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A Proposal for Action: Strategies for Recognizing Heritage Language Competence as a Learning Resource within the Mainstream Classroom

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raised by García, their perspective reasserts the importance of language proficiency in the heritage language construct because the stance often imposed by U.S. scholars can be an isolating rather than a unifying feature.

The final commentary is by two European researchers: Kees de Bot of the University of Nijmegen, who most recently collaborated on a study of the sociolinguistics of Bethlehem in order to develop appropriate language policies, and Durk Gorter, Professor of Frisian sociolinguistics at the University of Amsterdam and head of the Mercator Education Project within the European Union. They raise similar issues: What may be valid observations and remedies in the North American context may not apply elsewhere. They caution us about making generalizations and judgments because how people view multilingualism and perceive how others value multilingualism and minority language support differ by regional context. These views and perceptions determine what educational language initiatives they deem appropriate. This caveat is true for research evidence, for educational policy directives, and also for activism that would seem to warrant

optimism. As it stands, both de Bot and Gorter conclude that "the future of migrant language teaching is clearly grim" in the current sociopolitical environment in many European countries. Meanwhile, attitudes toward indigenous regional minority languages are generally favorable, bilingual and multilingual immersion education is booming, and Europe in its institutions and in the perception of its public sees itself as supporting multilingualism, particularly a multilingualism that involves English. Therein lies much food for thought.

I thank all the contributors of this *Perspectives* for having fostered the possibility of just such differentiated reflection.

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THE ISSUE

A Proposal for Action: Strategies for Recognizing Heritage Language Competence as a Learning Resource within the Mainstream Classroom

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Currently, heritage language teaching to school-aged students is carried out both within public schools (e.g., in foreign language classes and bilingual/dual language programs) and in community-supported out-of-school programs. In all of these settings, the teaching of heritage languages is marginalized with respect to funding provisions, number of languages involved, and number of students who participate. For example, only a handful of languages are taught in foreign language classes or in bilingual/dual language programs. Within the mainstream classroom, students' knowledge of additional languages has typically been viewed as either irrelevant or as an impediment to the learning of English and overall academic achievement. Many students continue to be actively discouraged from using or maintaining their home languages. Not surprisingly, there is massive attrition of students' heritage language competence over the course of schooling. This paper articulates some directions for challenging the squandering of personal, community, and national linguistic and intellectual resources within the mainstream classroom.

WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

The term *heritage languages* has only recently come to prominence in the United States. In Canada, the term emerged in 1977 with the inception of the Ontario Heritage Languages

Progams,[1] but it was not until the late 1990s that American scholars began using the term in the context of language policy (e.g., Krashen, 1998; Tse, 1997). The late Professor Russell Campbell of the University of California at Los Angeles hosted the First Heritage Languages in America

conference, in 1999, which was officially or-
ganized by the Center for Applied Linguistics
(CAL), the National Foreign Language Center
(NFLC), and California State University–Long
Beach. This initiative was followed up by a series
of other meetings, including a Binational Meeting
on Heritage Language Research Priorities in 2001
that compared Australian and U.S. programs and
research (Hornberger, 2005).

In the United States context, the term *heritage
language* refers to the languages of immigrant,
refugee, and indigenous groups. In principle, this
includes all languages, including English (native
English speakers have a heritage also!), but, in
practice, the term is used to refer to all languages
other than English. The Alliance for the Advance-
ment of Heritage Languages (n.d.) defines the
scope of the term as follows:

> The United States is rich in diverse languages and cul-
> tures. Heritage language speakers, who include immi-
> grant, refugee, and indigenous groups, contribute to
> this richness. Heritage language speakers are those
> whose home or ancestral language is other than En-
> glish, including those whose ancestors lived in this
> country prior to the establishment of the United
> States and those who have come in recent years.

From one perspective, the term *heritage language*
refers to the same set of languages as the term
foreign language (i.e., all languages other than
English). However, when we speak of teaching
heritage languages, the target group refers pri-
marily to students who have either learned the
language as their home language (L1) or who
have some form of family or "heritage" connec-
tion to the language (e.g., second and third gen-
eration immigrants). By contrast, the target group
for teaching foreign languages is generally as-
sumed to be English-speaking "mainstream" stu-
dents and the assumption is made that these lan-
guages have no presence in the community. Thus,
we have the following problematic consequences:
Languages that exist in the community, most par-
ticularly Spanish, are treated as "foreign" when
they are being taught for academic purposes to
nonheritage speakers. At the same time, some
students enrolled in elementary or high school
foreign language classes are already bilingual or
multilingual and sometimes fluent in this foreign
language, again particularly Spanish; but this re-
ality is largely ignored in both curriculum devel-
opment and instruction. (See Valdés, 2005, for a
more detailed discussion of definitions of heritage
language speakers.)

The recent initiatives by organizations such as
CAL to put heritage languages on the language

policy map have been motivated by the obvious
absurdity of current de facto national and state
language policies. These policies directly and in-
directly promote the loss of language resources
that have enormous relevance for economic inter-
change, national security, and community devel-
opment. Many studies have documented the rapid
loss of heritage language fluency in the early years
of schooling when these languages are not rein-
forced within the school context, such as through
bilingual or dual language programs (Cummins,
1991; Tse, 2001; Wong Fillmore, 1991). Even
as early as the preschool level, young children
quickly recognize the status differential between
their home languages and English. When the in-
teractions they experience with teachers reinforce
these status differentials, students disengage their
identities from their home languages and the pro-
cess of language loss is accelerated (Olsen et al.,
2001).

A major goal of this paper is, therefore, to
outline strategies whereby individual educators,
working with heritage language communities, can
communicate a very different message to students
about the value of their home language and cul-
ture. My rationale for this orientation is that, for
the reasons to be outlined, there is little imme-
diate prospect for large-scale policy shifts with
respect to national language resources or for a
coherent policy in relation to heritage languages.
Thus, we are faced with the bizarre scenario of
schools successfully transforming fluent speakers
of foreign languages into monolingual English
speakers, at the same time as they struggle, largely
unsuccessfully, to transform English monolingual
students into foreign language speakers.

A major reason for the lack of coherent policy in
relation to heritage languages is that the issue has
been submerged within the volatile debates about
bilingual education and the frequently xenopho-
bic discourse about immigration and linguistic
diversity generally. Thus, recent academic initia-
tives in relation to heritage languages can be
seen as an attempt to establish an independent
sphere of discourse where heritage language sup-
port can be debated on its own merits rather
than viewed through the lens of preexisting po-
larized attitudes towards bilingual education and
immigration. Heritage language advocates per-
ceive, correctly I believe, that there is little like-
lihood of any reduction in the volatility of the
bilingual education debate. This volatility is en-
tirely ideological in origin and has proved largely
impervious to influence from research findings
(Crawford, 2004; Tse, 1997). Among the vast ma-
jority of researchers, both in the United States and

internationally, there is consensus, based on massive amounts of research evidence, that bilingual education, although not by itself a panacea for underachievement, is a legitimate and useful instructional approach for developing bilingual and biliterate proficiency among both linguistic majority and minority students (see reviews in Baker & Prys Jones, 1998; Cummins, 2001). In carving out heritage language education as an independent focus of policy and debate, advocates can potentially build on the empirical findings regarding cross-language transfer that have emerged from bilingual research while at the same time avoiding the ideological turmoil that has made rational debate on bilingual education virtually impossible within the United States.

The situation in the United States is further complicated by the provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act and its requirement of frequent high-stakes testing to assess "adequate yearly progress" in core academic areas. (See *Perspectives* in *MLJ* 89, 2, 2005 for an extensive discussion of the influence of this legislation on language education.) These legal requirements have created major difficulties even for highly successful bilingual programs involving heritage languages because adequate yearly progress is typically assessed only in English (e.g., McCarty & Romero, 2005). In some contexts, social studies, the arts, and even science, when they are not tested, have been squeezed from the elementary school curriculum in order to maximize instructional time for reading and math, the two content areas most frequently tested. Even recess has been abandoned in some school systems in order to maximize time spent preparing for high-stakes testing. In this highly-pressured and almost paranoid educational context, heritage and foreign languages are of relatively low priority for policy-makers, educators, and the general public. Thus, there appears to be little hope in the immediate future for expanding the range of heritage and foreign language programs within the regular public school system.

This analysis suggests that it might be productive for advocates of heritage language instruction to broaden their focus. Macropolicies, including funding efforts, and academic initiatives that have been undertaken to promote heritage language policies through conferences and publications are highly valuable and should be continued. However, more immediate impact might be achieved by working with communities and educators in local contexts to implement instructional practices that will strengthen students' heritage language proficiency and their desire to maintain and develop it. In addition to promoting the her-

itage language itself, these initiatives could be designed to develop students' academic abilities in English by means of bilingual instructional strategies that teach explicitly for two-way cross-language transfer (L1 to English, English to L1). In other words, students' heritage language proficiency can become a resource for learning English rather than being viewed as either irrelevant or an impediment. This perspective is consistent with the argument that the No Child Left Behind legislation presents opportunities to language educators in addition to challenges (e.g., Brown, 2005; Byrnes, 2005). In the remainder of this paper, I elaborate these suggestions in the form of a proposal for action to promote heritage language proficiency at the level of the local school and community.

A PROPOSAL FOR ACTION: CHALLENGING MONOLINGUAL INSTRUCTIONAL ASSUMPTIONS

In particular, opportunities might be pursued in three specific contexts: out-of-school programs, dual language/bilingual programs, and "regular" English-medium programs. In each of these contexts, the incentive for both educators and communities to move in the direction that I am proposing is tied to the claim that we can simultaneously promote students' heritage language proficiency and their academic development in English. To make that claim a reality, however, an important pedagogical change is necessary. At present, instruction of bilingual students achieves considerably less than it could because monolingual instructional strategies are used rather than bilingual strategies that teach explicitly for transfer across languages. For example, most after-school or tutoring programs just assume that English should be the language of instruction and interaction. Similarly, in regular English-medium classrooms, little consideration is typically given to how students' L1 might be used as a resource for learning. Even in dual language and other bilingual or foreign language programs, current conventional wisdom dictates that the two languages of instruction be kept rigidly separate, resulting in cross-language transfer that is haphazard and inefficient.

In the following, I first outline the argument for using bilingual instructional strategies to teach bilingual students and then review some concrete examples of how these strategies might be implemented in the three contexts. The target group I am focusing on is the subset of heritage language speakers who are already relatively fluent in their

home language rather than those whose fluency in the heritage language is minimal. The essence of the proposal is that advocates for heritage language renewal should work with educators and heritage language communities both to highlight the value of heritage languages as resources for learning and to develop and disseminate a set of instructional strategies for incorporating heritage languages into mainstream educational contexts.

Overcoming the Prevalence of Monolingual Instructional Assumptions

Currently, in English-only mainstream classes, English as a second language (ESL) programs, second language (L2) immersion, and bilingual/dual language classes in both Canada and the United States, monolingual instructional assumptions predominate in the instruction of bilingual students. These monolingual instructional assumptions have minimal research basis. They include the following assumptions:

1. Instruction should be carried out exclusively in the target language without recourse to the students' L1; bilingual dictionary use is also discouraged.
2. Translation between L1 and L2 has no place in the teaching of language or literacy. Encouragement of translation in L2 teaching is viewed as a reversion to the discredited grammar/translation method; or in bilingual/immersion programs, use of translation is equated with the discredited concurrent translation method.
3. Within L2 immersion and bilingual/dual language programs, the two languages should be kept rigidly separate; they constitute "two solitudes."

When we free ourselves from these monolingual instructional assumptions, a wide variety of instructional opportunities arises for teaching bilingual students by means of bilingual instructional strategies that acknowledge the reality of cross-language transfer and strongly encourage students to engage in it.

Already, there exists extensive empirical evidence for interdependence across languages within bilingual programs and in language learning generally (for a review, see Cummins, 2001). Typically, within bilingual and L2 immersion programs, strong L1/L2 relationships are observed for literacy-related aspects of language. Students use their L1 conceptual knowledge to make sense of L2 input, and subsequently the L2 interacts with and exerts an influence on the L1

(Cashion & Eagan, 1990; Cook, 2003; Valdés, 2005). Lambert and Tucker (1972) observed that some students in the French immersion program they evaluated over the course of elementary school engaged in a form of contrastive linguistics where they compared aspects of French and English despite the fact that in this program (and in virtually all Canadian French immersion programs) the two languages were kept rigidly separate. If students in bilingual programs spontaneously focus on similarities and differences in their languages despite the lack of support for this strategy, then they are likely to benefit even more from systematic encouragement by the teacher to focus on language and develop their language awareness.

Accordingly, the next section sketches some concrete examples of bilingual instructional strategies that explicitly aim to raise language awareness and teach for transfer across languages.

Teaching for Cross-Linguistic Transfer

The use of bilingual instructional strategies not only enables students to bring their two languages into productive contact but also communicates to them that their L1 proficiency is an important accomplishment that is acknowledged and appreciated within the classroom. The following three bilingual strategies outlined are illustrative of many strategies that could be pursued in after-school programs, bilingual or dual language programs, as well as within monolingual instructional contexts: (a) systematic attention to cognate relationships across languages; (b) creation of student-authored dual language books by means of translation from the initial language of writing to the L2; other multimedia and multilingual projects can also be implemented (e.g., creation of iMovies, PowerPoint presentations, etc.); (c) sister class projects where students from different language backgrounds collaborate using two or more languages.

Cognate Relationships. Failure to draw students' attention to cognate relationships across languages is perhaps the most obvious limitation of monolingual instructional assumptions, whether in the regular English-medium classroom or in two-solitudes versions of bilingual or L2 immersion programs. The academic language of English is derived predominantly from Latin and Greek sources. As such, it has many cognate relationships with other Romance languages. Drawing students' attention to cognate relationships

and encouraging them to search their internal lexical database for similar meanings as they read is particularly useful in helping Spanish-speaking students transfer L1 knowledge to English. For example, if students come across the low-frequency word *encounter* in an English text they will soon connect it to *encontrar* which is the Spanish (high frequency) word for *meet* or *encounter.* The research evidence supports the effectiveness for L2 learning of drawing systematic attention to cognate relationships (e.g., Cunningham & Graham, 2000; Rodriguez, 2001; Treville, 1996)

Clearly, not all heritage languages have cognate relationships with English, but the vast majority of heritage language speakers in the United States are Spanish speakers, and thus this strategy can help these students develop their knowledge of L1 and English vocabulary at the same time. A teacher in the regular classroom does not have to know Spanish to implement this strategy because most of the English words derived from Latin and Greek are readily identifiable (Corson, 1997). In an after-school program, bilingual instructors or tutors from the community can systematically draw students' attention to cognate relationships between Spanish and English in the course of engagement in multimedia projects such as those considered in the next section.

Dual Language Books. The second bilingual instructional strategy, the creation of dual language books, has been successfully implemented in several projects carried out in the Toronto area. For example, the Dual Language Showcase project (http://thornwood.peelschools.org/Dual/) was carried out initially with Grades 1 and 2 bilingual students in a highly diverse school (more than 40 languages; see Chow & Cummins, 2003). Students created stories initially in English (the language of school instruction). They illustrated these stories and then worked with various resource people (parents, older students literate in the L1, some teachers who spoke a variety of students' languages) to translate these stories into their home languages. The stories were then word processed (or scanned in the case of some languages where fonts were not available), and the illustrations were scanned into the computer. The Dual Language Web site was then created, enabling students' dual language texts to be shared with relatives or friends in their countries of origin who had Internet access.

A number of similar projects can be viewed at the Multiliteracies project Web site housed at the University of British Columbia (http://www.multiliteracies.ca). In one such dual

language writing project (Cummins, Bismilla, Cohen, Giampapa, & Leoni, in press), students in Grades 5–8 who were receiving ESL support were asked to reflect on whether or not writing in both languages had assisted them in learning English. The responses of three of these students (with original spelling and punctuation) illustrate the cross-language facilitation that can occur when a student's L1 is legitimated in the mainstream classroom:

> When I am allowed to use Urdu in class it helps me because when I write in Urdu and then I look at Urdu words and English comes in my mind. So, its help me a lot. When I write in English, Urdu comes in my mind. When I read in English I say it in Urdu in my mind. When I read in Urdu I feel very comfortable because I can understand it.

> When I allowed to use Hebrew it helps me understend English I thinking in Hebrew and write in English. If I read in English I think in Hebrew and I understend more.

> When I am allowd to use Urdu inclass it helps me to reed and write English. When I have to learn new English word's I rember them faster if I study the words in Urdu. Like this [the student drew a chart entitled *New words* with *English, Urdu,* and *Picteur* along the top row. In the first column, under *English,* the words *Lungs, Kidneys,* and *heart* were entered; the second column contained the Urdu words, and the third column consisted of line drawings of these body parts].

A variation on this process has been implemented in a number of after-school programs. Culturally diverse and low-income students created movies, audio CDs, and Web pages to communicate the outcomes of their research or artistic endeavors that explored substantive topics of relevance to their lives (Durán & Durán, 2001; Hull & Schultz, 2001, 2002). In the context of after-school programs, there are few restrictions on using students' L1 for instructional purposes.

Students can also be encouraged to explore computer translation programs (e.g., Babel Fish or Google language tools) to develop both language awareness and editing skills. These programs are usually quite limited in the accuracy of their translation. However, this limitation provides students with the opportunity to work together (with input from the teacher) to edit the translation into appropriate and accurate language. For newly arrived students, writing in the L1 provides them with a means of expressing their intelligence, experiences, and imagination to both the teacher and their peers. The computer translation will usually be sufficiently comprehensible to permit teachers and peers to figure out the gist of what the newly arrived student has

written and to work together with him or her to create a dual language text or story.

Sister Class Projects. Students engage in technology-mediated sister class exchanges using the L1 and the L2 to create literature and art or to explore issues of social relevance to them and their communities (e.g., Social History of Our Community, Voices of our Elders, etc.), or both. These sister class exchanges can provide powerful motivation for students to engage in language learning or language maintenance activities, or both. In one project that linked students in Greece and Canada (Kourtis- Kazoullis, 2002; Skourtou, Kourtis-Kazoullis, & Cummins, in press), students completed a story begun by a very popular Greek children's writer and generated more than 80 versions of the story in Greek and English on the project Web site (see Brown, Cummins, & Sayers, in press, for many additional examples).

CONCLUSION

We normally think of *policy* as a set of mandates or actions prescribed by policy-makers. I have suggested that *policy* be conceived in much broader terms to include the underlying assumptions held by various actors who influence the opportunities made available to children to use and maintain their heritage languages and the attitudes that children develop in relation to the status of the language. These actors include community members and educators in both regular and after-school contexts. Currently, there is massive loss of national language resources because young children are given few opportunities to use and become literate in their heritage languages. Furthermore, there is minimal organized resistance to the negative and inaccurate messages children receive within the school regarding the status and utility of their heritage languages. Children understand very quickly that the school is an English-only zone and they often internalize ambivalence and even shame in relation to their linguistic and cultural heritage.

Those among us who advocate promotion of heritage language resources might do well to focus attention on changing the patterns of interaction and the messages children receive about the value and status of their heritage languages. Funding (e.g., from foundations rather than government) might be sought to create effective ways of communicating to heritage language communities the importance of the home language as a resource for learning and the opportunities (e.g., higher income) that accrue to those learn-

ers who become fluently biliterate. Strategies for reinforcing the heritage language in preschool and after-school programs could also be articulated in collaboration with community-based educators. Assumptions that exist within bilingual and dual language programs (such as the two solitudes assumption) could be revisited and critically examined. Finally, in the context of the push for ever higher test scores, the case can be made that bilingual instructional strategies have a place in the mainstream English-medium classroom. These strategies tap into students' preexisting knowledge and enable them to engage with literacy much more quickly and more effectively than strategies that ignore what students bring into the classroom. The scientific research on *How People Learn* (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000) suggests that this strategy use is a critical aspect of an effective learning environment.

This proposal for action aims to be provocative. It is an explicit challenge to all of us as applied linguists and language educators to confront and critically reexamine our own monolingual instructional assumptions. When they are interpreted as absolute principles, these assumptions are devoid of empirical support and are counterproductive in the context of heritage language policies and instructional practices. More important, heritage language resources will be consolidated and advanced when these monolingual instructional assumptions are qualified so that instructional spaces are opened up within both school and out-of-school contexts for teaching that actively promotes cross-lingual transfer and language awareness. The impact of these initiatives is likely to be as much affective as cognitive. Affirmation of students' home languages within the school and in after-school programs can play a crucial role in encouraging heritage language speakers to view their multilingual talents as a valued component of their identities.

NOTES

[1] The Ontario Heritage Languages Program provides funding to school systems for $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours per week of heritage-language instruction. School systems are mandated to implement a program in response to a request from community groups who can supply a minimum of 25 students interested in studying a particular language. Over the course of its almost 30 years of existence, annual enrolment has been consistently over 100,000 and typically about 60 different languages are taught (Cummins & Danesi, 1990).

Within the Canadian context, the term *heritage language* is still commonly used although, in 1994, the

Ontario government replaced it with *international language*, on the grounds that *heritage* connotes learning about past traditions rather than acquiring language skills that have significance for children's overall educational and personal development. Other terms used at different times and in different Canadian provinces to refer to international or heritage languages are *ethnic, minority, ancestral, third, modern*, and *non-official* languages. The term commonly used in Quebec is *langues d'origine*, although the term *langues patrimoniales* was introduced in 1993 when the federal government funded the Centre de Langues Patrimoniales in Montreal.

In contrast to the U.S. context, Canadian First Nations communities generally do not see their languages as *heritage languages* and prefer to use terms such as *indigenous* or *aboriginal languages*. French and English, the two official languages, are also not included within the scope of the term.

Within the Australian and British contexts, the term *community language* has been used. In her Introduction to the proceedings of the Binational Australian/U.S. conference, Hornberger (2005) used the composite term *heritage/community language education* explaining that "while scholars and educators in the USA had relatively recently turned to the term heritage language (HL) as a neutral and inclusive alternative to the terms minority, indigenous, immigrant, ethnic, second, or foreign language, Australian policy and practice had for at least a decade been using the term community language (CL) to refer to this same range of language resources in their national context" (p. 102).

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THE COMMENTARIES

More than a Silver Bullet: The Role of Chinese as a Heritage Language in the United States

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In his provocative yet practical analysis of the current state of the art (or rather the lack thereof) regarding the promotion of a national heritage language policy in the United States, Jim Cummins makes the poignantly accurate observation that "there is little immediate prospect for large-scale policy shifts with respect to national language resources" (p. 586). Various policy initiatives have funded foreign language teaching generously but there has been no coherent policy in relation to heritage languages. The sad irony is that the tremendous potential of heritage language communities as a precious national natural resource has been recognized for many years, at least by some of the more visionary members of our profession. With specific reference to the less commonly taught languages (LCTLs), Richard Brecht and the late Ron Walton (1994) characterized what they called the "domestic ethnic language preservation or enhancement sector" (p. 195)—that is, the heritage sector—as being "unique in that it possesses the potential to supply language capacity without instruction" (pp. 195–196). In those pre-9/11 years, the notion of national "language capacity" was defined by Brecht and Walton only in terms of the "ability to respond to constant or changing needs as defined earlier" (p. 193)—the list of needs being referred to containing nary a reference to national or international security.

However, as a recent series of reports and proposals has made abundantly clear, some depart-

ments and agencies within the U.S. Government are now recognizing the potential of the heritage sector to make important contributions to American national interests.

1. In the white paper originally produced in preparation for "The National Language Conference: A Call for Action," convened by the Department of Defense and the Center for the Advanced Study of Language in June of 2004, Action area number 1, "Develop Cross-Sector Language & Cultural Competency," called for government, academic, and private enterprises to "develop and implement both immediate and long-term programs to ... provide opportunities for individuals from our many ethnic heritage communities to enhance and make use of their heritage languages to their own and the Nation's benefit" (p. 6).

2. The Defense Language Transformation Roadmap, approved by former Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz in January of 2005, explicitly calls for the establishment of "guidelines for recruiting from heritage and U.S. populace with language capabilities" (p. 6) in support of Strategic Planning Goal 1, "Create Foundational Language and Regional Area Expertise" (p. 3).

Certainly no one would deny that Chinese is among the languages spoken in the United States for which there are significant heritage language capabilities. As reported in the 2000 United States Census, Chinese is the third most commonly spoken language in the United States, after English