the documents and prior interviews with two visual representations that supported my research. I started creating these drawings following Anzaldúa’s conceptual diagrams, and likewise, words and images began to take a crucial role in my research process. In her own words:

An image is a bridge between evoked emotion and conscious knowledge; words are the cables that hold up the bridge. Images are more direct, more immediate than words, and closer to the unconscious. Picture language precedes thinking in words; the metaphorical mind precedes analytical consciousness. (1987, p. 130)

The participants in these focus groups were the same teachers I previously interviewed. In this sense, my role of moderator was key, since I served as a leveling force that allowed all participants to reflect on various arguments without pressure to agree. I offered participants the possibility of typing in the chat the slide number that corresponded to the question or scenario they were interested in addressing, as well as any comment regarding the conversation on Zoom. This technique proved to be beneficial for one teacher who was less outspoken than the rest of the participants. The fact that, in Zoom, speakers need to unmute their microphone to participate, is another advantage of creating a fluid conversation where participants are not interrupting each other, or some voices remained unheard.

Focus Group Findings

Accepting doubts and ambiguity, the nepantleras reframe the conflict and shift the point of view. Sitting face to face with all parties, they identify common bonds, name reciprocities and connections, and finally draft a mutually agreeable contract. (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 149)

As I placed myself in the role of a *nepantlera* apprentice, I sent the six participants in this study a document that included five questions and six scenarios based on answers that defined crucial themes in the prior interviews. The topics of the questions and scenarios can be summarized as follows:

- Q1. Use of foreign language proficiency rubric to assess HL students
- Q2. Teachers' strategies to make HL student feel safe in their classrooms
- Q3. Linguistic expectations for HL students
- Q4. Academic advantages and disadvantages of HL students
- Q5. Linguistic growth of HL students
- S1-S3. HL students' interactions with L2 students
- S4. HL students' interactions with FL teacher
- S5. HL cultural awareness
- S6. Translanguaging

Although most of the questions and/or scenarios were designed to have teachers converse about HL students in their classrooms, a crucial part of the conversation developed around the theme of mirrors, or how teachers saw themselves as educators of heritage language students, which I found fascinating considering the vulnerability that the participants in this focus group showed in this virtual space. Following the steps of the *nepantleras*, I decided to listen carefully to the stories and shared information and to connect the educators' feelings of not-belonging to the HL students' own experiences of otherness. I noticed that during this process of collaborative exploration of areas grounded in imposter syndrome, teachers started to realize of how many of their HL students inhabited a schooling system that never welcomed them as part of the community. Continuing with the visual representation

that Anzaldúa taught me to better comprehend areas of nepantla, the windows through which teachers stated their perceptions of HL students turned into mirrors where they observed themselves as deficient and outsiders.

Espejos or Self-Perception of Teachers

The first theme of *espejos* presented in this analysis two areas where educators reflected on their own persona through their personal and professional actions: (a) their use of various forms of Spanish to adjust to circumstances, and (b) their role as teachers of HL students.

***Distorting Espejos: My Spanishes*²**

Within the theme of *espejos*, the first question that appeared in our conversation attempted to create a dialogue around the concept of one's language and its interdependence with one's identity. During the interviews, teachers had evaluated HL linguistic abilities in terms of language acquisition without reference to how our languages are intrinsically connected to our cultures, experiences, and perspectives of the world. When I asked teachers to describe their Spanish with an analogy, and the reasons why they chose a certain version of this language in various situations, participants expressed a multitude of emotions and reasonings.

Most teachers confessed that their first "real" Spanish, the one they started using fluently to communicate had its source in Spain, since six out of the seven teachers had done a study abroad program in this European country. However, through their contact with their HL students, and by incorporating terminology and expressions from their textbooks, this Spanish had shifted into a less castellano-type Spanish and acquired other characteristics that differed from teacher to teacher:

² I have included the term *Spanishes* as a recognition of the variety of languages teachers have expressed using depending on the circumstance and how access to various versions of a language is a sign of linguistic power.

My Spanish is a mutt. I was always trained in Spain Spanish, and I lived in Spain for three years, but now I've been hanging out with all these other dogs that speak different languages. And now I'm *kinda* just a mutt.

Mine is a chameleon. [...] I try to stick with the vocab of the person that I'm speaking to, but it's hard to organize in my brain who uses what vocab. And so more recently, because I want to be more identifiable or have more in common with most of my students, I'm trying to lean towards Latin American Spanish, specifically Central American Spanish.

Three teachers agreed on their use of what they labeled as “neutral,” “standard” Spanish, which according to sociolinguist Johnathan Rosa (2020) perpetuates the discriminatory notions about HL students’ languages been perceived as incorrect and in perpetual need of remediation. These teachers explained that the Spanish language originated from textbooks was the one that best suited the classroom. One of them compared this linguistic choice to how journalists avoid certain accents when they report the news, which, likewise, corresponds to raciolinguistics ideologies that relegate people of color to a status of linguistic deficiency regardless of the content of their narratives.

I just stick to mainstream classroom Spanish. I guess I just shoot for the middle. Try to have more of a neutral accent. But I really try to shoot like what journalism is: the journalists always say they shoot for an accent when speaking on TV, that's like from the Midwest, even though they may be from the East Coast or the South or whatnot.

And I try to ... I have that analogy just to can to a neutral accent, neutral vernacular.

I think I tend to use what I would call Spanish 1 Spanish.

I really like what *** said about using formal Spanish, because I always have students that have been ..., especially since we're talking about heritage speakers, they say “oh, everything you're saying is Spain Spanish.” And I'm like, that's a misconception.

Canadian scholar Ramjattan has explored the racist implications of expecting certain “neutrality” in pronunciation through the lens of raciolinguistics ideologies. His work is framed in an anti-racist pronunciation pedagogy and implies that perception of accents cannot be separated from perceptions of racialized bodies. In the case of

Spanish, this so-called “standard” language is undoubtedly grounded in whiteness, colonization, and financial profits.

The politically motivated use of “standard” language placed individuals with access to the also discriminatory concept of “education” in a position of authority over minoritized communities. As this study embraces raciolinguistics ideologies, I state that languages not only represent our means of communication, but they are anchors to our ancestors, our cultures, and our perspectives of life. Suggesting that non-standard language is not appropriate or normative is implying that minoritized communities’ lives belong in the margins. Gatekeepers like the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language (RAE, Real Academia de la Lengua Española) hold significant financial interests in the fact that “their standard” language is the one taught around the world, and that educators referred to their guidelines in search of appropriateness. In Anzaldúa’s words: “Even our own people *nos quieren poner candados en la boca*. They would hold us back with their bag of *reglas de academia*” (1987, p. 76).

The conversation around standardization of languages was crucial to deepen into the participants’ perceptions of linguistic correctness and how these views informed their practices. The analysis of the discussion around the topic of standard languages navigated teachers’ cenote, “an inner underground river of information” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 28), and was anchored in the first theme that arose during our individual interviews on teachers’ learning of Spanish and their experiences with the Latinx communities.

In “How to tame a wild tongue,” Anzaldúa stated that the complexity of the Latinx history in the United States gifted their communities with heterogenous living languages, and she listed eight languages her community used: “(1) Standard English, (2) Working class and slang English, (3) Standard Spanish, (4) Standard Mexican

Spanish, (5) North Mexican Spanish dialect, (6) Chicano Spanish, (7) Tex-Mex, and (8) Pachuco” (1987, p. 77). Although the Chicana scholar did not explain what she understood as “standard,” based on her writings, there is a correlation between her use of the term “standard” with the concept of academic language, which is once again, a set of artificial regulations imposed by colonizing forces to ensure the perpetuation of racial divisions in a capitalist society.

Espejo with Filters: Imposter Syndrome

Instagram is a photo sharing social networking service that allows users to edit their pictures with filters that make their lives look perfect from the outside, while psychologists around the world caution against its impact on its damaging psychological impact and imposter syndrome. In similar ways to the need of using filters to display a reality that the portrayed person acknowledges as false, when teachers in this focus group were presented with the scenario of a Department Chair requesting that they would teach a HL course the next school year, their conversations pointed to strong feelings of ingroup versus outgroup concepts, as well as feelings of not be apt to hold a teaching position for HL students. They did not own the right filter for this position.

Most teachers implied that teaching HL courses was best suited for those teachers who were either native speakers or heritage speakers, but there was no explanation on the reasons why someone with a HL background would be a better fit for these courses:

I'd be nervous. I think I'd be hesitant. [...] In my department, we have two other native Spanish speakers, one of whom teaches the class now. And so, I think that would be better for him. [...] But I think I would just have imposter syndrome. Like I'm not the best person to teach this class.

I feel like that it would be like I'm not a heritage language speaker, so I would feel a little uncomfortable.

I think there is validity to having buy-in from a native speaker. [...] If there's no one else, obviously a native speaker would be best, but if there's no one available, then you've got to find a curriculum that can still meet the students' needs.

Apart from the discomfort expressed by the participants since they were not members of the Latinx community, other reasons were mentioned to avoid having to oversee HL courses in their schools: (a) lack of curriculum, (b) extreme heterogeneity in linguistic proficiency levels, and (c) excessively demanding job.

Three teachers mentioned that there was no curriculum for the HL courses in our district, which was a sign of the invisibility of our HL program throughout the district:

But just like *** was saying, maybe we don't have a really well-established curriculum. I don't know, because I don't have any idea what the curriculum is, because I think there are some things.

So I just don't have the bandwidth to create additional, extra curriculum for them. I think there needs to be a lot of training.

Working as the HL district coordinator and having created and implemented a pioneer, well-established, three-level curriculum that I often present at workshops and conferences locally and nationally, the fact that six of my colleagues agreed on the fact that they were unaware of the pedagogical structure of the HL program was tremendously saddening—for me and for our HL students. This unawareness of the existence of a strong HL curriculum might be related to the reasons why when interviewed individually, many teachers highlighted that they did not push their HL students to drop their L2 courses and enroll in HL classes. In an effort to remain a facilitator of conversation in the group, I waited until the end of the focus group to inform teachers of the outstanding HL curriculum offered in our district.

Another reason for not feeling apt to teach a HL course was grounded on the heterogeneity of the student population and the need to use differentiating strategies to meet the demands of the HL students.

With so many different students with different needs and a heritage speaker class there's way different needs. And I would be concerned about my ability to do that effectively.

All of those students are in different levels. Some of them come in literate in their own language. Some of them come in with ... they can't write anything in Spanish, like *** said, some of her students can't write, but they can speak. They all have different goals. So, if you can't find a common ground for those students, it's going to be a rough year for you and for the students.

There were several misconceptions to unpack from these comments. To begin with, differentiation is simply a sound pedagogical strategy that benefits all students, no matter their linguistic features. In the second place, the extreme narrative that HL students “can’t write anything in Spanish” is grounded in profound deficit views. Therefore, I considered it crucial to highlight that misspellings and/or grammatical errors are just part of our communicative endeavors and should not erase anyone’s linguistic identity nor use them as weapons of racial divisions reinforcement.

When a teacher commented that HL students had “different goals” I searched his first interview to find out what goals he was referring to. I found a quote where he reinforced this idea of student-responsibility disguised as student-choice:

I want whatever their goal is for the class. That's what I want them to be. And like, one of those two students that I just talked about, she, I know she wants to improve her Spanish because she wants to be able to talk to her family more.

Besides, I examined the interpretive code that referred to educators’ linguistic objectives for HL students, and I was disappointed to realize that five teachers had mentioned not having specific goals for their HL students. The theme of how the learning responsibility was imposed upon HL students while L2 students were provided with a “rigorous” curriculum that aligned with standards, learning goals, and

well-established expectations, reinforced ideas of educational discrimination that our HL students endure, and the need of anti-racist pedagogical training for teachers of Spanish as a foreign language.

The last topic that emerged in this focus group regarding the area of how teachers expressed feeling a sense of inadequacy if asked to conduct a HL course in their school, was the perception of how extreme the demands of this job would be for them. These high pressures were linked to the misconception of a non-existing curriculum and ideologies based on deficit views of the Latinx community. Besides, teachers commented on the need to have a special support by the school's administration due to the specific nature of these courses:

I feel that you would have to have very few preps³ like two max, because if you wanted to do a really good job, you'd have to dedicate a lot of energy to that class.

I don't think that admin always realizes how important languages classes are and the need for heritage speaker classes and the difficulties that present to the teachers to teach a heritage speaker class effectively

This conversation around the need of administrative support led to some teachers expressing their frustration about how foreign language acquisition in general was perceived by society as a “fluff class.” Participants repeatedly mentioned the term “rigor” and “rigorous” to describe their L2 courses, and how learning languages involved practice “and there's also a lot of theoretical knowledge and vocab and grammar points that go into it.” Based on raciolinguistics ideologies, the concept of rigor, like other terms like standard, achievement gaps, or honors” are linked to principles of whiteness and colonization. According to Paris and Alim (2017):

It is a masterful colonial falsehood that has construed rigorous teaching practice as somehow mutually exclusive or antithetical to sustaining the cultural

³ When teachers talked about “preps” they refer to the number of different courses they teach over the semester/year, i.e., some teachers reported teaching two preps: Spanish 1 and Spanish 2.

practices and humanity of youth of color. (p. 230)

To finish this section with a hopeful statement, the teacher who had taught one year of middle-school heritage courses with no training or support, expressed a crucial awareness of the fact that this class went beyond linguistic and/or academic skills, and that interactions among students and teachers had a deep impact on the students' identity growth.

I feel like for a heritage class, like what we just said, it has all these particular challenges that a normal L2 class doesn't have. And I feel like the first question to any teacher should be, "are you passionate about doing this?" Not it's not just a skill. It's also a part of these students' identity. I feel like you do more harm than good if it's something you just get thrust upon you and you don't want to do it. No, like it's just another thing to go through the motions. I feel like it's something that the teacher should be very invested in personally.

Ventanas: Perceptions of HL Students

The second theme that emerged within the first interviews connected to the idea of perceptions and is represented as windows. These are glasses through which teachers of Spanish as FL watch their students in general and their HL students in particular. Like theoretical frameworks, ventanas work as a lens to describe our own reality.

Perceptions of HL Students' Academic Growth

Interviewed teachers were presented with a question and a scenario for them to examine perceptions of their students' Spanish languages as indicators of academic growth or proficiency in their L2 classes. Based on the information provided during interviews, where many teachers indicated having equal language requirements for all students to make everyone included, one of the questions encouraged teachers to comment on how equal linguistic expectations applied to their proficiency and/or performance assessments. Interestingly this question was only answered by one teacher and then, we moved on to the scenario due to lack of engagement.

As I have made clear throughout this dissertation, from my perspective, silence as a form of *desconocimiento* is a strong indicator of information. The fact that this question was explored by just one participant was relevant for this study. This teacher indicated that since our interview, she had attempted to create a different assignment for her HL student. She provided the student with a book and a set of reading comprehension questions and indicated that he could work on this activity at any time instead of joining the class in whatever other activities were taking place. The result of this attempt to differentiate was not positive: “he's only done it one time ever. And I think he doesn't like being the only kid doing something different.”

Since no one else engaged in this question, I moved to a scenario that lined up with the main idea behind the previous topic. In this scenario, I presented the rubric for presentational speaking that targeted students at a novice high-intermediate low proficiency target and asked my participants to explain how they would assess their HL students. Curiously, this question did not produce any information either. However, it was relevant for my studies to make note of this lack of engagement.

Finally, I mentioned how during our interviews, teachers had referred to letter grades as indicators for their HL students. I asked:

During the interviews, I saw that there's a range of grades that your heritage students are getting in your classes. There are the students with an A, and there're students with Fs. And I wonder, what are these grades indicators of? [...] How do you weight in proficiency in your classes? [...] Would an F set HL students at the same level of an L2 novice mid or novice low? [...] What does that assessment represent? What do you think it represents for you and what you think of represents for them to have an F or a D or an A in your traditional L2 class?

From this question, a series of relevant ideas that related to interpretive and descriptive codes from the documents reports and interviews emerged: (a) poor attendance, (b) lack of effort, (c) language deficiencies, and (d) out-of-school challenges. All these areas indicated a deficient mindset that often ends up

“positioning colonial ways of being and whiteness as normative” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 231). Heritage language students were presupposed damaged and in need of assistance. Conversations around these topics illustrated paternalistic views of how educators worked hard to ensure what they perceived as safe spaces for their minoritized students, while perpetuating systems of discrimination. One of the teachers expressed many of the thoughts I have often heard from colleagues and administrators. Disguised under narratives of support and frustration, there seemed to be an acceptance of the fact that Latinx students came from communities where education was not valued. This comment although lengthy has a crucial role in this dissertation:

There's some tuning out going on by some students, in some cases, it's for reasons that I respect. I grew up with people who did not give a rip about school. And in some cases, they were great auto mechanics. They were great welders. They were great farmers. They did not care about school. And I respect that, and I have students who were absent, and I know why they're in Guanajuato because they need to be there for King's day. And that's a family tradition. They have to be there. That is more important to them than my class. And guess what? Yes, family comes first. I get that. If they have an F in my class, they're blowing it all. I'm going to give them every benefit of the day out. In some cases, I just really don't know what's going on there. They have complicated lives that I know nothing about, including in some cases troubles with the law, that sort of thing that student knows with her probation officer. I give them every benefit of the doubt if they are getting an F it's because they're blowing stuff off.

Ventanas: Perceptions of HL Students' Languages

In similar ways as teachers expressed the existence of various types of languages and how they adjusted their original Spanish language to fit the needs of their classrooms or to align themselves with the textbook-based curriculum, a scenario was proposed to start conversations in which a fictitious Spanish 2 HL student wrote a paragraph⁴ about his family using various linguistic repertoires (English, Spanish, and

⁴ Mi familia es pretty big. Mis cousins y mi tío Pablo viven en el basement. Mi ma es la hermana de mi tío. They get along but mi pa no le gusta porque he leaves trastes everywhere. Mis cousins siempre son tarde ha su escuela.

what Anzaldúa calls Spanglish) as part of his final writing assessment. Teachers engaged in live conversations once this scenario was posed. Some participants wondered if HL students realized of the fact that they were using two different languages or if they were so accustomed to translanguaging that they were not aware of their own linguistic practices:

Maybe this writer is not even aware they're writing in two languages because that's what they're so used to hearing at home. It's just natural language for them. So, it's a matter of becoming hypersensitive to their writing and "oh yeah, I guess I am using English and Spanish. In this class we're being assessed by only our Spanish. So I can't use English." I think it's bringing in awareness and showing from the get-go, this is how you're being assessed. These are the rubrics, this is our standards or whatnot. And just teaching them that this is our goal.

There's always task completion on the rubric. Do they complete the task? Ha. So that's a way not to assess it linguistically, but rather did they complete the prompt? was the task completed?

Do you think that the way, the reason they write like this is because of gaps in language? Or do you think it's just they don't realize that they're writing like this?

These comments, when unpacked, illustrated a vital issue that affects heritage language education. No matter how much educators reported their efforts to create safe spaces for their HL students and talked about building relationships as bridges between them, as long as the course's objectives remained to fulfill colonizing discriminatory objectives, and resources, assessments, rubrics, and activities were designed to perpetuate the idea of an educated prestigious use of the Spanish language, dismissing the funds of knowledge brought by our Latinx communities, every HL student in every L2 course will endure the tensions and challenges that come from the origins of a systemic discriminatory schooling.

Ofelia García and other sociolinguists offer educators unlimited paths towards *el conocimiento* of translanguaging practices, so that we engage in decolonizing

foreign language practices, not only for our Latinx students, but also for any other multicultural multilingual student enrolled in a FL course.

One of the teachers mentioned how her students did not “want to study for quizzes and things like that,” or how they had “lots of gaps,” and they resorted to the use of what she said was “derogatorily called Spanglish,” and ended her comments by asking “how do you get students to acknowledge gaps in their language?” The rest of teachers chipped in with advice that ranged from students’ self-assessments or teachers’ feedback. Unfortunately, there was no conversation on the resourcefulness implied by being able to use various linguistic repertoires while telling stories that mattered to students, instead of choosing silence.

After a deep analysis of the focus groups’ transcriptions, I concluded that many teachers explained the use of various linguistic repertoires from a deficit mindset, and still perceived the bilingual students’ brain as an addition of two separate languages. On the contrary, Anzaldúa offered a transitional space—*nepantla*—where multilingual students could develop their complex cultural and personal identities without having to subordinate their languages to dominant colonizing expectations grounded in monolingual authority.

I finish this focus group analysis with a question one of the teachers posed to their peers in the focus group when conversing about linguistic correctness: “To what extent is that the case in Spanish classes in the United States where you do have a mentality of the native speaker is always right?” As I could feel the subtle dagger hidden in this rhetorical question, my thoughts traveled to Anzaldúa’s verses from *La conciencia de la mestiza / Towards a new consciousness* (1987, p. 103).

We are the porous rock in the stone metate
squatting on the ground.

We are the rolling pin, el maíz y agua,
la masa harina. Somos el amasijo.
Somos lo molido en el metate.
We are the comal sizzling hot,
the hot tortilla, the hungry mouth.
We are the coarse rock.
We are the grinding motion,
the mixed potion, somos el molcajete.
We are the pestle, the comino, ajo, pimiento.
We are the chile colorado,
the green shoot that cracks the rock.
We will abide.

The answer to this poignant question is that the heritage language community is not looking for right, nor for rigor or correct spelling. The searches of our communities of Latinx students are as deep as the ground *donde crece el chile colorado*, and as powerful as the grinding motion sobre el molcajete.

Chapter Summary

The last two chapters represent the path to *conocimiento*, the work done to listen, take notes, dismember and re-member stories, commentaries, and their location within the theoretical frameworks that have grounded this process of study. This last chapter brought to a space of cenotes, bridges, and (un)safe spaces in the form of a hogar, ideas shared by seven teachers of Spanish as a foreign language who have experience teaching heritage language students in their traditional language classes. The outcomes related in strong ways to what the documents report indicated in the sense of how lack of training leaves educators with a blank slate to address their

heritage language students, which is strongly influenced by cultural deficit views of the Latinx population. Another conclusion that derived from this analysis is that unless teachers engage in serious academic work of decolonizing the foreign language curriculum, the objectives of their classes will remain discriminatory towards minoritized groups of students, no matter their linguistic proficiency.

In the next and final chapter, I reflected on the major conclusions that surfaced during this exhaustive process, following Anzaldúa's seven stages of path to *conocimiento*: *arrebato*, *nepantla*, *Coatlicue* depths of despair, *compromiso*, putting *Coyolxauhqui* together, clash of realities, and finally, *naguala* or shifting realities.

CONCLUSION

A RESEARCH PATH TO CONOCIMIENTO

This study's intent was based on a fierce *arrebato*, a shaking ground that has not stopped for the last 25 years I have been a teacher in the United States. Sometimes this *arrebato* becomes more intense, and sometimes I adjust to the tremors as if I perpetually lived on a boat. This study is intellectual and emotional, since holding hands with Anzaldúa, I believe in the strength of both sides of our humanity, and their constant overlapping forces. As I mentioned in my personal path to *conocimiento*, this *arrebato* has snatched my professional self from the job I was trained to do to a *nepantla* of frustration and painful awareness of how I am part of the perpetuation of the colonizing system I thought I was combating. In the end, both central questions that motivated me to start this lengthy process had been addressed and this chapter will offer a *compromiso*, a paradigm shift, a call to action grounded in a proposal for an intense transformation, from within and from outside the foreign language institutions.

I started this research with two questions that were shaking my everyday life as an educator: (1) how do we, Spanish teachers, perceive students who come from communities where Spanish is one of their linguistic repertoires? and (2) how do our practices, our objectives, our assessments relate to those perceptions? In order to answer these questions, in my Chapter 1, I introduced a contextual line for the study of teachers' place within the history of foreign language education. This line ended up being like Anzaldúa's description of the geographies of selves: "like a map with colored web lines of rivers, highways, lakes, towns, and other landscape features en donde pasan y cruzan las cosas" (p. 69). Chapter 2 took me to places of knowledge, a review of literature from scholars who offered labels, theories, flow charts, and sketches to illustrate fluid understandings of the issues that pushed me into this path.

Navigating literature was like catching “a glimpse of the cosmic order and your (my) part in that cosmovision” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 122). This cosmic order keeps on switching as new articles appear and conversations with the participants in my study lead me to investigate areas that did not seem relevant before. In Chapter 3, my brain was invited to imagine a scientific methodology, a systematic process to bring answers to the pressing questions that started this *camino*. From the two paths I could have chosen, Anzaldúa helped me understand that it was in the oral and written stories where I could find the responses I needed to encounter my “shadow side and confront” what I programmed myself to avoid. I decided to explore documents that depicted gates, bridges, and spaces, and to engage in conversations with other teachers who would open their doors to their cenotes, while offering a glimpse of their own bridges and the *hogares* they built for all their students, and then, for our heritage language communities.

Throughout the next two chapters, I envisioned my role as a *nepantlera* apprentice, a liminal researcher at the threshold of what I thought I knew and what the narratives of educators and their guidelines were confiding in me. During this process my individual and collective definitions and belief systems were destabilized as I started “questioning our previously accepted worldviews (our epistemologies, ontologies, and / or ethics)” (Keating, 2015, p. xxxv). I divided the findings into two chapters, the first one examined the established structures of foreign language education represented by guidelines and cultural and linguistic descriptors, and the second, Chapter 5, utilized teachers’ narratives to create a visual representation that originated in the depths of cenotes and finished in the objects (practices) those teachers chose to position in their own spaces.

What follows in this last chapter is my attempt “to give back to nature, los espíritus, and others a gift wrested from the events” that happened throughout this path, “a bridge home to the self” (p. 122).

Path to conocimiento: Implication of Findings

Significant implications and findings materialized through the crystallization of narratives that I may not have fully grasped without the voices of the participating teachers combined with the constant presence of Anzaldúa. Opening their experiences and grounding their perceptions during our interviews and focus group allowed me to understand how the well-intentioned ideal of a teacher who does not stop to question their practices becomes complicit with the hegemonic proposition that, in order to accomplish academic success and be valued members of society, all students need to aspire to homogenic views of language and culture. By separating themselves from the non-European communities who use their content subject, Spanish, as one of their linguistic repertoires, teachers depicted an alignment with the same gates, bridges, and spaces built by the American Council of Teaching of Foreign Languages not for all students, but for mostly white, middle-class, monolingual students, most of whom in the end, will never be bilingual.

As I applied Anzaldúa’s seven stages of her path to conocimiento to the findings that emerged in my study, I hold inside a deep-rooted esperanza that when teachers of foreign languages read these words, an *arrebato* shakes their world in similar ways it shook mine. Our classrooms are full of students who should not have to wait much more until we, educators, transform ourselves, our perceptions, and our practices to acknowledge the unique resources our minoritized students bring every day to our spaces, only to leave them in their lockers.

El Arrebato versus the Perpetuation of Racist Language Policies

In the Atlantic's article, "America's lacking language skills," Friedman (2015) indicated that "although roughly 18% of the U.S. population report speaking a foreign language (in comparison to 26% of Canadians and 54% of Europeans), less than 1% of American adults are proficient in the language that they studied in a U.S. classroom," and only 7% of college students in America are enrolled in a language course. The comparison between those numbers, which mean stories to me, shakes my understanding of the field of foreign language education. The amount of resources, articles, committees, K-12 to college departments, and public and private organizations guaranteeing that white, middle-class students become proficient in a European language, that is already spoken by numerous racially minoritized sections of our population, is mind-blowing and infuriating. This statistic is a crack on the ground of all the documents that are part of this study: less than 1% of the students who will be impacted by millions of hours and actual dollars of intellectual work focused on their proficiency, will be able to communicate in such foreign language.

Anzaldúa states that every *arrebato* is a violent attack that "turns your world upside down and cracks the walls of your reality" (2015, p. 125). How would every teacher, every foreign language coordinator, every language professor, and every FL student feel if they read this statistics? These numbers are undoubtedly part of a larger discriminatory system that places an immense amount of physical, financial, and intellectual resources on a black hole with the purpose of maintaining systems of oppression, and perpetuating colonizing views that support our current societal divisions.

My analysis of the documents that are part of the American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages is proof of the continuation of this division under an

apparent well-intentioned purpose of envisioning “an interconnected world where everyone benefits from and values a multilingual and multicultural education” (from their website). In contrast with this inspirational narrative, advocate for the decolonization of the foreign language field, Macedo fiercely states that “the not-so-hidden racism that guides and shapes language policy and teaching institutions sabotages the many claims being made for a twenty-first century multilingual and multicultural globalized world” (2019, p. 14).

Nepantla vs the Standardization of the Teaching of Spanish Language

Throughout interviews and focus groups, the theme of variations of the Spanish language and their appropriateness was crucial. Instead of recognizing a liminal space within our FL classrooms where students could utilize their various linguistic repertoires to engage in meaningful learning projects, Spanish courses’ objectives were described in pure linguistic terms, being proficiency a fixed goal for all teachers who participated in this research, and whose voices are part of this conclusion.

The goal of walking with teachers through the path of their own personal experiences learning the Spanish language, then studying their careers in education, and finally, examining their interactions with local heritage language communities, was to explore if they were willing to engage in the transition space named nepantla, and if they had ever reflected critically about their own perspectives of languages in general, and the Spanish language in particular. Unfortunately, the theme that arose with most strength from our conversations was the choice of standardization of the Spanish language as a personal and professional goal.

As indicated in the analysis of interviews and focus group, six out of the seven participants in this study had connections with Spain in their process of learning the language. That selection of language placed teachers in a Western-centered linguistic

standpoint that was only questioned by mentioning linguistic difficulties (use of *vosotros* and its corresponding conjugations) or geographical distance. However, ideas related to the perpetuation of colonizing views by the foreign language curriculum, textbooks, and practices, never came up in our conversations.

Spain Spanish, or in its defect, standard Spanish was embraced by all teachers as the most appropriate form of communication in their classes, even when, heritage language students who would occasionally include terms used in their community, were also respected as deviations of the norm. Translanguaging expert, Ofelia García, acknowledged how languages have been used and still are as “tools of domination, conquest and colonization throughout history” (2019, p. 152). She distinguishes between named languages, i.e., fixed artificial societal constructions linked to historical events, and translanguaging, or the ways in which multilingual speakers make use of their complex linguistic repertoires depending on the situation and their audiences, a fluid element with the ability to shift shapes like the *naguala*, and that, according to Anzaldúa, would end up in *conocimiento*.

Regrettably, according to the outcomes of the current study and its literature review, the only system of languaging accepted in the researched foreign language classrooms remains a Eurocentric one, imposed through standardized named languages such as standard or Castilian Spanish. As an evidence of how deep this prescriptivism runs in the foreign language programs, even heritage language students perceive standard Spanish as “the powerful codes of society” (p. 159).

The Coatlicue State or Teacher’s Imposter Syndrome

That Latinx teachers are underrepresented in American public schools (Egalite et al., 2015) is a well-known fact. According to Zippia, a career database, only 10% of foreign language teachers in the United States define themselves as Hispanic or Latinx.

In the area surrounding the district where this research took place, a recent study established among K-12 students, Latinx population made up 19% of the population, while Latinx teachers were 0.5% of the teaching workforce (Latinx Education Collaborative, 2021, p. 9). When teachers participating in this research were presented a scenario where their department chair asked them to teach a heritage language course, all of them stated that they did not feel prepared and that they would rather have a Latinx teacher oversee such class. Three main issues presented after these comments were made: (1) unfortunately, there are not enough Latinx foreign language teachers to fulfill this initiative, (2) studies have shown that although sharing the same cultural background of your students is a connecting factor, it does not automatically translate to being the culturally sustaining educator heritage students need, and (3) heritage language students enrolled in 6-12 foreign language courses also report feelings of inadequacy and neglect (Edstrom, 2007; Leeman, 2018).

In the stage of Coatlicue, Anzaldúa describes her own process of denial when he was confronted with a diabetes diagnosis. Her words illustrate the paradox that also affect educators who reported feeling imposter syndrome when given the task to teach HL students: “The knowledge that exposes your fears can also remove them. Seeing through these cracks makes you uncomfortable because it reveals aspects of yourself (shadow beasts) you don’t want to own” (2015, p. 132). To the fears revealed by teachers of feeling “stupid” in front of their students, Anzaldúa responds with a profound statement: admitting their initial inadequacy for a job that defies what the educational system expects from FL teachers is the first step “to break out of your self-imposed prison. But it will cost you.”

Research has indicated that greater academic achievement for students of color is associated to mainstream and culturally responsive teaching practices, as well as

teacher-student ethnic match (Castro & Calzada, 2021). For our interviewed teachers, the outcomes of this research imply that they can offer HL students the culturally and linguistic sustaining space they need to be academically successful. More than that, that it is the educators' responsibility to find adequate responsive coaching so that this "dark side of your reality," stops controlling their fears. It is the educators' responsibility to acknowledge that they are professionals in charge of disrupting a profoundly discriminatory system by providing students whose lives are not recognized by proficiency guidelines nor national standards, with critical tools to assess for themselves past and present racist practices, and collaboratively build solid humanizing foundations.

I understand that, in the times we are living, teachers who engage students in critical approaches to racial affairs may risk their careers; however, one of the advantages FL educators hold is that, in similar ways teachers used a pure applied linguistics approach to distance themselves from the injustices of the world, they can also utilize it to examine decolonizing realities hidden in language exercises, which will engage not only their heritage language students, but all students in their classrooms. At least, as Ofelia García indicates:

Decolonizing languages might not be feasible in the present climate, but decolonizing our knowledge about languages and the language education programs that exist might destabilize the support that many language education programs enjoy today, exposing them for their role in restricting opportunity for minoritized learners instead of expanding it. (2019, p. 166)

El compromiso versus HL as Independent Learners

At four in the morning, the pounding of your heart wakes you. It's banging so hard, you're afraid it'll crack your ribs. (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 134)

The disparities between additive and subtractive practices have been banging so hard for so long throughout the history of American schooling that their outcomes produce an actual feeling of pain to any educator or scholar who attempts to

understand its roots. These contrasts unveil the cenotes from which schools' and teachers' philosophies about heritage language students surge. In general terms, a subtractive model of teaching language and cultures to heritage language students implies that one set of values (standard language and perception of cultures as geographically distant from the U.S.) replaces the languages and cultural resources students bring from their heterogenous communities, including translanguaging and cultures rooted in nepantla.

The results of this imposed re-colonization of students' funds of knowledge lead to foreign language programs ineffectiveness in meeting the needs of the heritage language population, and what is more crucial, wasting those incredible achievements the American Council of the Teaching of Spanish Language proposes as national goals. As Reagan and Osborn (2020) stated in their analysis of foreign language programs in the U.S., there exists a incomprehensible paradox of on the one hand, scholars arguing that this country needs more individuals who can function fluently in languages other than English "for reasons of business, diplomacy, national security, cultural understanding, and so on" (p. 74) , and on the other, excluding those sections of our population who already has the linguistic and cultural backgrounds necessary to succeed in this accomplishment. Instead, our heritage language students are neglected in favor of this "tiny, white, middle- and upper-class student population who 'take French, or Spanish, or German ... for three, four, or five years before entering college, only to discover that they cannot read, speak, or understand it'" (Jacques Barzun, cited by Reagan and Osborn, 2020, p. 13).

Throughout conversations with the seven teachers who took part in this study, neglect and distancing from heritage language students as opposed to attempts to achieve compromiso, were presented as goodhearted actions intended to ease the

assumed trauma and lack of academic motivation of such students. Comments such as “I hope they’re learning” or “I don’t have a specific goal for them” made my heart pound with a mix of anger and determination. Comments like “I want him to be in there and have a fun time” or “I don’t want them to feel weird” carry a whole world of dangerous compassion and assimilation objectives. A *pobrecito* mindset (Noguera, 2009) flows throughout the cenotes where most white, middle-class teachers started their channel towards the professional responsibility they currently hold. Framed by this philosophy, letting heritage language students just be comfortable in their classes seems the correct action to build (un)safe spaces.

However, in the hierarchical structure of schools, teachers and not students hold the responsibility to create conditions for everyone to thrive, not only emotionally, but academically. Setting high academic expectations for all students seems to be an element where most educational scholars agree on. Solving the educational difficulties teachers perceive in their students is the educational system responsibility (teachers, counselors, and administrators), not just the responsibility of the students and their communities. The analyzed documents ignored the existence of such challenges, and the conversations with the participants in this study aligned with the idea that educators are not well-equipped to successfully accomplish this mission. Scholars who abide by culturally sustaining pedagogies promote a system where educators work closely with parents and communities to create multicultural, multilingual positive learning environments that meet the needs of the students they serve. As Noguera reported on several schools across the United States that are succeeding at educating students of color, he emphasized that it is crucial that educators do not blame the students they are serving for “their own failures or, by extension, their parents” (2012, p. 12).

Nevertheless, when Anzaldúa speaks of *compromiso* in this fourth stage towards *conocimiento*, she acknowledges that there is path towards better understanding a future that has not yet taken place, instead of assuming that what teachers have done consistently in their classrooms might be the “best they can do.” Since languages, identity, racial divisions, and schooling are all social constructions, educators should be open to de-construct their pieces and build another version of a reality that favors those who have been historically pushed to live in the margins:

Identity becomes a cage you reinforce and double-lock yourself into. The life you thought inevitable, unalterable, and fixed in some foundational reality is smoke, a mental construction, fabrication. So, you reason if it’s all made up, you can compose it anew and differently. (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2013, p. 558)

Putting Coyolxauhqui Together versus the Folklorist Approach to Cultures

After dismantling the body/self, you recompose it—the fifth stage of the journey, though reconstruction takes place in all stages. When creating a personal narrative, you also co-create the group / cultural story. (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 140)

After de-constructing the ideas educators have about languages, identities, and racial divisions within the school setting, Anzaldúa proposes a reconstruction, a creation of a cultural narrative. The documents report offered a cultural framework that combined products, practices, and perspectives, which represented meanings, attitudes, values, and ideas of the world (Cutshall, 2012e). In my research, I classified this cultural framework as a gate, a threshold that teachers of Spanish as a FL chose to establish in their classrooms to define binary conceptualizations of ingroups versus outgroups, *us* versus *them*, *nos* / *otras*.

The idea of culture emerged in my research illustrated by two powerful lights: (1) the Hispanic culture defined by folkloristic approaches of exoticism, and (2) the glorification of the Western civilizations. Although Anzaldúa embraced folklore in the shape of goddess figures, myths, and storytelling (*la Jila*, *la Llorona*), she utilized these

stories to reconnect to the earth and reclaimed her indigenous roots. Folk myths were stories of transformation about powers and abilities manifesting in nature, and as such, these stories opposed European religions that “always side with those in power [...] that they want us to merge with the normal, to cut off the unacceptable parts of ourselves” (Anzaldúa, 2020, p. 96).

The documents analyzed for this research depicted cultural products and practices exclusively in their celebratory facets, ignoring their historical backgrounds of colonization, struggles, and reaffirmation: the reasons behind those colors, shapes, music, and textures. The portraits of cultural knowledge provided in the FL classrooms as reported by the document analysis and the voices of the interviewed teachers denoted the influence of minds shaped by the comfort of cultural appropriation. When asked about practices that informed students about culture in their classrooms, an astonishing number of interviewed teachers mentioned their celebration of Day of the Dead by showing some videos or watching the Disney movie, *Coco*. These narratives led me to imagine the topic of cultural perspective as a *fotografía* of fireworks bordered by a colonizing frame made in America.

The second approach to cultural knowledge as interpreted from the analysis of documents was the portrayal of a dominant Eurocentric discourse, where Spain’s history, art, and literature was overwhelmingly superior to the rest of the Spanish-speaking countries. One of the teachers divided his curriculum into two semesters, the first one devoted to Spain’s art, and the second one to Latin America. Teachers’ approach to cultural knowledge appeared to be also linked not only to their own traveling experiences, but also to their college experiences. Therefore, one of the initiatives that can be proposed from this study is the necessity to decolonize the foreign language higher education programs in the sense of including comprehensive

cultural information about Latinx in the United States: products, practices, and perspectives. I propose a more localized views of culture where educators reject binary concepts of borders (in / out) and welcome spaces of nepantla (in-between) and the existence of multiple cultural layers influencing our communities and grounded in a new tribalism.

The contrast between cultural knowledge and cultural awareness should be reflected in the curriculum FL teachers present to all their students, not just HLLs.

A Clash of Realities and Heritage Language Education Implications

By attending to what the other is not saying, what she's not doing, what isn't happening, and by looking for the opposite, unacknowledged emotion-the opposite of anger is fear, of self-righteousness is guilt, of hate is love-las nepantleras attempt to see through the other's situation to her underlying unconscious desire. (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 148)

During the focus group, I attempted to place myself in the role of a nepantlera, listening to what was said, but also to what was not. I had become an expert in the search of *desconocimiento*, and I had to ensure that the teachers in our zoom did not sense any sort of animadversion from the questions and scenarios I designed for them. The truth is that those prompts were grounded in feelings of disappointment that emerged throughout the analysis of the interviews, and shook my soul once more, another crack in the walls of my reality, another *arrebato*. As Anzaldúa declared, each *arrebata* results in a great sense of “loss, grief, and emptiness” (p. 125). This one is no different.

Deep in my heart, after five years working in the same district as the teachers who participated in this study, I have taken on myself to create a comprehensive culturally sustaining heritage language program. I have volunteered to put a taskforce together to design an engaging curriculum with units that speak to the multiple identities and communities we serve. I have presented during professional

development meetings to all my foreign languages' colleagues on how to build bridges and create safe spaces for our HL students, how to design platforms so that our heritage communities find sturdy policies that welcome their funds of knowledge and applaud their multiculturalism and multilingualism, even when they both overlap in ways we cannot dream of replicating. I have walked the path to *conocimiento* myself. I have been in their shoes and watched my students from a lens of superiority and compassion. I have not expected much for them, or at least, less than the rest.

“New *conocimientos* (insights) threaten your sense of what's “real” when it's up against what's “real” to the other. But it's precisely this threat that triggers transformation” (p. 147). Thus, those sixty minutes of virtual conversations followed by hours of reconciling opposite thoughts, I wonder if these teachers are correct when they request training in heritage language methods, when they articulate how they are doing the best they can with the background information they received. As a *nepantlera* apprentice that looks at what has not been said, or done, I can relate to a certain point in their camino, many years ago, and instead of anger, I decide to navigate their words *entre aguas*, and “to be a bridge, not a separatist,” to act more inclusively by recognizing the strength and vulnerability that these teachers have demonstrated just by saying yes to their participation in my research. After a revision of all interviews and focus group transcriptions, I can say that in order to create connectedness and wholeness, heritage language education advocates need to “show the deep common ground and interwoven kinship among all things and people” (p. 148).

Transformation and Hope for Future Research

Several recommendations have been provided based on the implications of findings related to this study. The integration of national documents for the teachings

of foreign languages and the voices of teachers have provided a series of milestones along the path to *conocimiento* that will accommodate future investigations, trainings, and programs. As one of my teacher-participants rightfully asked about her heritage language students: “what’s the students’ motivation? What do they want to get out of the class?” Given the fact that the issues of educational responsibility have been already addressed, I would like to use this question to explore future areas of research.

- The field of heritage language education is a living creature with lots of roots and branches, however, throughout the process of the current study, vacuums in the area of HL education at middle and secondary-school (6-12) levels emerged. Longitudinal case studies following FL teachers through a conscious professional development on pedagogical strategies focused on mixed classrooms would be decisive to reinforce ideas of continuous improvement through training.
- Additionally, understanding how foreign language policies and documents have been created and engaging in a culturally sustaining process of decolonization of the current proficiency guidelines, and their teachings of cultural knowledges, would lead to a much more comprehensive and just system of teaching and learning languages.
- One of the issues expressed throughout this study was FL teachers’ reliance on textbooks. Since textbooks are guidelines that embody particular ideologies and prioritize specific types of knowledge, future research on how Spanish textbooks present cultural knowledge from perspectives of otherness and folkloristic views, as opposed to incorporating local Latinx communities’ products, practices, and perspectives.

- And finally, one of the greatest acknowledgements of the current research was the lack of training foreign language teachers receive during their college years on heritage language education, and how, due to this desconocimiento, teachers did not feel the responsibility of providing students with challenging academic goals. Since research indicates that teachers must understand the students' cultures and linguistic backgrounds in order to teach them effectively, and since most FL teachers do not share the same culture as their Latinx students, specific studies focused on the creation of either units and/or courses for teachers to engage in meaningful culturally adequate conversations with their students, and construct safe spaces where they can not only feel comfortable but also enhance their potential, would be extremely beneficial.

Final Reflections

I started to walk this journey after several *arrebatos* at work and at home. My heritage language students and my own children were bringing stories of linguistic terrorism and their narratives made me reflect on my own practices as a Spanish teacher. These past years, I embarked on a personal and professional mission not only to learn from scholars and my own students, but also to launch and expand a heritage language program in my district, which is currently growing in relevance and numbers. I also collaborated virtually with teacher advocates around the United States to present in conferences and lead workshops on the topics of heritage language education, which has made my studies even more applicable.

After completing each section of the data analysis, I realized of how much work there is still to be accomplished in the field of teaching heritage languages and decolonizing our foreign language curricula. The results of this study, as well as my own accomplishment completing this doctoral degree, will open doors for my next

chapter in life, which I expect will have a larger impact on the community of immigrants like me and children of immigrants like my own children.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Informed Consent for Participation in a Research Study

Critical Study of Teachers' Perceptions of Heritage Language Students

Student Investigator: Marta Silva Primary Investigator: Dr. Nora Peterman

Request to Participate

You are being asked to participate in a research study to share your experiences as a Spanish language teacher with students whose community language is Spanish, i.e., heritage language learners. This study is being conducted in the state of Kansas. The goal of this research is to identify what teachers experience when students in their traditional Spanish courses come from communities where Spanish is spoken. The primary focus of this study is to learn from your own practices and perceptions.

The researcher in charge of this study is Mrs. Marta Silva-Serrano, a doctoral candidate in education at the University of Missouri – Kansas City. While the study will be conducted by her, other qualified supervising professors and faculty at the university may act for her in discussions for supervisory purposes or data analysis auditing.

The study team is asking you to take part in this research study because you are a teacher of Spanish and have experience teaching students who qualify as heritage language learners. Research studies only include people who choose to take part. This document is called a consent form. Please read this consent form carefully and take your time making your decision. The researcher or study staff will go over this consent form with you. Ask her to explain anything that you do not understand. Think about it and talk it over with your family and friends before you decide if you want to take part in this research study. This consent form explains what to expect: the risks, discomforts, and benefits, if any, if you consent to be in the study.

Background

This is a study about the unique experiences of educators of Spanish in mixed classrooms, i.e., monolingual and heritage language students. It uses a elements from case study methodology to collect ideas, perceptions, and stories, and then, analyze their meaning. This will be done through oral interviews, focus groups, and through the analysis of current language acquisition standards, lesson plans, and any other document pertinent to the topic. Most research on heritage language education has been done from students' perspectives and in the field of higher education. That is why your voice as a high school educator is so valuable to this study. Your perceptions and practices in this field will help other teachers will similar experiences, policymakers, and researchers to better understand the complex circumstances of teaching heritage language students in traditional foreign language courses.

You will be one of about 5-7 participants in this study in the state of Kansas.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions and practices of teachers of Spanish as a foreign language with heritage language students in their traditional L2 courses. By sharing beliefs, perceptions, and practices, teachers will depict a complex instructional reality that affects many educators of languages. Moreover, by understanding the perceptions behind the pedagogical practices, other education professionals may reflect on their own practices.

There are two central questions guiding this research.

1. What are the perceptions and beliefs of secondary Spanish language (SFL) teachers of Spanish heritage language learners (SHLLs) enrolled in their SFL courses?
 - a. What are the beliefs of SFL educators about Heritage language acquisition?
2. How do the perceptions and beliefs of SFL educators inform their practices regarding the teaching of heritage language students in mixed classrooms?
 - a. What instructional practices and strategies are utilized by SFL educators in their mixed classrooms when teaching SHL learners enrolled in their SFL courses?
 - b. How are SFL educators' perceptions towards their SHL students related to their teaching practices?

Procedures

This study will include 3 sessions of interaction between you and the researcher over the course of 3 weeks.

To begin with, you will be asked to complete an introductory online questionnaire—*Perceptions and Practices of Teachers of Spanish as L2 Towards Heritage language learners in their Classrooms* (click on link). This questionnaire takes less than 15 minutes to complete, and your participation is completely voluntary. Moreover, I will be the only person reading the results of the questionnaire and responses will remain secure and confidential.

1st session: As a follow-up to the questionnaire, I will be conducting individual interview sessions. The interview will be conducted as a dialogue and a complete list of planned questions will be provided to you at least three days prior to the scheduled interview. All interviews will be conducted at a time that is convenient for the participants within the first week of the questionnaire completion. Interviews will be scheduled for thirty to forty-five (30-45) minutes. Interviews with participants will take place over Zoom due to our current state of social distancing and they will be recorded using a digital recorder and Zoom's recording setting. These records will also remain secure and confidential. During this first session, you will also be asked to choose a pseudonym that will represent you in the research study. The interview audio will be digitally recorded, and a complete transcription provided to you for updating and corrections if needed. The digital audio file will be deleted after the transcription has been confirmed.

2nd session: A focus group will last approximately forty-five minutes to one hour (45-60 min.). Each focus group will host three to four teachers simultaneously. The purpose of this focus group is to allow conversation to flow among teacher participants and to clarify some issues that might rise during the individual interviews. Focus group will be conducted approximately one week after the last individual interview has taken place and at a time convenient for the participants. They will also take place over Zoom and similarly to interviews, they will be recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions will be provided to participants in case there needs to be updating or corrections. The digital audio file will be deleted after the transcription has been confirmed.

3rd session: Final interview lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. Prior to this interview, you will be provided a preliminary analysis of the previous interview and focus group. During this final interview, you will be asked to confirm or correct the gathered information, as well as to answer some follow-up questions to clarify any relevant issue. This information will be provided to you at least three days prior to the final interview. Finally, all interviews will take place over Zoom. They will also be digitally recorded, and a transcription provided to you for updating and corrections.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be involved in this study for approximately 2-3 hours over a period of no less than 3 weeks and no more than 5 weeks. The sessions will be scheduled at your convenience.

When you are done taking part in this study, you will still have access to the interviews transcriptions and preliminary analysis that have been provided to you. You will also be provided with an electronic copy of the final dissertation project if you request one.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to participate in certain activities or answer certain questions. You may withdraw from the study at any time by notifying the researcher in writing (email or SMS).

Risks and Inconveniences

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks of taking part in this research study are not expected to be more than the risks in your daily life. There are no other known risks to you if you choose to take part in this study. You will be asked questions about your own experiences as a teacher of Spanish to heritage language learners. You choose what information to share and which one to remain private. If you feel uncomfortable talking about some parts of your experiences, you are not required to do so.

Benefits

Although no direct benefits can be guaranteed to you, I hope you will have an opportunity to reflect and share your experiences, perceptions, and beliefs on the teaching of heritage language learners. You may benefit from a deeper understanding

of your own experiences with curriculum and pedagogical practices, and you might learn strategies from other teachers in the focus groups.

On a broader sense, other teachers of Spanish will benefit from your participation in this study. Teaching heritage language speakers can be a complex endeavour and with our increasing Latinx population in the U.S. more and more educators will be exposed to similar experiences to yours.

Fees and Expenses

There are no monetary costs or fees associated with participation in this study.

Compensation

There is no payment for taking part in this study.

Alternatives to Study Participation

The alternative is not to take part in the study.

Confidentiality

While we will do our best to keep the information you share with us confidential, it cannot be absolutely guaranteed. Individuals from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies), Research Protections Program, and Federal regulatory agencies may look at records related to this study to make sure we are doing proper, safe research and protecting human subjects. The results of this research may be published or presented to others. You will not be named in any reports of the results.

As previously described, you will be asked to select a pseudonym during the first interview session. This name only will be used on all written transcriptions, notes, and in the final dissertation write-up. Fictitious names for schools and districts will also be substituted to protect your confidentiality. The student investigator may seek publication for the written research findings in peer-reviewed research journals; however, you will be identified with your chosen pseudonym in this publication.

Please be advised that although the researcher will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, if you choose to participate in focus groups after your individual interview, you will need to sign a non-disclosure statement. In such, you will agree to maintain the confidentiality of the information discussed during such process and not repeat what is shared in the focus groups with others.

To reduce the risk of loss of confidentiality, all electronic data collected will be stored on a password-protected computer. This data will not be retained for future research. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you may request that your data will not be kept or use. Personal identifiable information will not be shared with any third party unless in the case of mandatory reporting of child abuse.

Contacts for Questions about the Study

You should contact the Office of UMKC’s Institutional Review Board at 816-235-5927 if you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research subject. You may call/text the researcher, Marta Silva at 913-526-1146 if you have any questions about this study. You may also call/text her if any problems come up.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. If you choose to be in the study, you are free to stop participating at any time and for any reason. If you choose not to be in the study or decide to stop participating, your decision will not affect any care or benefits you are entitled to. The researchers, doctors or sponsors may stop the study or take you out of the study at any time if they decide that it is in your best interest to do so. They may do this for medical or administrative reasons or if you no longer meet the study criteria. You will be told of any important findings developed during the course of this research.

You have read this Consent Form, or it has been read to you. You have been told why this research is being done and what will happen if you take part in the study, including the risks and benefits. You have had the chance to ask questions, and you may ask questions at any time in the future by calling Mrs. Marta Silva at 913-526-1146 or at ms756@umsystem.edu. By signing this consent form, you volunteer and consent to take part in this research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form.

Signature (Volunteer Subject)

Date

Printed Name (Volunteer Subject)

I understand that interviews and focus group sessions will be recorded

APPENDIX B

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTION LIST

Introduction: I would like to ask some general questions about your experiences in teaching Spanish and about your experiences in teaching Spanish to heritage language learners. There are not right or wrong answers. I am here to learn about your own beliefs and practices, so I can gather a better understanding of Spanish teachers' experiences in the classroom when they have students who come with some linguistic and/or cultural knowledge acquired in their community. Please know that I am also a Spanish teacher with my own set of experiences, and I would like for you to feel free to ask me questions about my practices at any moment of the interview. You can be as concise or descriptive as you like. Some of my questions are based on your answers to the initial questionnaire you filled out online.

1. Talk to me a little about yourself: your education, your professional experience(s).

Possible follow-up questions:

- a. How did you learn Spanish?
- b. How would you describe your training as a foreign language educator?
How did your educational program prepare you to teach a foreign language?
- c. Why did you decide to become a teacher? Why a Spanish teacher?
- d. Have you received any training or taking any coursework in Heritage Language instruction, i.e., teaching Spanish to students who live in a Spanish-speaking community?

2. Tell me about your experiences with Spanish-speaking communities, if any.

Possible follow-up questions:

- a. Have you ever lived in a Spanish-speaking community? If so, how was your experience?
 - b. Are you currently involved in any Spanish-speaking community? Do you have Spanish-speaking friends or family members?
3. Would you mind describing the courses you have taught this year and in the past (language and levels)?

Possible follow-up questions:

- a. What are essential learnings you would like your students of Spanish to acquire in your class?
 - b. What is your district's philosophy of foreign language acquisition? What about yours?
 - c. Tell me about how you usually design your daily lesson plans.
 - d. If I followed you through a typical school day, what would I observe in your class?
 - e. What are your students learning this semester?
 - f. Can you describe a unit test for me? What about a final assessment?
4. Since you have volunteered to do this interview, I understand that you have or had in the past taught students who come from Spanish-speaking communities and have some knowledge of the language. Would you mind if we go over your answers to the online questionnaire I sent you [last week] so that you can explain some of your responses to me? If you need to change or adjust any of your answers, feel free to do so.
- a. The first section covers your own ideas about teaching heritage language students in regular Spanish classes.

- b. The second section talks about your own classes, your own instructional practices, and your own heritage language students.
5. Tell me about an instance when you had to address a negative situation with a heritage language learner in your class, if any. What happened? How did you react? What did you do to solve the issue? What, if anything, would you differently now?
6. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience teaching Spanish to heritage language learners?

Thank you so much for sharing your experiences and thoughts. I will send you a copy of the transcription of this interview so that you can review your responses and make any additions or changes necessary. I am really looking forward to our next visit.

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS AND SCENARIOS

Introduction: Welcome and thanks for agreeing to meet in this virtual space to continue our conversation on heritage language students placed in traditional foreign language acquisition courses and your own experiences in this field. Your input in this study is of great value and your experiences will shape future actions in education.

My name is Marta Silva, and I will be the moderator in today's discussion. The format we are using is a focus group. A focus group is a conversation that focuses on specific questions or issues in a safe and confidential environment. I will guide the conversation by asking questions that each of you can respond to. There are not right or wrong answers. Just be honest. If you wish, I encourage you to respond to each other's comments, like you would in an ordinary conversation. It is my job to make sure that everyone here gets to express their thoughts.

Our conversation will be recorded and transcribed. I will send you a copy of the transcription for you to review and suggest changes or corrections, if needed. In the transcriptions as well as in the study you will never be identified by your name but by the pseudonym you chose in our first interview.

Obviously, I cannot control what you do when you leave this group. However, I would like to remind you that, as you signed on the Informed Consent form, everything we share must be confidential and should not be disclosed outside this group, nor references to individuals in this group be made after our focus group ends in order to respect each other's privacy. It is important for me and for the study that we trust each other and that we share our opinions freely without being interrupted.

1. In the interviews, a participant labeled their Spanish as a chameleon, another one as a mutt, a hybrid.

- a. How would you describe your Spanish if you had to use an analogy?
 - b. What “Spanish” do you use in class? From which country, if any? What do you think about the Spanish used by the textbook? Why?
 - c. Do you think your Spanish of choice matters to the L2 students? What about to the heritage students?
2. Many of you have implied in your interviews that it is crucial that your heritage students feel comfortable in your classes and that you value their well-being above all else.
- a. What are specific strategies you use to make your heritage language learners feel comfortable in your classrooms?
 - b. What do you avoid doing?
3. Some of you have indicated that having equal language practices for all your students lead your heritage students to feel a greater sense of belonging, of not being different. Please explain.
4. Interviews reported that HL students’ grades range from F to A.
- a. What do your grades indicate about all your students? Proficiency, performance, completion, or a combination of all?
 - b. If a student receives a D, would it mean that they can be placed in a novice level similarly to L2 students in your class with a similar grade? If not, what does this grade represents? Other questions will be informed by the results of analysing the responses of our first interviews.
5. Some of you have indicated that many of your heritage students don’t have to put a great amount of effort into their Spanish classes, that they are in a place

where they can in some sense relax because they have a language advantage, like a gifted student would have in a core course.

- a. What are advantages and disadvantages of this “lack of excessive effort” in your experience and/or opinion?
6. Some interviews indicated that heritage language students gain something just by being in the class, since activities are conducted in Spanish. Do you agree with this statement? Please explain.
 7. [Picture of the textbook’s rubric] Presentational speaking, Level 2, Target: Novice high - Intermediate Low. If you used this rubric to evaluate a heritage student presentation.
 - a. Which are categories where HL usually perform well and which ones are more problematic?
1. SCENARIO 01 – HL EDUCATION TRAINING - Your DC tells you that they need someone to teach a Heritage Language 01 class next semester and she thought of you. Are you interested? What are benefits / obstacles you would consider?
 2. SENARIO 02 – HLLs/SL2s INTERACTIONS – Location; Spanish 2 class - Clara (HL student) likes to work alone and has asked you not to pair her up with anyone during interpersonal speaking activities. She says she’d rather talk to you since the rest of the students don’t understand her and she barely understands them.
 3. SCENARIO 03 – HLLs / L2 TEACHER INTERACTION – Location: Spanish 2 class - Celia (HL student) complains about a section of your final test where she has to fill in blanks with previously learned vocabulary. She says that the Spanish you are teaching is weird and not the one she knows. She refuses to take the assessment. This is not the first time she does this.

4. SCENARIO 04 – CULTURAL SHARING – Location: Spanish 2 class - The topic is LA FAMILIA. The textbook includes a video of family features typical from Spanish-speaking countries. Your L2 students are really interested and start asking questions about family routines you are not sure about. There are 2 students in your class, one from Honduras and the other from Mexico.
5. SCENARIO 05 – TRANSLANGUAGING – Location: Spanish 2 class: Carlos is a HL student. This is his text on the writing section of the final. The prompt:
Describe your family. How would you assess this student?
 - a. *Mi familia es pretty big. Mis cousins y mi tio Pablo viven en el basement. Mi ma es la hermana de mi tio. They get along but mi pa no le gusta porque he leaves trastes everywhere. Mis cousins siempre son tarde ha su escuela.*

APPENDIX D

FINAL INTERVIEW

This last contact with my participants was made via email. The purpose of this last piece of information was to verify if our conversations had added some insights to their perceptions of heritage language students, since during our previous interview there were some comments regarding lack of awareness and time to reflect on this topic.

Dear colleague,

I hope your Spring Break is going fantastic and you are getting all the peace and rest you deserve. I have locked myself in my office to finish my dissertation and I am so happy to inform you that I will be graduating in May (if the world doesn't turn upside down once more). I appreciate so much your participation. Your conversations were incredibly valuable and hopefully, will make an impact on heritage language training in the future!

I would like to ask you for a last favor. I would like to include your voice in my conclusions and therefore, I would love it if you could answer this question via text or email (your call) ASAP since I am on a deadline here!

How have our conversations (interview) transformed your perceptions of heritage language students in your classes and your role as their teacher? If there have not been any changes in your thoughts, please indicate so.

Muchísimas gracias de corazón.

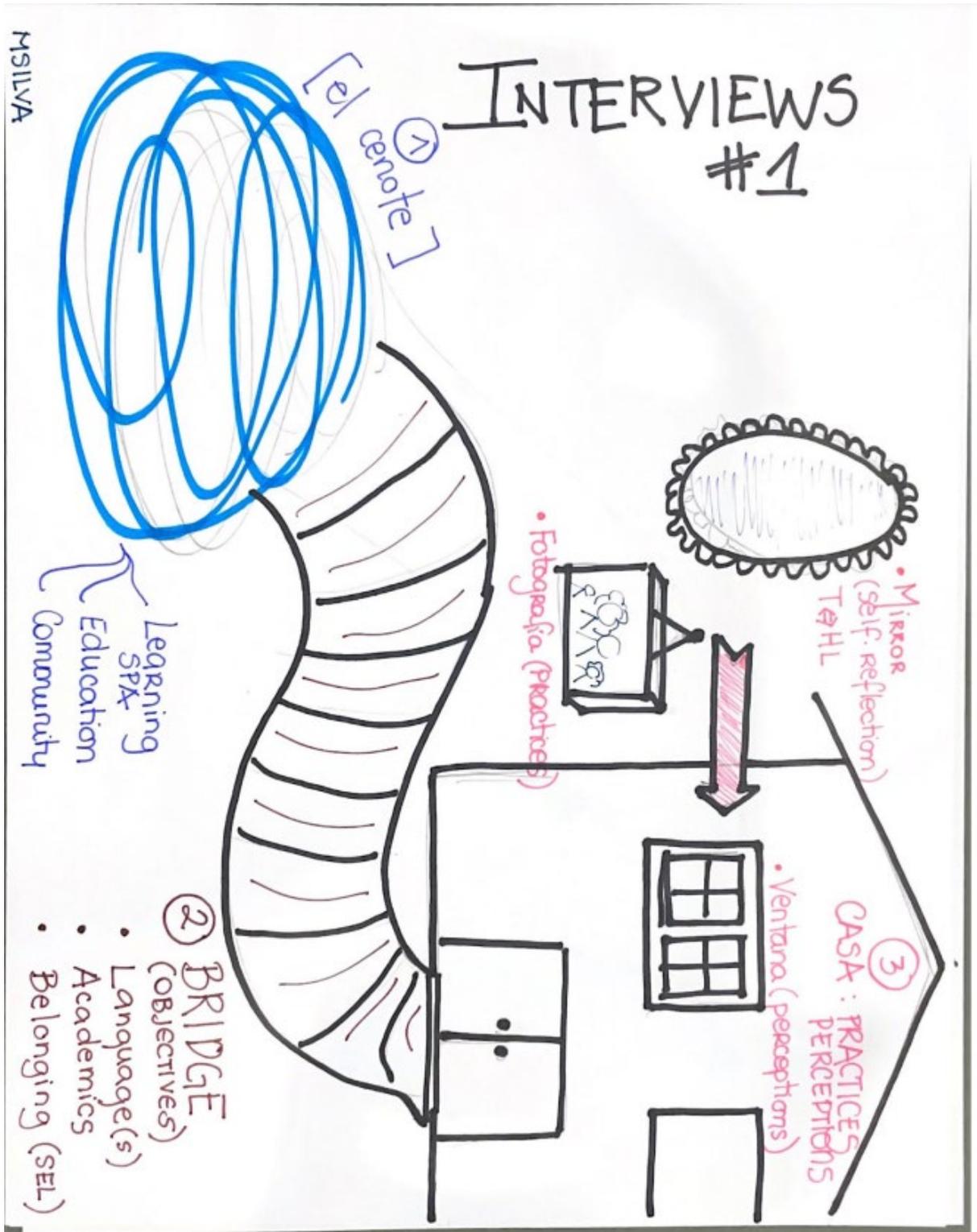
APPENDIX E

SKETCH 01 – DOCUMENTS



APPENDIX F

SKETCH 02 – INTERVIEWS 01



APPENDIX G

PARTICIPANTS INFORMATION

Teacher 1	Self-identified as white, US American 1 st language is English Teaching Spanish 1 (academic year 21-22) Self-rated level of Spanish proficiency: Advanced No training in HL education Studied abroad in Spain Active contact with HL communities through religious services
Teacher 2	Self-identified as mixed cultural background “born and raised in KS by Argentinian mother & KS father” 1 st language is English Teaching Spanish 4-5 (academic year 21-22) Self-rated level of Spanish proficiency: Superior No training in HL education Studied abroad in Spain No current contact with HL communities, but for Hispanic school colleagues
Teacher 3	Self-identified as Latina, Cherokee, Apache, English, Spanish, female 1 st languages are English/Spanish Teaching Spanish 1 (academic year 21-22) Self-rated level of Spanish proficiency: Advanced No training in HL education Studied abroad in Costa Rica Not fluent in Spanish during her childhood/adolescence Grandma taught her some songs, expressions in Spanish Parents suffered linguistic discrimination and avoided speaking Spanish in the household
Teacher 4	Self-identified cultural background as USA 1 st language is English Teaching Spanish 1 & 2 (academic year 21-22) Self-rated level of Spanish proficiency: Superior No training in HL education Studied abroad in Spain No current contact with HL communities
Teacher 5	Self-identified cultural background as USA 1 st language is English Teaching Spanish 1 & 2 (academic year 21-22) Self-rated level of Spanish proficiency: Superior No training in HL education Studied abroad in Spain No current contact with HL communities

Teacher 6 Self-identified as white/non-Hispanic. Grew up in rural KS
1st language is English
Teaching Spanish 2 & 3 (academic year 21-22)
Self-rated level of Spanish proficiency: Superior
No training in HL education
Studied & lived 4 years in Spain
Married to a Spaniard.
No current contact with HL communities

Teacher 7 Self-identified cultural background as USA born, Anglo family.
1st language is English
Teaching Spanish 1 (academic year 21-22)
Self-rated level of Spanish proficiency: Superior
No training in HL education
Studied abroad in Spain and other Spanish-speaking countries
No current contact with HL communities

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VITA

Marta Silva was born on October 4, 1971, in Salamanca, Spain. She moved with her family to the borderland city of Badajoz, where she attended school until she moved to attend college at the University of Cáceres and then, the University of Córdoba, Spain. She completed a Bachelor of Arts in Language Studies, a degree that compiles linguistic training in diverse languages, English, Spanish, Italian, French, Latin, and Greek. Her love of languages led her to apply to an international internship at William Jewel College, in Liberty, MO, where she taught as a lecturer in the Department of World Languages, from 1994-95. She then returned to Spain to complete her Master of Arts degree in Translation and Culture in the University of Córdoba in 1997. That same year, Silva moved to Merriam, KS, where she married and started a career and a family. In the fall of 2015, she started her doctoral studies at the University of Kansas City, Missouri to complete an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction (School of Education), and Latinx Studies (School of English).

Silva's educational professional life has ranged from teaching Spanish in Early Childhood centers to lecturing college courses, which has given her a broad perspective of how learning progresses throughout the years. Most of her educational career has been centered in the teaching of Spanish and Spanish as heritage language to 6-12 students. She has taught at Bishop Ward High School, Blue Valley West High School, and Olathe North High School, where she has launched and developed a pioneer heritage language program, that currently extends to five high schools and two middle schools. She is the heritage language facilitator for the district, and frequently presents in local and national conferences on topics related to heritage language education.

Upon the completion of her Doctor of Philosophy degree, Silva plans to continue her role of advocating for Latinx students who remain on the margins of our educational system, and to actively campaign for the inclusion of translanguaging practices in our classrooms, while offering support to college programs of education so that future teachers receive decolonizing culturally sustaining training which will hopefully impact generations of currently minoritized students.