

*Book Review*

**Language Ideologies and Linguistic Identity in Heritage Language Learning**, by Rachel Showstack, Diego Pascual y Cabo and Damián Vergara Wilson. Routledge, 2024, 170 pp., USD 144.00 (hbk), ISBN 978-0-8153-6477-1

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This book is focused on a research project by Rachel Showstack, which originated from a discourse analysis course. It explores the intricate dynamics between language ideologies, identity, and the educational experiences under the lens of critical language awareness (CLA) on Spanish heritage language (SHL) learners and teachers in Kansas and Texas, USA. Observing how these individuals often viewed their Spanish negatively, the authors sought to understand the impact of heritage language courses on their self-perception and social positioning. Collaborating with Pascual y Cabo and Wilson, Showstack expands this inquiry into a comprehensive exploration of identity and language ideologies in heritage language education. This work provides rich insight into the sociopolitical and cultural factors that influence language learning and identity formation among heritage speakers and underscores the importance of validating diverse linguistic backgrounds and challenges the biases inherent in the discursive practices of traditional language education.

This volume is organized into six chapters. The first chapter lays out the goals of the book which include “an ethnographic intersectional approach that examines the different ways in which real students and real teachers talk about and make sense of their histories, identities, and privileges, and how these experiences shape the ways language is used and vice versa” (p. 5), and an introduction of various theoretical concepts and frameworks on language, identity, and heritage language learning. The authors first discussed the often-complex nature of what defines a heritage language (HL) and a heritage speaker (HS). Drawing heavily from sociocultural theory, the authors then utilize concepts from linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, and educational linguistics to frame their analysis. Key theoretical constructs such as Bourdieu’s (1977, 1991) notions of habitus and linguistic capital, Ochs’ (1993) indexicality, and Kramsch’s (2009) symbolic competence are employed to dissect the ways in which heritage language learners’ identities are co-constructed and negotiated in the classroom. The theoretical framework provides a comprehensive lens through

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which readers view the complexities of language learning and identity formation within social and ideological contexts.

The second and third chapters of the book are grounded in empirical research with interview data collected from five students and five teachers respectively conducted in SHL classrooms in Texas and Kansas, offering a detailed examination of the sociopolitical contexts, personal histories, and communicative practices of both teachers and students. This empirical foundation allows the authors to present rich, contextually embedded insights into how heritage language learners engage with and resist dominant language ideologies. For instance, the authors discuss how some Spanish language programs in the U.S. context position U.S. Spanish as a defective or incomplete variety, thereby influencing how heritage speakers perceive their own linguistic identities. It shows that “the ways in which language educators teach and interact with their students are influenced by their own histories as multilinguals and as language learners as well as the institutional contexts in which they work” (p. 50). The authors focus on practical implications for heritage language education in which the authors advocate for pedagogical approaches that recognize and value the linguistic and cultural resources that HLs bring to the classroom. They emphasize the importance of creating inclusive educational environments that validate students’ linguistic repertoires and promote critical awareness of language ideologies.

In Chapter 4, five students from Texas and Kansas share their stories of learning Spanish as a heritage language, and through positioning into specific roles as a Spanish speaking or multilingual individual, they claim membership as either in-groups, or in communities within their narratives. Achieved through storytelling, the five students provide narratives and counternarratives to the (a) different varieties of Spanish they speak, (b) the power (im)balances with the choice of Spanish they use versus the “Standard Spanish” expectation to sound intelligible, and (c) meaning-making with the Spanish language varieties they use in their contexts. As the authors illustrate, the variety of Spanish that the heritage speakers used in their day to day lives were only relevant when other Spanish speakers criticized the five students in their narratives (p. 90). The fourth chapter leads up to how heritage language is connected to symbolic power, as well as heritage language education and context in Chapters 5 and 6.

In Chapters 5 and 6, the authors report the students’ multilingual repertoires and multicultural experiences to address community issues and challenge dominant discourse within and outside the classroom (p. 92) to address symbolic power (im)balances, as well as centering sociocultural context and critical language education to look at language critically and with a critical pedagogy lens. As the authors argue, the powerful belief that “certain varieties are positioned higher than others are related to hegemonic language ideologies” (p. 92), which in turn creates disparities within the Spanish heritage speakers featured in the third chapter. In order to provide heritage language speakers symbolic power in using their heritage language, a student shares a community project as service learning, and the site they were at to provide services to a

community, *Alce Su Voz*. This allowed the students to connect the community through using Spanish in the present, and in the future to support their investment in language study (p. 129). As a powerful narrative, the authors center community-based approaches as a gateway to get heritage speakers to be involved with their heritage language education and heritage culture. Therefore, this book calls for language educators to start and continue the conversation with fostering and valuing varieties spoken from heritage speakers, and to embrace different sociolects that they speak. Doing so can dismantle hierarchies built upon languages, as stipulated from Flores and Rosa (2015). Students should be involved in what they are assessed with their language (p. 128), which is a way to implement critical approaches in SHL curriculum. The transferability can advance heritage language programs in different contexts in diverse language programs outside of Spanish.

Initially readers might question the generalizability and transferability of cases of heritage speakers of Spanish in Kansas and Texas to other parts of the US or even other global contexts. The authors explained the instructors represented in the study are not indicative of the entire SHL teaching community. However, the authors hope their diverse life experiences and institutional contracts, and the impact these factors have on their teaching, highlight the uniqueness of SHL teachers' backgrounds and practices (p. 64). Through finding commonalities between heritage speakers in the Spanish heritage speaker context from Texas and Kansas, this line of research can bring forth stories which highlight the qualitative aspect of heritage language research, and respecting the different sociolects that heritage speakers use in their heritage language. To add, the authors also argue that instructors should be interested in heritage speakers' own individual language experiences to help cultivate and foster their language study.

As seen in this book, there is not a one-size-fits-all approach which can be implemented to assist all heritage speakers. As the authors brilliantly stated, no single approach can truly be put into practice to accommodate all heritage speakers. For this reason, language educators must be equipped with skills to work with heritage speakers, as they bring unique life experiences into the classroom that should be valued, and not looked down upon since they do not conform to "target-like" and "standard" norms. This book showcases the unique intricacies of how heritage language instructors should have a synergistic approach with heritage speakers in the classroom, and outside the classroom, as reported throughout Chapters 3 to 5. Through an assets-based approach while utilizing a CLA lens, heritage speakers can bring about subtleties that language instructors and second/foreign language learners may not have access to, both linguistically and culturally, inside and outside the classroom, as heritage speakers are raised with rich cultural heritage, which they bring into their walks of life.

Throughout this book, countless artifacts such as the field notes collected from the interview data were collected and brought to light from Spanish heritage speakers and should be treasured as they tell their stories about their heritage languages. Showstack, Pascual y Cabo, and Wilson illuminate the need for institutional support, and how

heritage speakers should be appreciated for their linguistic abilities. As Maria Carreira states, the “lack of institutionalization” is something that should be worked on (2017). Language educators must have buy-in to have effective heritage language education, policies, and programs, in order to reach more heritage speakers in any language. As the authors bring forward as examples, critical autoethnographies can be effective ways to focus on experiences inside and outside the language classroom, focusing on heritage speakers’ experiences. Another way to involve heritage speakers is community involvement, like *Alce Su Voz*. The authors highlight the work of Higgins (2021) with Hawaiian Pidgin, and how a community-based approach can be seen as valuable to reach all heritage speakers. As reported in Chapter 5, a community-based approach can reach HSs through service learning and allow heritage speakers to contribute what they can invest in their future language study. To conclude, the work and research from this book delivers a clear message to language educators, which are the targeted readership of this book: we must advocate for better resources to support our heritage speakers.

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