Writing Difficulties in Heritage Language Classes
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Introduction

A heritage student is an “individual who is exposed to a language other than English at home but educated primarily in English” (Carreira, 2015). Despite knowing two languages, heritage language students have limited vocabulary and grammar. These struggles, along with different degrees of motivation and interest, contribute to their low performance when it comes to writing in the heritage language.

Objective

The objective of this study is to determine effective strategies that help heritage students improve their writing in their heritage language.

National Heritage Language Resource Center survey results:

How important is it for you to accomplish the following goals in your HL class?
1 = unimportant, 5 = very important

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>One</th>
<th>Two</th>
<th>Three</th>
<th>Four</th>
<th>Five</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve speaking</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>1030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve listening</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve reading</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve writing</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>1073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve grammatical accuracy</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase vocabulary</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>1139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Carreira, 2015)

Conclusion

Writing in the heritage language is an issue for heritage students partly because of lack of interest and authentic task opportunities. Since heritage students often identify with several cultures, they are genuinely interested in topics related to national, cultural, and linguistic identities, to name a few. Assignments that deal with themes of identity encourage students to find pleasure in writing, and allow them to learn more about their culture, to speak and to listen the heritage tongue, and to reconnect with their heritage culture.

Strategies

To help students become greater writers in their heritage language teachers must focus on the development of their students’ vocabulary, cultural competence, and grammar in addition to reading, listening and speaking.

Some of these strategies include:

- A variety of writing assignments that allow them to explore diverse methods of writing, such as poems, argumentative, descriptive, and narrative essays.
- Interesting topics such as Spanglish, the origin of student’s names, and the immigration stories of family members.
- Oral interviews with community members and written reports of their experience as immigrants in the U.S.

References