Heritage Learners of Spanish: Self-Ratings of Oral and Writing Proficiency

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OVERVIEW

- Study of heritage learners’ self-ratings of proficiency
- Focus on Intermediate and Advanced heritage learners of Spanish
- Written and oral modalities
WARM-UP

- Do self-assessments inform placement for heritage learners in your program?

- What self-assessment tools yield the most reliable information?

- How do heritage learners’ self-assessments differ between the written and spoken language modalities?
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How accurate are heritage learners of Spanish at self-rating their proficiency in Spanish?

- How does accuracy vary...  
  - across proficiency levels?  
  - across language modalities?
Self-assessment is a common tool for placement of heritage learners

Interpretation of self-assessment crucial for accurate placement

Insight into learner attitudes and goals
OVERVIEW OF STUDY
Center for Integrated Language Communities (CILC) study

Aims:
- To provide recommendations for instructors teaching writing to heritage language learners, based on learner profiles
- To analyze the relationship between writing proficiency, self-ratings of proficiency, biographical characteristics, and educational experiences
PARTICIPANTS

- 98 heritage learners of Spanish

- Who is a heritage language learner?
  - Heritage language spoken in the home
  - Bilingual to some degree in English and heritage language
  - Engaged in heritage language instruction (Valdés 2000)
MATERIALS & PROCEDURES

- Biographical Questionnaire
- Self-ratings: Can-Do statements
- Writing Proficiency Test
- Oral Proficiency Interview
- Analysis of writing samples
| NL | I am able to write words and phrases. I can write lists and short notes. I can fill in information on simple forms and documents. |
| NM |

| NH | I have the ability to meet practical writing needs (i.e., I can write simple messages and letters, requests for information, and notes). I can ask and respond to simple questions in writing. I am able to communicate simple facts and ideas in a series of connected sentences on topics of personal interest. |
| IL | |
| IM |
### CAN-DO STATEMENTS: WRITING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IH AL AM</th>
<th>I can write routine informal and some formal correspondence, as well as narratives, descriptions, and summaries of a factual nature. I can narrate and describe using the major time frames of past, present and future. I can elaborate to provide clarity.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AH S</td>
<td>I am able to produce most kinds of formal and informal correspondence, in-depth summaries, reports and research papers on a variety of social, academic, and professional topics. I can write about abstract issues with virtually no linguistic errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL NM</td>
<td>I can only say a few words and phrases. It may be difficult to understand what I say in Spanish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NH IL IM</td>
<td>I can say enough to survive in a Spanish-speaking environment (i.e., order a meal, buy a train ticket, ask questions, deal with a simple social situation). A sympathetic listener will be able to understand what I say in Spanish.</td>
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Swender et al. (2014)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IH</th>
<th>AL</th>
<th>AM</th>
<th>CAN-DO STATEMENTS: SPEAKING</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>I can tell stories; explain situations; clarify miscommunications; and describe people, places, and things. I have enough language to make explanations even when there is an unexpected turn of events. Most native speakers of Spanish will understand what I say when I speak Spanish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AH</td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
<td>I can support opinions, deal with abstract issues, and speak hypothetically with virtually no errors in language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My ability in Spanish is equal to that of a highly articulate, educated native speaker. I am able to tailor my language to all audiences and speak with subtlety and nuance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RESULTS
TWO SELF-RATING MEASURES

- **Likert scale (1-5)**
  - **Writing**
    - n=96
    - median=3 “good”
  - **Speaking**
    - n=96
    - median=4 “very good”

- **Can-Do Statements**
  - **Writing**
    - n=97
    - median=3 (IH, AL, AM)
  - **Speaking**
    - n=20
    - median=4 (AH, S)
SELF-RATINGS: WRITING

Likert Writing
Can-Do Writing

NB: Can-Do Writing does not include Distinguished
TWO PROFICIENCY MEASURES

- **Writing Proficiency Test**
  - n=95
  - median=Advanced Low

- **Oral Proficiency Interview**
  - n=37
  - median=Advanced Mid
ANALYSIS
Can-Do measures
- Yield similar self-ratings to Likert scales (weak correlation due to low response rate)
- Facilitate reflection on learning objectives

Likert and Can-Do measures
- Writing: $r=0.57$
- Speaking: $r=0.38$
Accuracy of self-ratings varies by level and modality

Proficiency and Likert self-rating
- WPT and Likert: \( r=0.52 \)
- OPI and Likert: \( r=0.45 \)

Proficiency and Can-Do self-rating
- WPT and Can-Do: \( r=0.43 \)
- OPI and Can-Do: \( r=0.07 \)
RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MODALITIES

- WPT and OPI
  - r=0.52

- Likert self-rating
  - r=0.70

- Can-Do self-rating
  - r=0.44

- OPI > WPT

- Speaking self-rating > writing self-rating
Accuracy of self-ratings varies by preferred language

Writing and Speaking

- Learners who feel dominant in Spanish are more accurate self-rating their Spanish than learners who feel dominant in English (contra Gollan et al. 2015)
- Learners who feel equally comfortable in “Both” are the least accurate
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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Under</th>
<th>Accurate</th>
<th>Over</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NL</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LM</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
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# Self-Rating Accuracy: Speaking

<table>
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<th>Under</th>
<th>Accurate</th>
<th>Over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NL</strong></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NM</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IH</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IL</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IM</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SH</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*<em>S</em></td>
<td></td>
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RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MODALITIES

- Speaking > Writing
  - 80% of IH-AM over-rated *speaking* proficiency
  - 21% of IH-AM over-rated *writing* proficiency
  - 20% of IH-AM under-rated *writing* proficiency

- Typical heritage learner profile
  - Broader range of experiences and contexts in spoken modality than written modality
  - More confident speaking than writing
DISCUSSION
Accurate self-assessment of narration and description at Intermediate level

Tendency to over-rate ability to deal with abstract issues, hypothesize

Tendency to over-rate facility with formal and professional contexts

Tendency to over-rate accuracy
Self-assessment can inform placement

- Learners may over-estimate their speaking proficiency and under-estimate writing proficiency
- Self-assessment is one tool in a larger toolkit

Self-assessment can empower learners

- Can-Do statements help learners recognize specific strengths, weaknesses, and goals

How might you use this information in your context?
Test results influenced by testing context

- IH-AM learners may be able to access some Superior-level functions and contexts with preparation, time, and opportunity to revise

What are some strategies for implementing self-assessment as a tool for formative assessment
IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTRUCTION

- Identify and leverage the strengths HLLs bring to the classroom
- Use oral language skills to scaffold the development of next-level writing skills
- Provide rich input to develop weaker functions, contexts, and text types
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Center for Integrated Language Communities
Visit our booth (#1333) at ACTFL!
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