

Writing in Spanish and Writing in English: The bilingual proficiency range of heritage language learners

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Abbreviations			Intermediate Mid	IM	5	Advanced Mid	AM	8	Age of arrival	AoA
Novice High	NH	3	Intermediate High	IH	6	Advanced High	AH	9	Heritage language	HL
Intermediate Low	IL	4	Advanced Low	AL	7	Superior	Sup	10	Heritage language learner	HLL

Background

- Literacy does tend to be less-developed domain
- Researchers & educators assume (1) HL is always less proficient (2) heritage status causes the lower HL proficiency. **Are these always the case?**
- Mikulski & Elola (2013)
 - Similar revision behavior in both, suggesting cross-linguistic transfer
 - But no proficiency measure

Research Questions & Study

- What is the relationship between writing proficiency in English & Spanish in post-secondary Spanish HLLs?
 - Does proficiency in the majority language affect the HL?
 - How accurate are self-assessments of proficiency differences?
- We compared standardized writing proficiencies of both languages, expecting higher English, & significant differences**

Methods | Instruments | Subjects

- Assessment modeled after American Council on Teaching Foreign Languages Writing Proficiency Test
 - Span & Eng | Two certified ACTFL raters
- $n = 101$
 - Mean age = 21
 - AoA < 15
 - Enrolled in Spanish-for-HLLs courses | 2021–2022
 - 76% born in U.S. | 24% AoA = 2–15



RQ 1 | English higher, but not in all

Writing Proficiency Relationship	# of HLLs	% of total	Different by x sublevels
English higher	72	71%	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Equal	18	18%	n/a
Spanish higher	11	11%	1, 2
Total	101		

RQ 1 | English higher, but small amount

English Range IM (5)–Sup (10) Average = **7.73** = AL/AM (SD = .95)

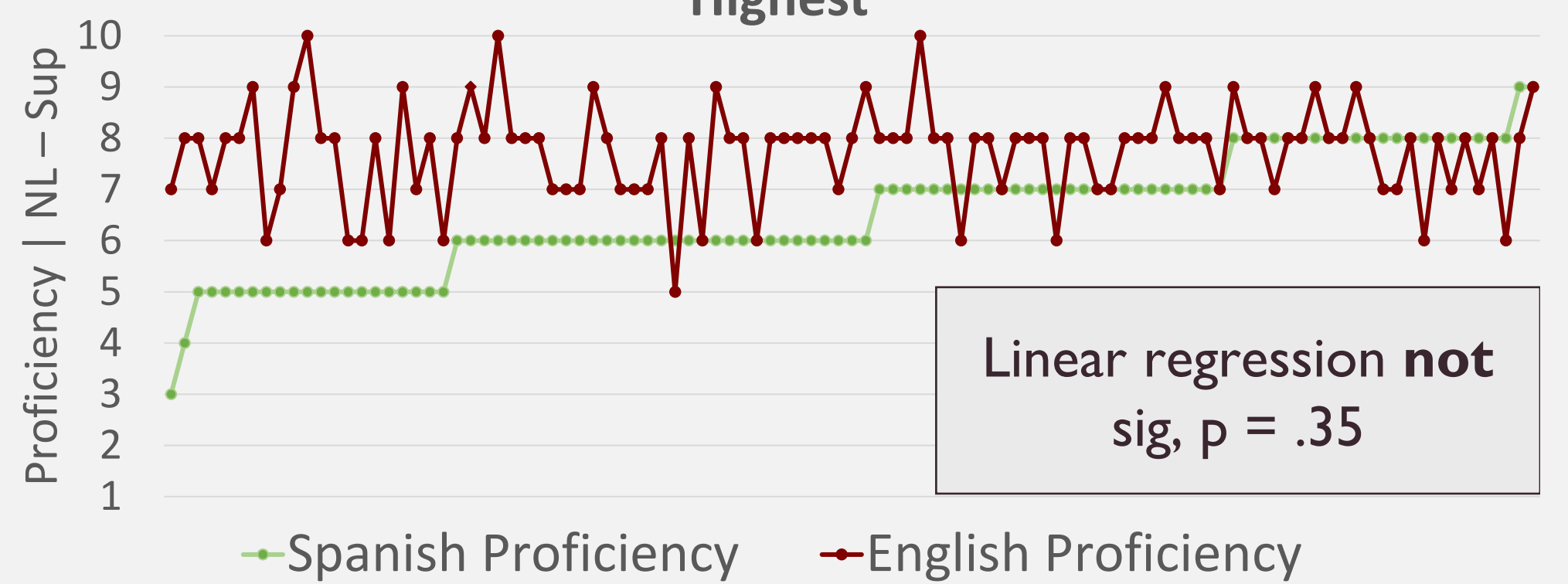
Spanish Range NH (3)–AH (9) Average = **6.50** = IH/AL (SD = 1.16)

- Average proficiency gap = 1.24
- Paired samples t-test: $t(100) = -8.71, p = .000$
- Higher English

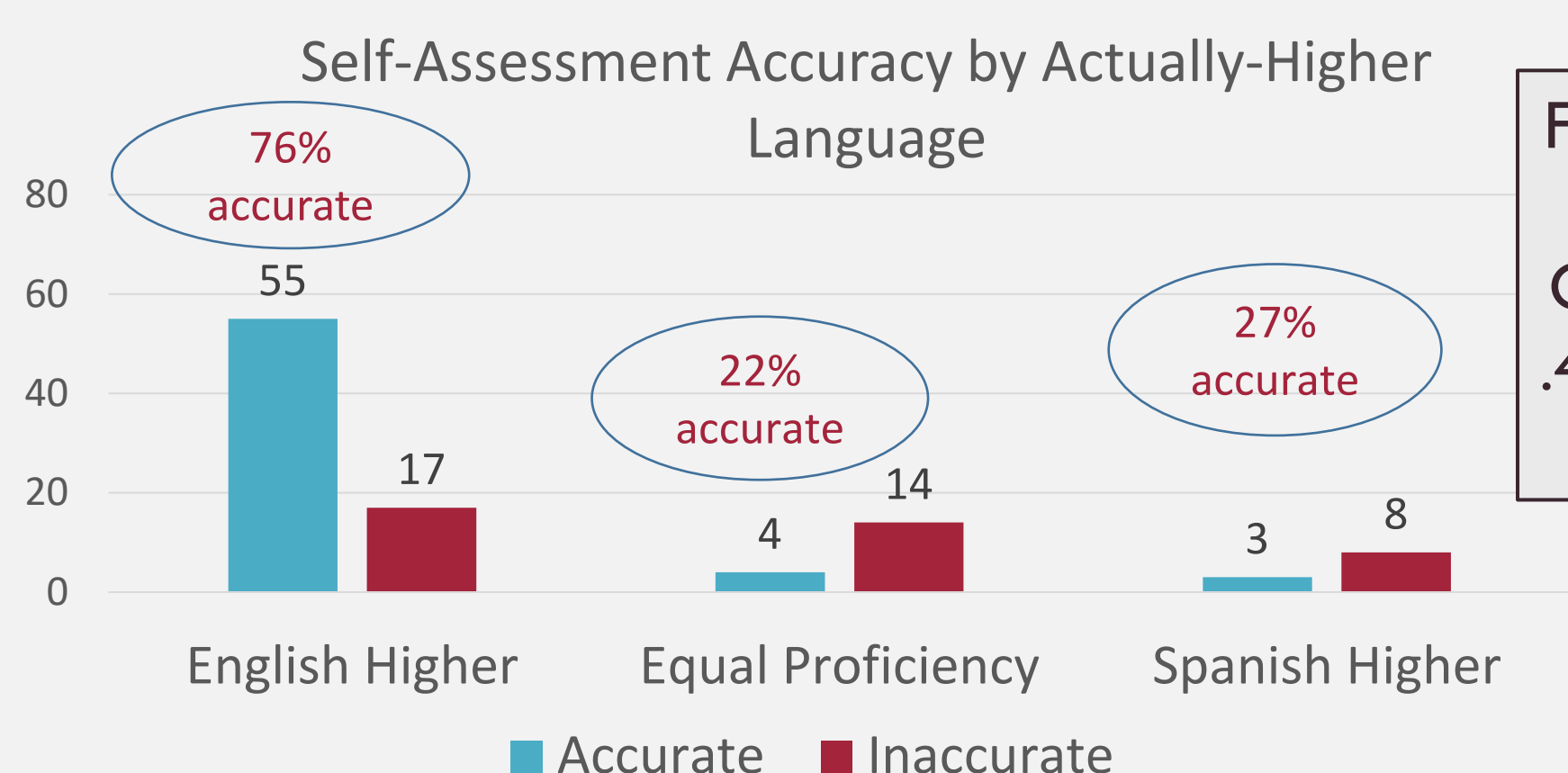
Cohen's D = 1.16, large effect size

RQ 2 | Lower Spanish is likely not global literacy

Each Proficiency Pair, Sorted by Spanish, Lowest to Highest



RQ 3 | Can-Do Statements (Naïve) of 4 major levels



Fisher's Exact $p = .000$
Cramér's V = .49, moderate effect size

Discussion

- Unexpectedly small **average** gap
 - Avoid assumptions about all HLLs
- Majority language influences HL **less** than expected
 - Perhaps global literacy less of a factor in HL proficiency
- Self-assessments accurate in about half subjects, more when English is actually higher
 - Perhaps influenced by language attitudes