

# **Parents' Perceptions of Heritage Languages in the Mid-West: Facing the Challenge of Losing One's Native Language in Kansas**

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## **Abstract**

**Abstract:** While heritage language research tends to focus on populations in the Eastern and Western coasts of the country, little if anything is known about heritage language loss, use, perceptions, or what parents do to overcome the challenges their children face on a daily basis in Midwest states such as Kansas, especially in remote rural areas. The present study aims at making the voices of some of these parents heard by describing the common themes that emerged from the qualitative data analysis collected from their perceptions towards heritage languages in the state of Kansas. The paper provides a brief description of the sociolinguistic context, includes a brief literature review, describes the methodology used in data collection and analysis, summarizes data results, discusses the common patterns, and offers some conclusions and recommendations. The main research questions were: How do parents perceive heritage language use in their families and communities? What do they do to preserve their heritage language in their families and communities? To what extent are these parents able to analyze the causes of heritage language loss and societal attitudes from a critical and macro-level of analysis?

## **Introduction**

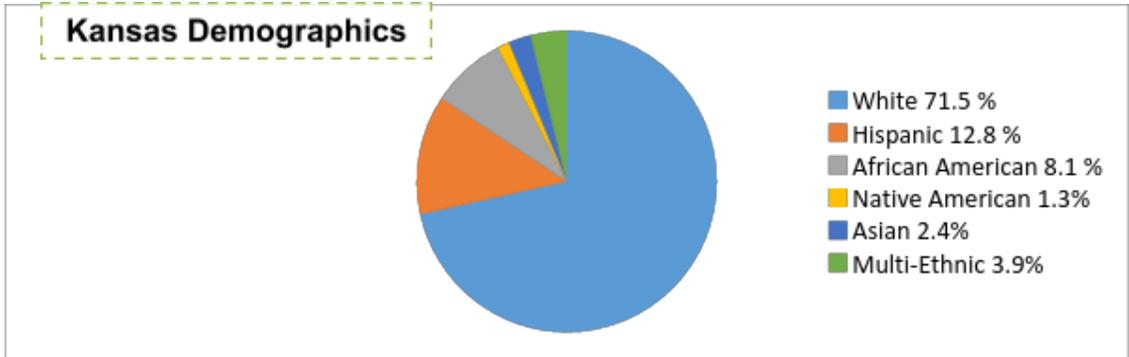
“My children are losing their heritage language. I'm aware of that. I hear them talking English among themselves at home all the time. I don't know what to do about it. My children watch a lot of TV, play video games, PS3, DS, and X-Box. All is done in English. I think they are losing their language because they spend so much time at school, too. They leave home around 7:15 am and come back around 4:15 pm. That's nine hours of intensive communication in English and when they come home they watch TV and play those games in English.”

The above statement illustrates a common problem among families of immigrants in the USA. This statement clearly explains the daily struggle that takes place between the dominant language and culture on one hand and the minority languages and cultures on the other hand. This illustrates and explains how culture is viewed here as a struggle over meaning and representation within a socio-cultural context from a critical perspective (see Giroux, 1981; Sehlaoui 2001; 2008a; and 2011). In other words, the parent's complaint is an example of how the socio-economic context and its inherent power relations play a role in determining the fate of a language or culture in a given socio-economic and political context. The quote also shows how those domains of language use that most children engage in daily are under the control of the dominant language, English, and not the heritage language. Therefore, the heritage language is endangered and may be lost.

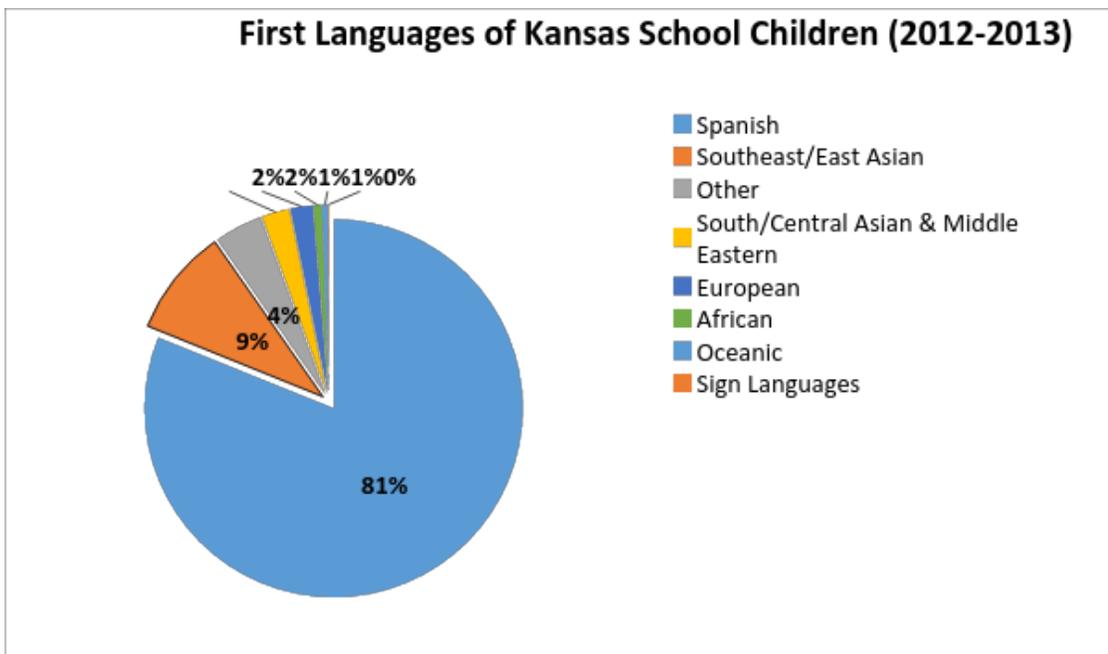
It seems clear from the above concern voiced by this particular participant that she is aware of this danger, but she is not sure what to do to overcome this challenge. The present paper describes the common themes that emerged from the data analysis collected on the perceptions of a group of parents in the state of Kansas. The paper will provide a brief description of the sociolinguistic context, include a brief literature review, describe the methodology used in data collection and analysis, summarize data results, discuss the common patterns, and finally describe the pedagogical recommendations and strategies that emerged from the qualitative data analysis to face the challenge of heritage language loss. Before we move to the next sections of this paper, it is important to define what is meant by heritage language. The term heritage language (henceforth HL) is used to identify languages other than the dominant language (or languages) in a given social context. According to Valdés (2000), "The term "heritage speaker" is used to refer to a student 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." ( p. 1)

### **The sociolinguistic context of Kansas**

There are more than thirty HLs in the state of Kansas, according to Kansas State Department of Education (2013). The state student demographics are shown on Figure 1 below with the Hispanic student population being the highest among other minorities. According to the Office of World Languages at the Kansas State Department of Education (2013), the number of HLs spoken in the state by second language learners is represented in Figure 2 with Spanish being the majority language.



**Figure 1. Kansas Demographics**



**Figure 2. Main Languages Spoken in Kansas**

**NOTE:** Languages are classified in order of largest to smallest populations as follows:  
**Southeast/East Asian** (Vietnamese, Chinese, Khmer, Lao, Korean, Hmong, Karen, Burmese, Thai);  
**Other** (This category includes students with unknown home languages); **South/Central Asian & Middle Eastern** (Arabic, Urdu, Nepali, Hindi, Punjabi, Farsi, Gujarati, Turkish, Pashto); **European** (German, Russian, French, Portuguese, Serb, Bosnian Croatian); **African** (Swahili, Somali, Dinka)  
**Oceanic** (Tagalog, Ilokano, Visaya); **Sign Languages** (ASL, other signed languages)

## **Review of Literature**

### **Heritage Language Loss**

On September 21-23, 2001, a national conference was held to address some of the issues that were related to HL education. A group of researchers in their “Priorities Conference Report” about heritage language research concluded that:

...[A]s a rule within two or three generations most non-English-speaking immigrants to the USA will have lost or almost lost their heritage languages. The causes of this language loss are complex. Most researchers see the major reasons as related to the power and international status of English in the media and the economy. This, together with the power of overt and covert policies supporting English only, leads to a dramatic loss of heritage languages in the USA (p.6).

When HLs are not supported through the school system with resources and the creation of bilingual programs, the fluency in these languages tend to be lost at the early years of schooling. Many studies that investigated this phenomenon (e.g. Fishman, 1991; Cummins, 1991; Cummins, 2005; Tse, 2001; Wong, 1991; Olsen et al, 2001) indicated that young children start to quickly recognize the status differential between their home languages and English at an early age. Cummins (2005), for example, explains that “When the interactions they experience with teachers reinforce these status differentials, students disengage their identities from their home languages and the process of language loss is accelerated” (p.586). Other researchers such as Portes and Rumbaut (1996), and Alba et al. (2002) have found that immigrants have the tendency to learn English as fast as possible. This is usually accompanied by their children giving up their HL. Based on research and experience, such as the well-documented case study conducted by Stephen Caldas (2006), children tend to respond to the HL in English, and if the parents give up the struggle, then the children will lose even their ability to comprehend spoken HL and thus lose contact with their roots and who they really are.

Some researchers such as Haynes (2010) explain how “[e]conomic and social forces converge to make English a very valuable commodity, often to the exclusion of other languages” (p.1). Others (e.g. Henze & Davis, 1999), point out that language loss is often associated with oppression.

According to Fishman (1991), the above factors or HL loss become even more serious in small and isolated communities such the ones represented by some of the participants in this study. Fishman (2001) describes the cultural devastation that can accompany language loss, stating, “a traditionally associated language is more than just

a tool of communication for its culture... [It] is often viewed as a very specific gift, a marker of identity and a specific responsibility vis-à-vis future generations” (p. 5).

Jensen (1994) found that only 14 percent of second-generation immigrants reported speaking English poorly, while Lopez (1996) argues that children who grow up as bilinguals often prefer to speak English, even when talking to their parents. The loss of intergenerational language transmission is one of the most significant factors in language endangerment (e.g. Brenzinger et al, 2003; Fishman, 2000; Leonard, 2008). Furthermore, Portes and Hao (1998) argue that the preference for English among second-generation immigrants is universal as these children rapidly lose fluency in their parents' native languages, especially when parents themselves recognize the status differential between their home languages and English and may hold attitudes or perceptions that could either contribute to HL loss or its maintenance. The next section addresses this factor in more details.

### Parents' Perception towards Heritage Language

Several studies have explored HL issues among parents. However, these studies have been conducted predominantly on families living in Eastern and Western coast cities in large metropolitan areas such as San Francisco, Vancouver, Philadelphia, Montreal, New York, and Los Angeles (Guardado, 2002; Jeon 2010; Lao, 2004; Park & Sarkar, 2007; Shibata, 2000; Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009; Guofang Li, 2006; Hyekyung Sung and Amado M. Padilla, 1998). HL populations living in mid-sized or smaller Midwestern cities have received little attention with few studies focusing on parents' perceptions and attitudes in Midwestern cities such as Ruth Lingxin Yan (2003).

As far as the perception of parents towards HL is concerned, Hyekyung Sung and Amado M. Padilla (1998), for example, examined the attitudes of 847 parents in California concerning their attitudes toward foreign language learning and involvement in their child's language study. The findings from this study reveal that younger children were more motivated overall toward Asian language study than were older students. According to these researchers, younger children also perceived their parents as more involved in their language study than did the older ones. Elementary school parents had more positive attitudes and were more involved in the child's language study than were parents of high school students. We can conclude from these findings that parental involvement is crucial, especially at the early years of schooling.

From the Eastern Coast, Guofang Li (2006), who conducted a study in a suburban city in the state of New York, found out that all families expected their children to become biliterate and multilingual. Factors such as parents' perceptions of their minority status in the host society, their attitudes toward the role of HL and their own proficiencies in the dominant language, as well as several school and societal factors,

such as quality of instruction in HL schools, language policies in the mainstream schools, and the media, were found to play an important role in shaping the children's language choices and patterns of use at home. This researcher concludes that helping immigrant children become bi-literate and multilingual is a challenging task that requires concerted efforts between parents, public schools, and community organizations.

In her study conducted in Midwestern cities in the state of Iowa, Ruth Lingxin Yan (2003) discovered that most of the parents demonstrated self-pride in their own cultural heritage. Regardless of the language group they belong to, these parents also expressed a strong interest, with varying degrees from one language group to another, in maintaining their HL in their children for various benefits, including maintaining their cultural and religious heritage by sending their children to HL classes or through speaking it at home, strengthening family ties between the younger and older generations, keeping connections to their own cultural and language communities, and promoting bilingual skills for better job opportunities for their children. It should be noted here that HL use has always been emphasized in HL research.

### **Heritage Language Use**

Heritage language research (e.g. Fishman, 2000; Holmes, 2008; Sehlaoui, 2008a) concludes that without active language maintenance and systematic efforts to reverse language shift, language loss is inevitable. Researchers such as Fishman (1991) and Holmes (2008) found that the more the number of contexts -in which native speakers of HLs use their ethnic languages- diminishes, the more the dominant language, in this case English, gains control of these domains. In other words, according to these researchers, in the absence of any efforts to preserve a heritages language and increase its use in various domains and settings, there is always a gradual decrease in the complexity and diversity of linguistic features of the language when speakers start to simplify their phonological rules, their grammatical patterns become less and less complex, and their vocabulary in the language gets smaller and smaller. Many researchers (e.g. Fishman, 1991 and Hinton, 1999) stress the importance of use of the HL at home as vital to help children maintain it.

It is clear from the above brief literature review that the rapid loss of HL fluency happens when these languages are not reinforced within the home, school, and community contexts. It was also found that the interactions that students experience in their contexts reinforce the status differentials and as a result they disengage their identities from their home languages and the process of language loss is accelerated. Multiple factors, including parents' attitudes and perceptions of their HL were found to play an important role in shaping the children's language choices and patterns of use at

home. Finally, the reviewed studies have shown that most of the parents demonstrated self-pride in their own cultural heritage, regardless of their ethnicity or HL group.

The present study aims at making the voices of some parents heard from various Midwestern cities in Kansas by describing the common themes that emerged from the qualitative data analysis collected on their perceptions towards HL use to answer the following main research questions:

1. How do parents of heritage language perceive heritage language use in their families and communities?
2. What do they do to preserve their heritage language in their families and communities?
3. To what extent are these parents able to analyze the causes of language loss and societal attitudes from a critical and macro-level of analysis?

To answer these questions and achieve the purpose of this study, the following methodology was utilized.

## **Method**

### **Survey**

About seventy-five parents who attended a state TESOL and Migrant Education conference received a survey to participate in this study. A survey was sent to all conference participants. The first questions on the survey asked them whether they were parents of HL children. Answering such question affirmatively led the participants, who chose to participate, to the following questions in the survey that inform them of the purpose of the study and that their participation was voluntary. Otherwise, if their answer to that question was negative, they were automatically exited from the survey webpage. The survey questions were anonymous. Thirty individuals from this population chose to complete the survey. Survey questions 1-7 collected data on the participants' demographics (ethnicity, gender, age, and mother tongue). Questions 8-21 dealt with the following aspects:

- Whether the participants encourage their children to maintain their mother tongue.
- When they talk to their children or young people in their community, whether they reply to them in English or in the native language or both.
- Whether they shift/choose to use English in order to better communicate with other members of their community.
- Whether there are any instructional resources available to them in their heritage language.
- What parents do to help preserve the heritage language.
- What their community does to help youth and other members in their community to preserve their heritage language.

As far as heritage language domain of use, participants were asked the following Yes-No questions:

- a. Is your heritage language used at home?
- b. Is your heritage language used in your own community?
- c. Is your heritage language used in schools?
- d. Is your heritage language used in any other public services?

Prior to the conference, the survey questions were first pilot-tested with a small group of participants at a local school district and a community center.

### Interview

In-depth interviewing was also used with five individuals out of this sample during and after the conference. Participants were selected for interviews based on the language groups they represented. Three interviews were conducted on site during the conference and two were conducted by phone two days later after the conference. A semi-structured interview format was used to guide the interviewing process (Tracy, 2013). In-depth interviewing (Seidman, 1991) was pursued as the need arose from the situation. The interviews were guided by the research questions and the attempt was to uncover and explore the participants' perspectives using what Tracy (2013) describes as an emic approach "which means that behavior is described from the actor's point of view and is context-specific" (Tracy, 2013:21). Data analysis was, in part, concurrent with data gathering. The reading and re-reading of the interviews field notes brought on a growing awareness of emerging "themes". A domain/thematic analysis, based on the initial research questions, was conducted by generating categories and then themes from the answers given by the responders to both survey and interview questions (Ely, et al., 1991; Miles & Huberman, 1994). A system of creating themes was developed as follows. First, the transcribed data from survey and interviews field note data were divided into domains. Second, within each domain, the data were reviewed several times for information that was particularly revealing or expressive or stood out as a potential theme. Similarities and linkages as well as differences and contradictions within and between the perspectives of the participants were identified. Interview questions were mainly a follow-up to some of the survey questions, they addressed the following topics:

1. Is your heritage language used at home? If yes, how? Please explain.
2. Is your heritage language used in your own community? If yes, how? Please explain.
3. Is your heritage language used in schools? If yes, how? Please explain.
4. Is your heritage language used in any other public services? If yes, how? Please explain.
5. What advantages do you see for heritage language use? Please explain.
6. What challenges do you perceive for heritage language use? Please explain.

## Participants

Thirty parents participated in this study. Eighty five percent (85%) were females and (15%) males. Their ages ranged between 21 and 70. Half of the participants (50%) reported a Hispanic ethnicity and the rest were Asian (30%), White/Middle Eastern (15%), and (5%) European/Caucasian. Seventy five percent (75%) of these parents were also teachers, (10%) administrators, and (15%) paraprofessionals. When asked about their mother tongues 15 reported Spanish as a mother tongue, and 3 Chinese. 3 participants came from large urban cities such as Wichita, Manhattan, and Kansas City, Kansas, the rest were from small rural and suburban areas such as Derby, Hope, Emporia, and McPherson.

## Results

The following table summarizes data from survey questions 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 17.

Question	Answer		Percentage	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
8. Do you encourage your children/students to maintain their mother tongue?	30	0	100%	0%
9. When you talk to your children or young people in your community using their heritage language, do they reply to you in English?	28	2	93%	7%
10. When you talk to your children or young people in your community, do they reply to you in the heritage language?	18	12	60%	40%
11. When you talk to your children or young people in your community, do they reply to you in both English and the native language?	26	4	86%	14%
12. Do you shift/choose to use English in order to better communicate with other members of your community?	26	4	86%	14%
13. Are there any instructional resources available to you in your heritage language?	23	7	76%	24%
17. a. Is your heritage language used at home?	24	6	80%	20%
17. b. Is your heritage language used in your own community?	21	9	70%	30%
17. c. Is your heritage language used in schools?	15	15	50%	50%

<b>17. d. Is your heritage language used in any public services?</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>44%</b>
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**Table 1: Data results from survey questions 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 17**

Qualitative interview data and open-ended questions from the survey revealed some interesting recurring themes that emerged from the data as reported under the following subheadings.

#### Attitudes towards HL Use and Maintenance

All participants (100%) reported that they encourage their students and children to maintain their HL (Question 8). However, an overwhelming majority (93%) responded that their children and young people in the community use English in responding to HL interlocutors (Question 9). Use of code-switching (use of English and HL) in the response of the young ones was reported by 86% of the informants (Question 11). As a result of the young people’s code-switching responses, 86% of the participants in this study said they do switch to English for better communication with their younger interlocutors (Question 12). Many participants (76%) in this study reported the existence of some instructional material in the HL (Question 13) and 70% confirmed that their HL is used in the community (Question 17a), while 80% reported its use at home (Question 17b). However, only 50% (mainly Spanish) reported some use of the HL at school (Question 17c). When these participants were asked whether their HL is used in other public services only 56% confirmed that (Question 17d). Qualitative data from interview follow-up questions (Questions 1-6) related to language use were triangulated and aggregated with data collected through the survey based on the themes that emerged from the data as follows.

#### Language Loss and Factors Contributing to It

The following quote from one of the participants summarizes and illustrates what almost all parents (95%) feel and experience as they witness their children lose their mother tongue:

“I’m a first generation immigrant. I came here fifteen years ago. I have four children. My children speak English and Spanish. When they talk to each other they use English. I don’t like that. I try to remind them but they keep forgetting. When they talk to me they use Spanish, but when they talk to their mother, they use English. Their mother does not care about that. We take them to Mexico every other year. That seems to help a little. We have them listen to our music and watch Mexican TV. We celebrate our customs and beliefs at home and in the community center using our language. We share personal stories about our

childhood and family. We go to church and speak Spanish there, too. At school, people are friendly. Kids bring things written in English. The library has books in Spanish as well, but the language is not allowed in the classroom.”

The above quote also corroborates the results from survey questions 9, 13, 17b, and 17c. In other words, children use of their HL is determined by some sociolinguistic factors such as who they are talking to. When they talk to their father (who is an educator and competent in both languages), the children use Spanish. Unlike their mother, the father seems to care about that. This parent’s awareness and attitude was found, as discussed earlier in the literature review, to be crucial in preserving the HL. On the other hand, children tend to use English when talking to their mother, each other, or their peers. Finally, the above quote also illustrates the recurring theme related to societal attitudes towards HL and its speakers.

### Heritage language and Identity

The following quote by a Muslim Arab American parent who immigrated to the United States long time ago is consistent with what emerged from research by Fishman (2001), he noted that the language is more than just a tool of communication for its culture... [It] is often viewed as a very specific gift, a marker of identity and a specific responsibility vis-à-vis future generations” (p. 5). Linguistic items are not just attributes of groups or communities, they are themselves the means by which individuals identify themselves and identify with others Tabouret- Keller (1985).

“Having my kids preserving their HL means preserving their identities as well, since I believe one’s mother language is one fundamental component of a person’s identity. My kids need to feel the pride of their uniqueness and differences, this is what makes them who they are. They can achieve this by strengthening their own qualities and abilities in maintaining their mother language. For us, as Muslim Arab Americans, Arabic language (our HL) is very important since it is the language of the Holy Qur’an. Arabic is considered as a part of the Islamic identity as well, so that’s why preserving my kids’ HL is crucial to us as Muslim parents.”

Many scholars have argued that language is not only indispensable but very important and useful for ethnic identification (Lei, 2013; Heller, 1994; Smolicz, 1992). Heritage language provides important access to participation in ethnic activities and formation of group boundaries (Lei, 2013; Heller, 1994).

### **Dealing with Negative Societal Attitudes**

To corroborate this recurring theme of societal negative attitudes, which was reported by 75% of the participants, one of the informants explained how she conveys it

to her children: “My husband and I raised our kids as Vietnamese. We tell them that just because they are born here in the USA they still look like a foreigner and will be treated as a foreigner.” Most of the informants tried to explain why some people hold such negative attitudes towards speakers of HLs. The following quote further elaborates on this common theme:

“People are afraid of “the other” or the unknown. Lack of knowledge breeds fear and anxiety. Fear of change. Except for Native Americans, we are all immigrants. The answer is education. I think it is the parent's’ responsibility to maintain our heritage language in another culture. We also need to share with these folks what research says to prove that being bilingual makes you smarter”.

This participant is aware of the importance of how being bilingual contributes to academic success and success in second language acquisition which has been confirmed by research (e.g. Cummins, 1989; Platero, 2001; Holm & Holm, 1995; Thomas & Collier, 2002).

### **Advantages and Challenges Facing HL**

Other themes that emerged from the qualitative data can be classified in terms of perceived advantages and challenges of HL use. The participants were asked the following open-ended question during the interview: What advantages and challenges do you see for your heritage language in your community, town, or country? Please explain:

All participants (100%) felt that HL has so many advantages. The perceived advantages that emerged from the data can be summarized as follows:

- “To me the advantages are in preserving the culture and sharing it with people from other cultures. I see no disadvantages.”
- “Reaching out to the community. Communication is improved between school and community. It gets parents involved”.
- “The advantage for my kids and me are to feel like we belong to a community. Encourage diversity and understanding. Use of heritage language breaks stereotypes about behaviors and expectations”
- “When a person is literate in his/her native language he can easily learn a second language”.
- “One advantage might be to expose others to a new language”.
- “I believe people should be able to speak more than one language so as to relate with many other people. I believe being bilingual makes you see things from a different perspective”.

All informants’ qualitative data confirmed the main advantage of using one’s HL as being a means to strengthen not only the native literacy, but to facilitate second

language acquisition as illustrated by one of the participant's comments: "When a person is literate in his/her native language he/she can easily learn a second language. Another advantage might be to expose others to the native language. This aspect of heritage education was also confirmed by many research studies as was reported above.

The challenges that were perceived by all participants (100%) can be summarized as follows:

- "The Midwest is slow to assimilate other cultures and resent speakers whom they cannot understand."
- "There are very few who speak Vietnamese. It is seen as very foreign."
- "One main problem that I face is getting the dirty looks in different public places when using my native language. Sometimes when speaking your heritage language in the community, people will look at you differently."
- "Lack of diversity and openness to other languages/cultures in the Midwest."

### **Emerging Strategies and Recommendations**

The following strategies emerged from the qualitative open-ended questions regarding what the participants do to help their children speak their HL and preserve it and what they think the community does to help achieve these goals. All participants shared some strategies and recommendations that can be synthesized as follows:

- Encouraging students to take HL in high school.
- Taking/Sending them to visit their grandparents and/or correspond with their relatives in the heritage language.
- Increase their awareness of their self-identities.
- Watching and listening to heritage language TV channels. Watching cultural videos together, playing cultural music, joining activities to promote language development.
- Encouraging them to speak the heritage language at home and reading to them in the heritage language.
- Insisting they continue to read, write, and speak in their native language.
- Exposing them to heritage language sounds and music.
- Explaining to them the advantage of being bilingual for their future jobs.
- Encouraging them to respond in their HL, if they talk to me in English I ask them again in the heritage language until they answer in that language.
- Encouraging the parents of the children in my classroom to support their native language at home.
- Making it a rule to speak in our native language at home unless is about homework.
- Providing materials in the heritage language and attend heritage language community services.

- Conducting Saturday classes at home or community centers.
- Developing positive habits, attitudes, and virtues.

### **Community and School Support in Large Urban Cities vs. Rural Small Towns**

While informants from small rural and suburban areas (such as Emporia, Hope, Derby, and McPherson) reported no support (0%) for their HL, especially minority HLs such as Chinese, Vietnamese, Arabic, French, Japanese, and Thai, the following responses came from informants located in large urban cities, namely, Wichita, Manhattan, and Kansas City, Kansas:

- Our community allows the native language to be used in schools, businesses, and offers translations for events around the community. This mostly refers to Spanish and Vietnamese (Wichita area, Kansas).
- The Chinese and Arab community offers Chinese and Arabic classes for their children. (Wichita, Kansas City, Kansas)
- Some minority languages such as Vietnamese, Arabic, and Chinese (in Wichita and Manhattan, Kansas) are reported to be used in their different religious institutes/ community centers.

### **Making the Connection between HL Loss, Societal Attitudes, and the Macro-socio-political Context of Education**

The last theme that emerged from qualitative data results relates to the participants' ability to relate the issues of societal negative attitudes to the macro-socio-political context of HL education in this country. Unfortunately, only five participants (16%) provided this critical socio-cultural analysis that goes beyond the training of individuals approach. The following quote illustrates this ability as reported by one of the participants. She suggested that "government and educational legislative committees at state and federal levels need to come up with more up-to-date laws and language planning policies that are capable of coping with the 21<sup>st</sup> century, especially when most world countries are much more advanced in this area than the USA." This theme emerged from 75% of the parents who happened to be parents and educators at the same time. This socio-cultural analysis echoes what Sehlaoui (2011) reported regarding how educators are socialized to focus so much on the micro-level of analysis and the individual-based analysis and ignore the macro-level or the system-based critical analysis that looks at the socio-economic, power relations dynamics as they apply to HL education, and political context at large.

## Interpretation of Data Results and Discussion

While all parents (100%) stated that they would encourage their children to maintain their HL, only 7% among them reported that their children would respond to them in the HL when they talk to them in that language. This means that 93% of HL children are in the process of language shift as a first step towards language loss. Eighty-six percent (86%) of participants reported that their children would code-switch or use both English and their first language when responding to them. This is evidence that language shift is occurring and corroborates what research found in this area. A similar percent (86%) was found in the participants' shift or choice to use English in order to better communicate with young members of their community. Seventy-six percent (76%) among the participants reported that there are some instructional resources available to them in their HL, especially in large urban areas such as Wichita, Kansas City, and Manhattan. As far as HL use is concerned, eighty percent (80%) reported some use of the language at home, 70% in their community, 50% in public schools, and 56% reported the use of HL for public services which were predominantly religion-related. This echoes what Holmes (2008) and other researchers found when it comes to the gradual reduction of domains of use. In other words, the dominant language gains control of domains of language use not covered by HLs which results in lack of HL communicative competence. When asked whether they encourage or support their children to maintain their native tongue, all participants (100%) reported that they encourage their children to maintain their mother tongue.

These results were consistent with the findings reported in the review of literature regarding language shift (e.g. Ruth Lingxin Yan, 2003; Guofang Li, 2006). Language shift is happening at a rate of 76% among the children of these respondents in Kansas. However, it should be noted here that 60% (who were native-speakers of Spanish, Arabic, Chinese and Vietnamese) reported that their children still respond to them in the native language and that they were making efforts to preserve their cultural and linguistic heritage. These efforts are crucial in preserving HLs as described in Peyton, Ranard, and McGrinnis (2001). This also corroborates what previous research discovered in this area (e.g. Lopez, 1996). The main conclusion that can be drawn from these results is that data confirms that language loss is happening among the children of these participants from the state of Kansas, in spite of these parents and community members' efforts.

When asked whether they use both their HL and English in their response, 64% of these parents reported that their children use code-switching in their response. This

language shift is the beginning of the process of language loss (Fishman, 1991; 2000, 2001). The majority of the participants (82%) said that they choose English “to better” communicate with members of their families and communities which could indirectly indicate that the HL does not cover the various sociolinguistic and communicative functions and uses in those contexts. As to the availability of instructional resources, 77% of the participants reported that there are some resources available to them. A closer look at these respondents revealed that they were all Spanish-speaking parents of Spanish-speaking children. The rest (23%) reported an absence of instructional resources for Vietnamese, Arabic, Chinese, Thai, and Japanese in this case. While 80% of the participants said that their language is used at home, more than 20% of their children seem to have lost their HL already. Half of the participants, who happened to be Spanish-speaking, reported that their language is used at schools. As a dominant HL, Spanish seems to be in a healthy situation compared to other minority HLs. This raises a concern for these minority HLs in the USA, in spite of the efforts to support this linguistic asset in the country as was reported in a special issue of *Language, Culture, and Curriculum* journal (Sehlaoui, 2008b).

Qualitative data results corroborated the parents’ positive attitudes and awareness towards HL education. They were able not only to communicate their positive attitudes, but also share some practical strategies at the community and family levels for overcoming the challenge of HL loss among their young generations. The themes that emerged from qualitative data under the advantages of speaking HL also supported what research has established as a fact that knowing and speaking one’s HL facilitates the process of second language acquisition and helps bilingual students to outperform their monolingual peers academically (e.g. Collier, 1992; Ramirez, Yuen, & Ramey, 1991; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005; Thomas & Collier, 2002). All participants (100%) reported this benefit or advantage in their responses.

Finally, qualitative data results revealed how some of the speakers of the dominant language, English, hold some negative attitudes towards minority languages and multiculturalism as reported by many of the participants. However, the advantages of speaking one’s HL outweigh the challenges and disadvantages reported by most informants. Education and cross-cultural awareness and training were offered as solutions by most informants to address the issue of “dirty looks” and negative attitudes. These negative attitudes often translate into social interactions both at school and in the community at large, this may communicate or reinforce status differentials and power struggles that lead children to believe that their linguistic and cultural heritage is not important and therefore disengage from their cultural and linguistic identities. As a result the HL gets lost (e.g. Valdés, et al, 2006; Cummins, 1991; Cummins, 2005; Tse, 2001; Wong, 1991; Olsen et al, 2001).

## **Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research**

To conclude we can say that the emerging themes and data results provided evidence to address the questions that this study attempted to answer. In other words, it was found that all parents held good attitudes and perceived HL use and maintenance positively in their families and communities. They did, however, express and echo concerns and issues that have been addressed by previous research. They offered common suggestions and pedagogical recommendations that usually emerge from HL research and stressed the crucial role of parental involvement in the process of HL preservation and maintenance. Data also confirmed the fact that HL loss and issues become even more challenging for Kansas parents who live in rural or remote small towns in the state and that HLs other than Spanish experience more difficulties in the state. As to the extent to which these parents were able to analyze the causes of language loss and societal attitudes from a critical and macro-level of analysis, the study revealed that only 16% of the parents were able to make such connections. Based on these data results, it seems that more awareness is needed for parents and educators to be more critical to understand the societal and political forces, policies, and power relations that drive language policy in our country.

Finally, as was stated above, many studies have explored HL issues among parents. However, the majority of those studies have been conducted predominantly on families living in Eastern and Western coast cities in large metropolitan areas. Heritage language populations living in mid-sized or smaller Midwestern cities have received little attention. While we hope this study will contribute to close this gap to some extent by making the voice of these parents heard, it should be noted that because the data were gathered from thirty parents only, the results cannot be generalized to all parents in the state of Kansas. Moreover, since the majority of parents who participated in this study were also educators, we recommend more research to be conducted with parents of all walks of life and various professions with a larger sample. Another area that can be recommended for further research, in Midwestern areas, is to focus on HL use at the family and community level to raise awareness and critical thinking among parents in these remote and isolated communities. The relationship between HL and identity construction is another crucial area that should be investigated in future studies.

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