

# Heritage language learners and Spanish for specific purposes: Bridging the gap through community service learning\*

*Aprendices de lengua heredada y español con fines específicos: cerrando la brecha mediante el aprendizaje servicio comunitario*

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## Abstract

The growth in the number of Spanish heritage language learners in languages for specific purposes classes has been accompanied by an increase in the number and types of community service learning programs in which these students can participate to better prepare them for future employment opportunities. In spite of the increase in the number of Spanish heritage language learners in the languages for specific purposes classroom, few studies have looked at these students in this setting and even fewer have looked at the role that community service learning can play in developing these learners' domain-specific abilities. Through an analysis of research in the areas of heritage language learners, Spanish for specific purposes, and community service learning, this article discusses strategies to effectively teach Spanish heritage language learners in language for specific purposes classes and to develop their language and cultural knowledge through community service learning. In addition, we address many of the challenges that arise when connecting Spanish heritage language learners with community partners as well as the obstacles to the integration of community service learning into the Spanish for specific purposes curriculum. The article concludes providing suggestions on how community service can be used to help Spanish heritage language learners not only see the benefits of language for specific purposes courses but also transfer their skills to other fields of study.

**Key Words:** Language for specific purposes, Spanish heritage learners, experiential learning, curriculum design, career preparation.

## Resumen

El crecimiento en los aprendices de español como lengua de herencia en clases para fines específicos también ha sido acompañado por un aumento en el número y los tipos de programas de aprendizaje-servicio comunitario en los que estos estudiantes pueden participar para prepararse mejor con miras a futuras oportunidades. A pesar del aumento en el número de aprendices de español como lengua de herencia en cursos para fines específicos, pocos estudios han analizado el impacto de este enfoque en su aprendizaje y, aún menos, han examinado el papel que el aprendizaje-servicio comunitario puede desempeñar en el desarrollo de las habilidades profesionales de estos estudiantes en determinados campos. A través de un análisis de la investigación en las áreas de los aprendices de español como lengua de herencia, el español con fines específicos y el aprendizaje-servicio comunitario, este artículo discute estrategias para enseñar eficazmente a los aprendices de español como lengua de herencia en clases para fines específicos y desarrollar su conocimiento del idioma y la cultura a través del aprendizaje-servicio comunitario. Además, abordamos algunos de los desafíos que surgen al conectar a los aprendices de español como lengua de herencia con los socios comunitarios, así como los desafíos para integrar el aprendizaje-servicio comunitario en el currículo del aula del español con fines específicos. El artículo concluye proporcionando sugerencias sobre cómo el servicio comunitario se puede utilizar para ayudar a los aprendices de español como lengua de herencia a ver no solo los beneficios de los cursos con fines específicos, sino también a transferir sus habilidades a otras áreas de estudio.

**Palabras Clave:** Lenguas con fines específicos, aprendices de español como lengua de herencia, la educación basada en la experiencia, diseño curricular, formación profesional.

## INTRODUCTION

The growth in the Hispanic population has accounted for half of the overall population growth in the United States since 2000 (Flores, 2017). Currently Hispanics make up over 18% of the overall population in the US and account for over 25% of the population in public schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Though Hispanics are enrolling at increasing levels in college, the number of these students who graduate with a four-year degree is still relatively small, lagging behind whites as well as other minority groups. Krogstad (2016) found that only 15% of Hispanics ages 25 to 29 had a bachelor's degree or higher in 2014, citing three main reasons. First, Hispanics were less likely to enroll in four-year colleges with almost half attending two-year colleges. Second, Hispanics were less likely than other groups to attend an "academically selective college" (para. 6) and, third, Hispanics were less likely to be enrolled full-time due to work demands that delay their graduation or take them away from higher education entirely. The question then arises as to what can be done to encourage Hispanics not only to stay in school but also to graduate with a degree in their chosen field.

Three curricular innovations that have arisen in many post-secondary language programs may positively impact Hispanic students' retention and contribute to their

self-efficacy and employment potential, while a fourth could be truly transformative. The first innovation pertains to the creation of pedagogically sound heritage language courses that allow students with a connection to the Spanish language to expand their linguistic abilities in the language of their socio-cultural heritage, regardless of the strength of that connection. Second, the widespread penetration of language for specific purposes (LSP) courses into Spanish curricula offers students concrete applications for their linguistic skills while also transmitting crucial topical knowledge. The third innovation, community service learning, is a teaching method not unique to language pedagogy that makes the community the classroom and meaningful tasks completed with the community the curriculum. The fourth, and most powerful, innovation would simply be the seamless integration of the three aforementioned approaches either in the same program or, ideally, in the same course. Indeed, the marriage of heritage language education, LSP, and community service learning offers a powerful solution for achieving greater engagement by Spanish-speaking Hispanics in higher education and, more importantly, greater academic and professional empowerment.

In this article, we begin by defining key terms and concepts before briefly outlining the development of each respective field. After orienting the reader to the individual merits of each approach to Spanish language education, we spend the majority of the article closely analyzing the potential contributions and synergies that may result when combined. The linguistic, social, cultural, and professional benefits that may accrue for students as a result of the harmonious marriage of these pedagogical approaches are numerous, but so too are the potential pitfalls. Indeed, given the socio-cultural and socio-linguistic profile of many Spanish heritage learners, and the guiding principles behind language for specific purposes and community service learning, there is truly untapped potential as we argue below.

## **1. Background**

### ***1.1. Spanish heritage language learners***

While the aforementioned demographic statistics represent all individuals who identify ethnically as Hispanic, regardless of linguistic competence, a large number of these individuals would be defined as Spanish heritage language learners (SHLs) since many have some degree of proficiency in Spanish, a cultural connection to the language, or both. Students of this socio-linguistic profile are increasingly found in the LSP classroom and in order to better address their needs, it is important to understand who these learners are. Spanish heritage language learners can be identified in different ways according to the context in which they were raised and how they use Spanish. Indeed, SHLs are a very diverse group and equally diverse are the definitions used to describe them. The term heritage learner has been defined as an individual:

“who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or merely understands the heritage language, and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language” (Valdés, 2000: 1).

More recently, heritage learners of all languages have been defined as “heritage speakers are bilingual native speakers of their heritage language, except that the degree of ultimate attainment in the heritage language is variable” (Montrul, 2016: 249). Montrul, like Valdés, focuses on the language abilities of the students as a principal component of the definition. However, Fishman (2001) expands this definition beyond the scope of linguistic proficiency to include passive language skills as well as personal and familial connections to the culture. For Fishman, heritage languages present two main characteristics in the United States context: (1) they are those other than English, and (2) they are languages that “have a particular family relevance to the learners” (Fishman, 2001: 81). Given the increasing numbers of SHLs in the university setting, research has been forthcoming regarding how to best help these learners improve their language skills as well as how to better connect them with local Spanish-speaking cultures and communities. Beaudrie, Ducar and Relaño-Pastor (2009) surveyed SHLs who felt strongly that “SHL classes should strengthen students’ connections with the surrounding Spanish speaking community, as an integral part of their cultural identity process, by encouraging cultural interactions as a standard part of the SHL curriculum” (Beaudrie et al., 2009: 170). Too often university students are not involved in the local community regardless of whether they consider it their own or not. One way to engage SHLs is by increasing their enrollment in LSP courses where they can use their bilingual abilities to increase their marketability and contribute to the community in which they currently reside and other communities where they will reside in the future.

### ***1.2. Language for specific purposes***

For centuries, traditional approaches to the study of language eschewed practical, communicative, and vocation-oriented curricula considering them intellectually inferior and banal. To engage with the great literary masterpieces of a language and its culture through translation and in-depth grammatical analysis was ostensibly worthier of formal study than acquiring functional communicative ability in the language. Such an approach aligned well with the culture of formal academic studies undertaken at universities during the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and even 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, as Bok (2006) noted in his assessment of the state of higher education at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, higher education has undergone a dramatic transformation over the last several decades, particularly undergraduate education. Bok documents the transition of the typical collegiate program of study from one based in the liberal arts and sciences to one focused on future employment and earning potential, pointing to student demand as a driving force behind the change:

“The other reason for the growth of vocational majors is the marked increase in the number of students who look upon making money and succeeding in one’s career as primary motivations for going to college. Since 1970, the percentage of freshmen who rate ‘being very well off financially’ as an ‘essential’ or ‘very important’ goal has risen from 36.2 to 73.6 percent, while the percentage who attach similar importance to ‘acquiring a meaningful philosophy of life’ has fallen from 79 to 39.6 percent.” (Bok, 2006: 26)

As the nature of higher education and its primary goals evolved during mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century, so too did the teaching and learning of foreign, or second, languages (hereafter L2 teaching) (Kramersch, 1989). During that same period, the field of L2 teaching was undergoing tremendous changes from a pedagogical and curricular standpoint. Learners increasingly sought after practical communicative skills that would facilitate interpersonal encounters. Novel methods appeared on the educational horizon with their advocates making sweeping claims regarding their effectiveness. Curriculum designers began introducing into their programs practical, communication-oriented courses (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

At the close of WWII, it became apparent that English would soon become an international lingua franca as the United States’ status as a social, economic, and political superpower was all but assured. Beltrán (2004) traces the beginnings of LSP to this post-war period when socio-economic and socio-political conditions allowed for advances in science and technology and, as a result, increased international trade, information dissemination, and cross-linguistic and cross-cultural contact. De Tomás Puch (2004) concurs, noting that innovations in electronic communication have increased contact between professionals from different countries and cultures and has resulted in L2 students with expectations and goals very different from years past (Kramersch, 1989). Similarly, the appearance of and findings from several subfields in linguistics, namely applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics, created fertile ground for the development of LSP.

As interest in teaching language learners the discourse of particular domains gained momentum, it became apparent that the creation of pedagogical materials would need to be grounded in research. As early as 1964, Halliday, Strevens and McIntosh called for research that would provide an empirical basis for the language presented in pedagogical materials targeting language learners seeking to improve their mastery of English in professional contexts. Rather than assuming that one language instructor’s exposure to and experience with a particular domain is representative of that discourse community, scholars sought to consolidate the field and imbue it with sufficient rigor and an autonomous intellectual identity.

Crucial to the establishment of any scholarly field is a coherent definition of the field. LSP has been defined by many applied linguists, but, as Brown and Thompson

(2018) observe, most definitions seem to have the following in common: (1) They draw a contrast between LSP and traditional L2 pedagogy, indicating not just a difference in content but pedagogical approach and fundamental understandings of best practices, and (2) they prioritize the identification of unique discursive, linguistic, cultural, and communicative characteristics unique to a particular topical domain. One of the most prominent scholars in the field of LSP offers the following definition:

“Specific purposes teaching refers to a distinctive approach to language education based on identification of the specific language features, discourse practices, and communicative skills of target groups, and on teaching practices that recognize the particular subject matter needs and expertise of learners.” (Hyland, 2009: 201)

LSP courses cover a wide range of subjects in addition to medicine and business. In 1990, Grosse and Voght designed and administered a survey to ascertain the vitality of LSP in the academy. Their original instrument contained the following six areas for identifying LSP courses: business, medicine, law, public programs, technology and other. Long and Uscinski (2012) used Grosse and Voght’s original study but added four new areas to the original six: education, nursing, translation, and engineering. In spite of the added breadth of the second version of the survey, these 10 categories were apparently insufficient. The second most used category on the 2011 survey was ‘other’, with nearly a quarter of courses (21%) falling under that category showing the breadth of the types of LSP courses that are offered at the post-secondary level.

A fundamental issue in LSP education that must be adequately addressed to achieve curricular coherence is what Doyle calls a “tripartite integrated curricular structure” (Doyle, 2012: 108). Unlike courses in language, linguistics, or literature, LSP courses must find a balance between focusing instruction on topical knowledge--which may be quite technical--content-specific linguistic resources unique to the field, and cultural norms adhered to by a particular discourse community. Many of the curricular and programmatic difficulties, especially the identification of competent staff and the seamless integration into departmental/programmatic intellectual culture, derive from the ‘tripartite’ nature of LSP, regardless of the department or program offering the courses. These considerations come in addition to the obstacles presented by many students’ deficits in overall language proficiency; those who undertake LSP study without a solid foundation in the L2.

### *1.2.1. Spanish for specific purposes*

Though LSP courses in English are by far the most numerous, the number of non-English for specific purposes (non-ESP) courses continues to grow, particularly those offered in Spanish. Long and Uscinski (2012) found that the most commonly taught non-English course was business Spanish, representing 43% of all non-ESP courses. Courses in business Spanish and medical Spanish continue to dominate the Spanish

for specific purposes (SSP) curricular landscape though Long and Uscinski highlighted in their article such novel courses as ‘Spanish for hotel, tourism and restaurant management’ and ‘Spanish for criminal justice’. Our analysis (Brown & Thompson, 2018) of select universities’ undergraduate offerings in SSP demonstrated nearly an 8-fold increase from an average of four in 1970-71 to 30 in 2015-16.

Though the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP) published a volume dedicated to SSP as early as 1945 (Grattan Doyle, 1945), it was not until the late 70’s that institutions of higher education began to systematically incorporate non-ESP into their programs and curricula. Eastern Michigan University (EMU) was one of the first institutions to engage in non-ESP curriculum development after establishing its Language and International Trade Program in 1979. EMU also hosted an annual conference focused on improving language teachers’ familiarity with international business and the professions (Fryer, 2012). Following these pioneering efforts by EMU, serious development of non-ESP courses blossomed. The creation of Centers for International Business Education and Research (CIBERs) that are federally funded and attached to institutions of higher education represents the most obvious example of the many curricular and programmatic initiatives that surfaced to support non-ESP. (See Fryer, 2012 for an extensive discussion of these and other initiatives.)

As the second unofficial national language in the United States (Alonso, 2007; Macías 2014; Brown & Thompson, 2018), it comes as no surprise that SSP has grown significantly over the last several decades, beginning with the publication of a Spanish-language journal dedicated to LSP in 1996, *Revista Ibérica*: “is a scientific journal ... that accepts submissions related to topics within the field of language for specific purposes”. Soon thereafter Fryer and Guntermann (1998) published a book-length treatment of SSP with AATSP entitled *Spanish and Portuguese for Business and the Professions*. These publications along with the appearance of academic programs of study such as majors, minors, and certificates explicitly targeting students enrolled in Spanish for specific purposes courses all attest to the deep penetration of SSP in contemporary post-secondary curricula.

Yet in spite of the apparent ascent of SSP in the academy, seamless integration into post-secondary Spanish programs remains an obstacle for a variety of reasons. Lafford, Abbott and Lear (2014) conclude that LSP “is a square peg that we are trying to fit into the round hole of traditional university language curricula (language and linguistics)” (Lafford et al., 2014: 98). Brown and Thompson (2018) identify three primary challenges going forward for SSP in the American post-secondary context: (1) the diverse nature of SSP students, their profile, and their needs, (2) the tri-partite structure of LSP courses mentioned previously that requires balancing topical knowledge, linguistic skills, and domain-specific cultural mores, and (3) the transformation of institutional cultures from those that are faculty-centered and

resistant to change to those that are student-centered and embrace curricular innovation. In essence, what we have argued is that many Spanish departments are ill-prepared to integrate meaningfully SSP into current curricular structures especially if one takes into account the growing number of heritage speakers of Spanish found at all levels of post-secondary institutions. If Spanish departments have struggled to develop SSP courses and integrate them into the curriculum, how much more of a challenge will this be while trying to serve a SHL population that has unique talents and needs?

### *1.2.2. Spanish heritage language learners, Spanish for specific purposes, and community service learning*

One of the areas of struggle we identified above was the diverse nature of SSP students. For all but the strongest SSP programs, many post-secondary SSP courses pull from a diverse population of students representing a variety of proficiency levels, academic programs, professional goals, and ethno-/socio-linguistic identities. Quite ironically, student diversity, particularly in the case of SHLs, can lead to more meaningful and transformative experiences when accounted for prudently. In spite of the many administrative and programmatic struggles that undermine effective and systematic implementation into post-secondary Spanish curricula as identified by Lafford et al. (2014) and Brown and Thompson (2018), SSP may function as a conduit to greater engagement among SHLs at post-secondary institutions. When SSP is deployed primarily via community service learning (CSL) the potential for learning of all types to take place is maximized. In this section, we begin by reviewing research exploring the connections between SHLs, SSP, and CSL. Following this discussion, we explore concrete ways in which CSL can facilitate the achievement of many of the objectives targeted by SSP, as well as others.

Dewey (1938) and his revolutionary ideas regarding experiential education from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century rather recently found expression in L2 learning and teaching vis-à-vis the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015) (formerly the Standards for Foreign Language Learning, 1996). For generations, foreign language teachers have struggled to help students make connections between their classroom language learning and the real world. Of the now widely known 5 Cs that constitute the ‘Standards’, two have particular relevance for the present discussion: ‘Connections’ and ‘Communities’. ‘Connections’ encourages students to “connect with other disciplines and acquire information and diverse perspectives in order to use the language to function in academic and career-related situations”. Similarly, ‘Communities’ endeavors to expand L2 language learning and use beyond the walls of the classroom by empowering students to “communicate and interact with cultural competence in order to participate in multilingual

communities at home and around the world” (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2018).

The 5 Cs seemed to trigger increased interest in not only experiential learning among L2 educators, but more specifically CSL (Lear & Abbott, 2008). As Brown and Purmensity (2014) point out “the benefits of service-learning for language students are quite intuitive given its experiential, goal-oriented, communicative, and interpersonal nature” (Brown & Purmensity, 2014: 78). CSL injected into language learning a degree of motivation and immediacy that was nearly impossible to achieve in the classroom as students completed tasks which, however contextualized and meaningful, did not begin to approximate a real-world encounter. CSL has been found to help universities meet many of their overarching goals:

“Universities embrace service-learning for the promises it makes: to instill democratic principles, to foster global citizenship, and to connect the ivory tower of the university with real-world concerns. In a culture obsessed with practical results and models of value, where universities are required to document and assess outcomes in quantifiable ways, Spanish language teachers should embrace the pedagogy of service-learning as an effective way to meet these new demands while still preserving the dignity and spirit of a liberal arts education and providing excellent disciplinary instruction in Spanish.” (Carney, 2013: 234)

One American student from Brown and Purmensity’s study who completed an international service-learning project in Ecuador expressed the sentiment this way:

“It wasn’t a situation where I could just give up and use English if something was too difficult to understand. I really had to keep working at it and seeking different angles to approach something until the patient and I could finally understand each other. It may have taken a while in some cases but when that “ah-ha” moment of realizing we both understood came, it was such a great feeling.” (Brown & Purmensity, 2014: 87)

With such an effective tool at the disposition of L2 educators, particularly Spanish educators in the United States, it came as no surprise that scholars of language teaching began taking a much closer look at the potential of CSL. Thompson (2012) found that both SHLs and second language learners benefitted from CSL not only in their linguistic knowledge but also in their ability to learn about culture and course content through their diverse CSL experiences. He found that SHLs possess a unique set of skills that can be used to benefit the learner as well as the community. In a separate paper that provided further analysis of the impact of CSL on SHLs, Thompson (2015b) found that the skills and experiences possessed by these learners made them exceedingly valuable to the community organizations that they were serving. The community organizations found that the quality of the work of the SHLs surpassed that of their highly proficient second language counterparts due in large part

to their knowledge of Hispanic culture(s). Interestingly, Thompson (2015a) also found that in spite of the SHLs' knowledge of Hispanic culture(s), they also reported this as one of the areas where they experienced the most growth. When asked if they had interacted with 'people from different social, economic, or ethnic backgrounds', the vast majority of the SHLs agreed or strongly agreed with this in spite of the fact that many of the SHLs were participating in CSL in the communities in which they had been raised. The 'difference' that SHLs perceived between themselves and those whom they served may have been socio-economic rather than ethnic given their status as university students, which for many working class Hispanics indexes privilege. The growth in CSL in L2 language courses, with both SHLs and second language learners, has led to the development of Spanish textbooks designed specifically on the foundation of CSL pedagogy (Abbott, 2010).

As CSL rose to prominence in the field of L2 pedagogy and as the Standards for Foreign Language Learning were being written, increasing attention was also being paid to the needs and skills of SHLs across the country. The field of heritage language pedagogy had existed for many years prior to the publication of the first version of the standards in 1996, but scholarly research in the area proliferated in the late 1990s and 2000s (Beaudrie, 2012; Fairclough, 2015; Lynch, 2008; Valdés, 2000). Not surprisingly, concomitant increases in SHL textbooks accompanied the surge in research. Researchers uncovered what any perceptive Spanish language educator had surmised previously: SHLs have qualitatively different needs than traditional monolingual Spanish students due to their unique social, cultural, psycholinguistic, and ethnolinguistic identity. Given SHLs socio-cultural and socio-linguistic connections to Spanish, effective approaches to language education with these students must take into account such essential notions as standard language ideology, critical language awareness, dialectal variation, and bilingualism/biculturalism. In other words, for many of these students, Spanish is not solely a linguistic code used to transmit neutral messages for informational-cognitive purposes, but rather is a marker of in-group identity fulfilling a psychosocial function. Languages are not used in a socio-cultural and socio-political vacuum in society, especially not Spanish in the United States, and SHLs must understand this fully.

Indeed, these co-existing trends in language education, namely, the increase in SHLs and corresponding recognition of their unique needs, the need for domain-specific language education in the form of LSP, and the contemporary emphasis on experiential, community-based service learning led many scholars and language educators to a rather obvious conclusion: SSP for SHLs deployed via community service learning had untapped potential and could be a powerful agent for change. The potential for learning transcended language and could result in not only positive linguistic outcomes, but intrapersonal, political, and socio-cultural ones as well. Many applied linguists have closely analyzed the interface between two of the three elements

(i.e., SHLs, SSP, and CSL), but to our knowledge there exists scant research that explores the confluence of all three. The need to develop connections between these three areas has created a curricular gap that is explored in the next section.

## **2. Curricular implications for bridging the gap**

In a recent conference presentation, Martínez (2018) noted that though heritage language education and LSP developed in earnest during the 1970's, they have followed quite distinct paths. Heritage language curricula were the domain of Spanish departments that sought to expose SHLs to advanced language study while LSP was limited to ESL programs targeting students in professional programs or those focused on science and technology. Traditionally, heritage language programs pursued the development of multiple literacies among a population with limited exposure to and experience with formal, written Spanish. The curricula developed within the heritage language tradition focused on how language learning could facilitate SHLs social and cultural integration into additional speech communities, primarily those using formal registers of language. In contrast, LSP appeared to adopt a more instrumental stance, focusing on improving oral skills and technical writing ability. However, Martínez is quick to point out that these assumptions are being questioned by scholars such as Magaña (2015) who asks, "Are we preparing our students for their own needs and goals, and for the needs of local communities? How are our courses informed by the trajectories that our heritage language students take once they earn their degrees and enter the workforce?" (Magaña, 2015: 378).

Martínez (2018) problematizes the way in which LSP expanded from English to Spanish, particularly for law enforcement officials, health care professionals, and labor supervisors whose language instruction tends to center on useful commands. In Martínez's view, 'command' Spanish approaches:

"Highlight assumptions and power differentials within professional practice that have gone uncontested in Spanish for the professions ... [and] discursively situates the professional in a position of authority requiring the giving of orders and assumes that this is the most salient function of the language for the learner. At the same [sic], command Spanish constructs Spanish speakers as docile bodies waiting to receive such commands." (Martínez, 2018, slide 14)

Pennycook (1997) has referred to such demeaning approaches to LSP resulting from hyper-pragmatic needs analyses as 'vulgar pragmatism'.

Martínez (2018) argues that at the heart of SSP for SHLs is the notion of social capital. The acquisition of appropriate language to be deployed while executing professional skills goes much beyond language and serves to establish crucial social networks among professional communities. Social capital increases for an individual

and the society of which she is a part as relationships are strengthened, all of which is mediated by language.

As the title of this article indicates, in many ways SHLs confront a gap between their varieties of Spanish and their ability to be successful in LSP courses. This gap limits their ability to develop the social capital mentioned by Martínez, which is key to maximizing the benefits of CSL and SSP. In this section, we discuss ways in which these students can maximally leverage their socio- and ethno-linguistic resources in local communities to successfully acquire the needed content-specific linguistic and cultural knowledge reflective of LSP education. Though we realize our list is not exhaustive, we have identified four areas where SHLs can help bridge the curricular divide through community service learning.

First, the ethno-linguistic identity of SHLs helps them to connect with the community members through their shared culture and the emic perspective it provides them. In spite of their status as university students, which some community members may perceive as a sign of privilege, many of the students share similar Spanish-based names, ethnic and racial profiles, and home-based cultural experiences. As such, SHLs are in an ideal position to gain the confidence and trust of the Spanish-speaking communities they serve for they represent what is familiar. For example, a Mexican-American student who describes, even in less than perfect Spanish, her *abuela's* tamales served at her cousin's *quinceañera* would seem to have a clear advantage in establishing close meaningful interpersonal connections over an Anglo-American student describing the tamales of her Hispanic friend's *abuela*.

Regardless of the SSP course in which they are fulfilling the CSL requirement, SHLs may be better able to understand not only the cultural make-up of the community, but also their specific needs, and do so from an insider's perspective (Pak, 2018). Thompson (2015b) found that SHLs were better able to relate to Hispanic community members even if they were from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds given the fact that the students were of Hispanic origin thus helping the community members to be more at ease with them—as mentioned above. Pak (2018) states:

“By working with local Hispanic communities, SL (service learning) directs attention to the assets of the linguistic and cultural heritages of Latino students. Students critically examine issues that affect U.S. Latinos while supporting local Spanish-speaking community members” (Pak, 2018: 79).

Undoubtedly, there are myriad and diverse cultural manifestations among Hispanic and *Latin@* cultures, yet there is much to be said about the facilitative effect of ethno-linguistic similarities in the CSL context.

Second, through their involvement in CSL, SHLs can increase their critical language awareness. Courses that combine CSL with SSP offer the chance for SHLs to develop greater awareness when the CSL is based on critical language awareness (CLA) pedagogies. These pedagogies encourage students to see how languages are invariably imbedded in and at the mercy of larger socio-political and socio-cultural forces. They challenge students to see how power is brokered through language, how language can be racialized, and how speech communities can be discriminated against for their language. Leeman (2018) contends that CLA pedagogies can be used “to promote students’ understanding of the social, political and ideological dimensions of language as a means to promote students’ agency in making linguistic choices with the broader goal of challenging linguistic subordination and promoting social justice both inside and outside the school setting” (Leeman, 2018: 345-346). Many SHLs are speakers of non-standard varieties of the language and have experienced first-hand linguistic prejudice without fully understanding many of the deleterious ideologies and forces that undergird such biases. Their work with other community members can help them to understand how language varies across communities and why the label ‘standard dialect’ is a social construct not a linguistic or scientific one. As they understand this, students are better positioned to comprehend the social and political significance of terms such as ‘right’, ‘wrong’, ‘good Spanish’, ‘bad Spanish’. Further research found that SHLs involved in CSL using medical Spanish “developed an enhanced sense of respect for local varieties of the language” (Lowther-Pereira, 2015: 184).

While many SHLs are quite competent with excellent linguistic skills and cultural knowledge, many are still very insecure about their language skills especially having often been criticized by native speakers of Spanish. Pak (2018) notes:

“Despite this linguistic and cultural advantage, many heritage students experience linguistic insecurities in the classroom. They come into Spanish classrooms with limited exposure to the standard varieties of Spanish, which are viewed as being more prestigious in academic settings than the varieties they have learned in informal, familial, and bilingual settings.” (Pak, 2018: 78)

While many language programs work with SHLs to help them develop a more formal variety of Spanish, often at the expense of the home dialect, their interactions with community members helps them to see the variety of language that is used within different linguistic communities. Even those whose variety is different from the community members they serve can benefit from a contrastive analysis and critical reflection on their language skills helping them to appreciate differences between the community partners. Leeman (2005) summarizes the need to reflect on language varieties and dialects by exploring:

“(a) the relationship between power and language and the sociopolitical reasons that certain language varieties and practices are frequently constructed as inferior or unacceptable, (b) the ways in which these constructions are propagated, and (c) the consequences for speakers of varieties negatively constructed” (Leeman, 2005: 42).

SSP classes can assist students in preparing them to be more observant of the language used in the local community. These courses can incorporate sociolinguistic elements into the curriculum “to help students develop an understanding of how language and linguistic variation work, not just at the formal (i.e., linguistic) level but also with regard to social, political and aesthetic concerns” (Leeman, 2018: 351). Leeman continues recommending the use of sociolinguistics as a way to empower students and force them to begin to question “common assumptions” about languages and language varieties and “equip students to challenge the status quo” (Leeman, 2018: 353). Martínez (2003) frames the goal of critical language awareness as one that empowers students to make informed linguistic choices. He provides this effective example:

“If our students walk into the class saying *baiga* and walk out saying *baya*, there has been, in my estimation, no value added. However, if they walk in saying *baiga* and walk out saying either *baya* or *baiga* and having the ability to defend their use of *baiga* if and when they see fit, then there has been value added.” (Martínez, 2003: 10)

As SHLs study in the SSP classroom, instructors can help them make informed choices regarding their use of different styles of speech and their involvement in CSL can provide them with opportunities to use the language in a more informed way.

Third, domain-specific language preparation helps SHLs to focus on a specific professional context and its accompanying disciplinary content and vernacular, so they are able to speak the language of that specific field. Further research asserts that the confluence of CSL and SSP classes benefits students by helping them to “acquire specialized vocabulary and develop communicative strategies in their field” (Lowther-Pereira, 2015: 164). Lowther-Pereira (2015) notes that SHLs involvement in CSL through a series of medical SSP courses helped these students to recognize the numbers of Spanish speakers in the local community while improving their language skills. She found that students not only became more committed to improving their language skills through CSL but working in different clinics helped them to see the vast numbers of Spanish speakers who were served by these organizations. She goes on further to conclude from student surveys and her own observations that heritage language student’s involvement in CSL as part of their medical Spanish classes introduced them to the value of their home language variety in different professional situations. The fact that the SHLs in her study were neither cognizant of the need for individuals to help within the community nor of the large numbers of Spanish

speakers who needed services from the clinic highlights the potential benefit to SHLs of being involved in CSL.

Simply recognizing the numbers of Spanish speakers in the community and the needs of these speakers can serve as motivation within the SSP classroom. For example, SHLs enrolled in Spanish translation courses can greatly benefit from the real-world application of the skills being acquired as well as address the growing need for translation and interpretation services within the local community. Lizardi-Rivera (1999) states that CSL benefits language students because it allows students to have hands-on experiences. Through CSL, language students are able to take on challenging tasks in different disciplines and work through them to develop real world artifacts. Pacheco Aguilar (2016) expands on this argument by stating that CSL allows students a certain degree of autonomy in preparing them for their given profession. He asserts that through CSL “students can be expected to take control of and responsibility for their own learning process and can also have an influence on social and political forces in their educational environment” (Pacheco Aguilar, 2016: 13).

Finally, SHLs can learn appropriate role definition through community service learning. Lowther-Pereira (2015) declares:

“Critical stances to SHL instruction acknowledge the dynamic interplay between language, power, identity and ideology and aim to develop critical language awareness among students in which students gain an understanding of social hierarchies and language subordination” (Lowther-Pereira, 2015: 158).

Much care must be given during CSL so that an equal power relationship is maintained throughout the process whereby those being served and those serving realize that the relationship is reciprocal in nature. Unfortunately, the phrase ‘community service learning’ seems to frame the community as the ones in need of service and the university partners as those best positioned to serve rather than the site for learning by both parties. Students who embark on CSL with this attitude will inevitably find it difficult to establish meaningful relationships with the community partners, particularly those of lower socio-economic status. SHLs in CSL programs need to determine what are the constraints and boundaries of CSL in order to avoid the mentality that those being served are powerless and those serving have all of the power. One way to accomplish this would be to have guest speakers visit the SSP classroom who have emigrated from another country where they worked as professions that they are no longer able to do given their lack of language skills or a lack of recognition of their credentials. Students could interview such individuals and acquire valuable information about the education system, employment in other countries, and even immigration laws. This would help them to fully appreciate the unique circumstances of each individual that they are working with through CSL.

University students need to understand power dynamics and how those are often brokered beyond the control of university or community stakeholders.

Another key component in helping SHLs understand the reciprocal nature of CSL within the SSP classroom is through guided reflection. While reflection is a key component to any type of CSL, guided reflection can help students understand how they benefit from CSL and how it can help them in the future. Johns (2010) describes guided reflection as a practice in which “the practitioner is assisted by a mentor (or ‘guide’) in a process of self-enquiry, development, and learning through reflection in order to effectively realize one’s vision of practice and self as a lived reality” (book cover). In the case of the SSP classroom, the instructor serves as the guide for students and helps them to understand the true nature of effective CSL. He goes on to state:

“Guided reflection is the weaving of two strands of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’. ‘Being’ is the reflection of the practitioner’s clinical practice as known through reflection. The stories written in a reflective journal or shared in guided reflection. ‘Becoming’ is the reflection of the practitioner’s journey from where she is at now to where she wants to be as known by looking back through the unfolding series of reflected - on experiences to perceive self as transformed or not.” (Johns, 2010: viii)

The SSP instructor can assist SHLs in becoming through guiding reflection questions posed throughout the CSL experience. What did you learn from the community members? How have they helped you in your professional development? What do you need to do in order to be more effective in your CSL experience? These are just some questions that could guide the SSP instructor in directing students towards an understanding of the reciprocity that takes place in well-designed CSL.

The fact that the SHLs are university students places them in a distinct position with many of the local community members with whom they will be working. Local community members could respond positively to these SHLs seeing them as individuals who have worked hard to improve themselves and gain an education. Conversely, the SHLs could be seen as a privileged group with whom the local community members have nothing in common. This is especially important for SHLs to understand while engaging in CSL as avoiding this perception will help them to better appreciate the local community in which they live as well as their home community and recognize the value of the diversity found in these communities.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The future is bright for SHLs embarking on the study of LSP insofar as appropriate pedagogies are applied, such as CSL, that maximize the contributions their

socio-cultural and socio-linguistic identity can make. As SHLs master technical language and topical content of previously foreign, untouchable fields of study by tapping into their ethno-linguistic identity, they will flourish rather than flounder. Such was Pedro's (name changed) experience while serving as an assistant to an American dentist as part of a service learning project during a study abroad in Ecuador:

“[T]hey assigned me as a translator and assistant to Dr. XXXX, which I really loved as it made me feel like I was in the middle of the action” (translation ours) [*“me asignaron como traductor y alludante de el Dr. XXXX, lo cual me encanto porque sentía que estaba en acción”*].” (Brown & Purmensky, 2014: 88)

By being in the ‘middle of the action’ socially, linguistically, and culturally, these heritage students are bound to find personal fulfillment with SSP, much like Pedro.

SHLs offer a set of skills that can benefit the community as well as help them develop skills that they can take into their professions. Participating in CSL as part of an SSP class can have an empowering influence on these individuals. Given the relatively low graduation rate for Hispanics and SHLs from four-year post-secondary schools, the connection between service learning and SSP classes can help them develop more confidence in their areas of study as well as connect them to their community. Often times the way one approaches a university education can reflect a rather inward focus on how one can improve job opportunities and potential earning power in the future. Though this is surely one of the main goals of a university education, the incorporation of CSL into SSP courses can help learners become aware of the needs and sources of knowledge in their communities. They also see how the skills they are developing not only benefit their employment prospects, but also help others around them. In previous research, Thompson (2012) found that many students who participated in service learning maintained the relationships they had established with the community partners long after the assignment had ended. He cites one heritage student who ended up as one of the members of the board of directors of a non-profit organization after graduation due to his introduction to the organization during a service-learning class.

In spite of the progress that has been made, there are still many challenges ahead to successfully and seamlessly connect Spanish for Specific Purposes (SSP) courses and CSL. Sánchez-López (2013a) identifies several of these challenges:

- 1) **Instructors:** Many instructors of Spanish do not feel confident enough to teach (even less develop) SSP courses because they wrongly believe that only ‘super-instructors’ (Sabater, 2000) can do it. As has been discussed earlier, SSP instructors do not need to be experts in the target profession. However, they need to have some knowledge of the target profession to be able to connect

with their students, be comfortable around them, and choose appropriate instructional materials.

- 2) Recognition: There is still a lack of professional recognition in higher education for SSP teachers, especially in the United States. Some university departments and administrations still give more importance to traditional fields such as literature or theoretical linguistics when it is time to evaluate for promotion or tenure.
- 3) Inadequate funding: Since there is a lack of professional recognition, some universities do not invest adequately in qualified instructors and professors for SSP courses and programs. Therefore, they often rely on part-time instructors.
- 4) Limited pedagogical training: Although there is a growing body of SSP professional resources such as symposia, conferences, workshops, and publications, formal methodology courses or programs in SSP are not common. Typically, instructors have to resort to self-training by adapting their regular methodological knowledge and experience to the new SSP courses.
- 5) Limited pedagogical resources: Even though there has been a proliferation of SSP pedagogical resources since the 1990s in terms of number of publications, there is still a deficit of high-quality materials based on best practice instruction due to the short history of SSP (Sánchez-López, 2013a: 5324-5325).

The author recommends that meaningful capstone service-learning courses should be an essential component of any type of LSP program and draws the following conclusion:

“As institutions of higher education in the United States continue to awake from their monolingual dream and start making drastic curricular changes to prepare students to compete against the best and brightest in a furiously competitive global market, LSP programs will rapidly gain importance and visibility.” (Sánchez-López, 2013b: 389)

SHLs possess skills and abilities that make them valuable to their communities and in their universities. Through the incorporation of community service learning in SSP courses, SHLs will thrive and develop the skills necessary for them to compete in the global market as well as serve others in the local communities.

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