

# SELECTED PAPERS FROM THE 7TH NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON SPANISH AS A HERITAGE LANGUAGE

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE OF THE SHL JOURNAL

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As pointed out in the Editorial Letter in the inaugural issue of this journal (Pascual y Cabo, Foulis, Prada & Wilson, 2021), the National Symposium on Spanish as a Heritage Language (NSSHL) has played an important part in the vitality of the field of Spanish as a Heritage Language. Since 2014 NSSHL has occurred yearly at a variety of institutions. We are excited to contribute to the vitality of this conference by publishing this special issue of selected papers from the 7th annual meeting of this conference organized by the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque (February 27–29, 2020). We emphasize that this is only the second collection of papers from NSSHL published, with the first special issue drawing from the 3rd annual meeting (see Holguín Mendoza, Wilson & Rajan, 2017). In line with the vision of inclusivity described in the aforementioned Editorial Letter, this special issue presents a diverse body of work that represents important strands of research in our field.

We would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the significance of NSSHL7 to all of the attendees who came to the beautiful state of New Mexico. For many of us, this was the last large gathering or conference that we attended before the global pandemic forced us into a world of remote work, which challenged our ability to conduct research and to teach at a time when so many people were

fighting for their lives or grieving their lost loved ones. As we reflect sentimentally on that gathering we understand that the field of SHL is about much more than scholarship and fostering emancipatory educational experiences for heritage learners. This conference is also a space for developing a true community where we can rally around our field. It is a space that is supportive for new scholars and veterans alike. While we often feel isolated among home department colleagues who may not understand SHL, we know that we are among family at NSSHL. It is our *querencia* and we borrow and apply words from the poet laureate of New Mexico, Levi Romero, to say that NSSHL es un lugar sagrado, a place where “two or more are gathered in the name of community” (Herrera, Kaiser & Romero, 2013: xi). We are proud to present excellent works from this gathering in the second issue of the SHL Journal.

The works contained in this special issue are connected by the theme of shedding light on heritage learners and speakers of Spanish in innovative research efforts. Other than that connection, this is a collection that represents the diversity of scholarly work that NSSHL promotes. Here we offer five original research articles, two book reviews and a dissertation summary, elements of which were presented at the conference in question.

In a work that brings a new subject to the field of SHL, “Heritage Spanish Speakers (Back) In Mexico: Educating U.S.-Raised Children In Mexican Schools,” Kathleen Tacosky describes the challenges faced by children of return migrants raised in the United States who either return to live in Mexico or move there for the first time. This is part of a decade-long project in which Tacosky has amassed many interviews with students. She argues that these are a type of heritage speaker and that, different from the situation in the United States, they face a situation in which the heritage language is now the dominant language. After outlining the many challenges that they face, from academic struggles to bullying and admonishment, she goes on to provide suggestions that could be implemented without great effort on the part of Mexican educators.

Patricia MacGregor-Mendoza and Gabriela Moreno contribute “SHL Literacy Skills: The Search for Hidden Treasure,” which draws from a larger project aimed at improving the placement exam for their SHL students. The authors point out that literacy is understudied in the field of SHL, and they highlight four misconceptions applied to discussions of literacy of SHL students: SHL reading framed as a deficit; reading viewed as a largely cognitive task; overdependence on L1 and L2 reading models; and outdated methods and literary

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genres. In order to study literacy from an SHL perspective, they present student participants with informal readings reflective of social media exchanges and ask comprehension questions that probe for an overall sense of the materials. They found that students did show gradient sensitivity to their questions according to course level and argue for the utility of this type of reading genre for bridging the divide between community and academic Spanish.

Whitney Chappell's contribution, "Heritage Mexican Spanish Speakers' Sociophonetic Perception of /s/ Aspiration," examines sociophonetic perceptions of coda /s/ held by second-generation Mexican Americans in the United States through a matched-guise task. Participants rated Mexican and Puerto Rican male voices that contained both [s] and [h] according to a matrix of social qualities (e.g., niceness and intelligence). While speakers rated Puerto Rican voices as denoting lower social status, greater age and Caribbean identity, they displayed a much more nuanced reaction to the Mexican voices in the task and in open-ended responses. Chappell argues that this greater nuance in reactions to the in-group samples is evidence that heritage speakers possess a great deal of sociolinguistic competence, which she positions as another repudiation of deficit models frequently applied to heritage speakers.

In the next article, an action-research investigation in linguistic landscapes, Yuly Asención-Delaney presents a pedagogical project with a Spanish as a Heritage Language class in which students use technology to explore, describe, and analyze the use of Spanish in public spaces. She argues that a linguistic landscape study serves several purposes: first, to explore the role of Spanish in a multilingual context and ideologies surrounding Spanish speakers; second, to investigate why Spanish could and should continue to exist in public spaces; third, to give students a sociolinguistic perspective on the varieties used in public spaces. These goals contribute to the students' understanding of language use as political and ideological as well as taking agency in their own linguistic choices.

In the final article, authors Naomi Shin, Mariana Marchesi, and Jill P. Morford test the hypothesis that restricted language input among heritage language children would lead to a pathway of development that was a protracted version of the development of abundant-input children. Focusing on demonstratives (*esa* and *esta*), the authors asked young heritage speakers to indicate verbally which puzzle piece was closest or farthest from a certain speaker's location. Fascinatingly, they found that young heritage language speakers'

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development of demonstratives did not exhibit the same pattern as their abundant-input peers; on the contrary, they preferred “esa” over “esta”. This study points to the need to consider how the language development of heritage language learners is not simply a slow-motion carbon-copy of native speakers’ language development.

In line with the journal’s mission to offer a variety of genres to the reader, we include book reviews of *Digital L2 Writing Literacies. Directions for Classroom Practice* (Oskoz & Elola, 2020) by Amalia Llombart and *Heritage Speakers of Spanish and Study Abroad* (Pozzi, Quan & Escalante, 2021) by Clara Burgo. We also include a dissertation summary of Priscilla López-Beltrán’s recently defended dissertation, *Heritage Speakers’ Online Processing of the Spanish Subjunctive: A Comprehensive Usage-Based Study*, and emphasize that Dr. López-Beltrán presented aspects of this work at the 7th NSSHL in Albuquerque.

We hope this special issue contributes to the vitality of this field, that itself seeks to preserve and raise the ethnolinguistic vitality of Spanish speaking communities in the United States, specifically, and to contribute to the broader mission of heritage language scholarship in any applicable context. ¡Nos vemos a la próxima!

## REFERENCES

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