Considerations on the Teaching of Pragmatics and Speech Acts to Heritage Language Learners of Spanish: Beneficial or Counterproductive?

Erik Garabaya-Casado
University of Utah

Abstract: Second-language pragmatics teaching, of speech acts in particular, is a developing field that has reiterated its relevance toward the achievement of communicative competence in the target language due to its focus on the contextual and cultural components. However, this relation may be less clear in the case of Spanish heritage language learners, who have already acquired some pragmatic knowledge at home. Therefore, authors such as Pinto and Raschio (2007, 2008) state that heritage speakers demonstrate a unique pragmatic style in comparison to monolinguals and that they experience an advantage in relation to second-language learners. In this line, Barros García and Bachelor (2018) have suggested that the teaching of speech acts to this student population might be counterproductive as heritage language learners have shown lower scores in the assessment of their pragmatic competence after explicit instruction in this regard was provided. In this paper, I aim to discuss some of the latest literature on speech acts that point out this regression and to compare first, second, and heritage language learners in order to suggest some explanations and future lines of research that could ultimately help fill a gap in Spanish as a heritage language acquisition theory and pedagogy.

Keywords: heritage speakers, pragmatics, speech acts, language pedagogy

Introduction

Pragmatics is a relatively new field in language pedagogy that does not usually receive enough attention even though it is an essential component for communication. Pragmatic cross-cultural research and second-language (L2) pragmatics pedagogy have been developed during the last few decades, foregrounding the relevance of their study and in-classroom teaching as essential toward the development of communicative competence, as this particular field emphasizes the role of key components for communication such as the speakers involved, the purpose, the context, or the shared cultural knowledge (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig 2013; Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper 1989b; Félix-Brasdefer and Cohen 2012; Koike 2008; Taguchi and Roever 2017). Nevertheless, studies on heritage speakers' pragmatic competence are dramatically scarce (Bachelor and Barros García 2019; Gironzetti and Koike 2016; Taguchi, Zhang, and Li 2017; Xiao-Desai 2019), which leaves a noticeable gap within the more complex framework of heritage language (HL) acquisition and pedagogy.

Heritage speakers have been defined as those individuals who have some proficiency in a minority language after exposure at home during early childhood, at least until the age that they begin to go to school and gain literacy only in the dominant language (Valdés 2000, 2001). Some sort of connection to the

heritage culture, and not only language, has also been proposed as a factor for their categorization (Fishman 2001). Speakers who fall under these definitions, those who have Spanish as their HL in particular, already represent a significant portion of the US population (60 million "Hispanic" or "Latino" individuals currently live in the United States according to the US Census Bureau 2020, among whom 15 million have a "limited competence" in Spanish, following the data collected by the Instituto Cervantes 2020). As authors such as Carreira and Kagan (2018) have argued, Hispanic bilinguals and heritage speakers are becoming increasingly relevant at the socioeconomic, demographic, and educational levels in the United States, especially in colleges and universities, which encourages and sustains research on their linguistic and pedagogical needs.

In the following sections, I will briefly describe heritage language linguistic and acquisitional phenomena, highlight the role of pragmatics in this development, and summarize what has been published in previous literature regarding HL speech acts specifically. Finally, I will offer some conclusions and future lines of research that could help fill a gap in the broader theoretical framework of Spanish as a heritage language acquisition and teaching.

Defining the Heritage Speakers of Spanish

According to Valdés (2000, 2001, 2005), heritage speakers (HS)[1] in the United States are those individuals who grow up in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who can speak it or, at least, understand it, and who can be considered bilinguals to some extent. Even though they have access to their family language during childhood, these speakers attend school in English and, consequently, they develop literacy only in the societal language. Other authors like Fishman (2001) highlight the speaker's relation to the heritage culture rather than whether they can speak that language or not.

What are the implications of speaking the HL almost exclusively at home and attending school only in English? A state of social bilingualism with one clearly dominant language reduces input in the minority language in most domains and registers, which shapes heritage languages (Silva-Corvalán 1994). Many researchers (e.g., Silva-Corvalán 1994, 2012, 2018; Valdés 2001, 2005) have found that these speakers show a very diverse language proficiency depending on their individual and familial background, and the order of language acquisition (simultaneous bilinguals are exposed to both languages from birth, while sequential bilinguals have started to acquire one of the two languages first) which could lead them to fall along a "bilingual continuum." As Valdés (2001: 41) illustrates it, a heritage speaker may be dominant in Language A with little

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1   For the purpose of this article, I use the acronym "HS(S)" to refer to the heritage speakers (of Spanish) in the United States. I will later introduce the acronym "HLL" to allude to heritage language learners specifically, i.e., those heritage speakers who are also language students at any learning institution.

or no proficiency in Language B and vice versa or be proficient in both to a greater or lesser extent, closer or further from a balance, respectively. Hence, some speakers might be considered native while others can say just a few words in the minority language. This heterogeneity regarding our potential heritage students is one of the main challenges that HL instructors must face in the classroom (Schwartz 2001; Van Deusen-Scholl 2003).

There are three phenomena related to language acquisition that have traditionally explained this bilingual continuum. First, we could find some cases of "incomplete acquisition," in which speakers have not been able to fully acquire their home language, usually because they started school or they migrated from another country and they suddenly entered in a rigid English-speaking environment, abruptly decreasing the use of their original first language (Potowski, Jegerski, and Morgan-Short 2009). Secondly, we could observe cases of "attrition," either independently or in addition to incomplete acquisition. Linguistic attrition refers to a language loss suffered by those speakers who had already acquired certain grammatical features (Montrul 2002; Potowski et al. 2009). Lastly, Spanish speakers may have acquired a "contact variety" from the previous generation, already affected by inner grammatical modifications and by the influence of English (Lipski 2015; Silva-Corvalán 1994; Potowski et al. 2009).

The first two scenarios could explain a grammar simplification as the one documented in the canonical study by Silva-Corvalán (1994) in Los Angeles. This "incompleteness" often relates to an erosion of the tense, mood, and aspect structures (Montrul 2002; Silva-Corvalán 1994, 2018). However, some scholars argue that what these speakers know is not an incomplete version of the minority language, but precisely a simplified version that is *completely* acquired (Otheguy and Zentella 2012, but contrast with Silva-Corvalán 2018). For instance, Pascual y Cabo and Rothman (2012) state that the variety learned by some heritage speakers is completely acquired and internally coherent, although affected by input that has already undergone a process of attrition from previous generations and other contact phenomena. It is their bilingual experience that makes heritage speakers' competence "different" from the monolingual precedent, but not "incomplete" (451), a term that tends to imply an apparent deficiency[2] from these speakers (452).

The third phenomenon is in fact that Spanish in the United States is a "contact variety" (Potowski et al. 2009: 538-539). Apart from the myriad of Hispanic dialects that individuals could learn depending on their own national origin (although the Mexican variety is predominant), Lipski (2015) underscores

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2 The deficit perspective is a sensitive matter that should be carefully addressed in heritage language pedagogy. As Sánchez-Muñoz (2016) argues, heritage speakers have internalized linguistic "trauma" during their lives due to the critics received for the way they speak each language (207). In her view, HL classes should validate the students' vernacular and non-standard varieties and help them develop linguistic confidence.

the influence that English exerts on the Spanish varieties in the United States. In this regard, Potowski (2005, 2008) differentiates between borrowings (morphological and phonological adaptations from the donor language to the recipient one, e.g., *to watch*>"guachar"), calques (morphological or syntactic imitations from the other language, e.g., *to call back*>"llamar para atrás"), and semantic extensions (the addition of one meaning to an already existing Spanish word which did not have it previously, e.g., *to apply*>"aplicar [a un puesto laboral]").

Another paradigmatic trait is code-switching, a pragmatic-discourse conduct displayed by speakers in bilingual contexts based on the juxtaposition or alternance of codes (languages or linguistic systems) within the same conversation, from one sentence to another or even within the same sentence (Poplack 1980; Potowski 2005). As Gumperz (1982) points out, there are important motivations behind the bilingual speakers' use of this strategy (e.g., to reiterate a message, to quote a third person, to mark interjections, etc.). In addition, we can also find examples of accommodation and dialectal leveling, situations in which speakers with different dialects living in the same community choose to utilize those terms that facilitate comprehension, sometimes adopting English borrowings (Lipski 2015; Otheguy and Zentella 2012; Potowski 2005, 2008).

It is yet to be thoroughly explored to what extent these diverse processes could also affect pragmatics and speech acts. As it happens to morphosyntax, phonetics, or lexis, the pragmatic acquisition may follow a singular path and should be studied by itself. The main and most relevant studies in Spanish HL pragmatic competence usually relate to the speakers' tendency to produce overt subjects (Lapidus and Otheguy 2005; Otheguy and Zentella 2012; Silva-Corvalán 2012) and code-switching (Lipski 2005; Poplack 1980), but the practical application of these matters to the classroom is not so clear yet (although see Carvalho 2012 for some ideas to bring code-switching to the classroom, and see O. García 2009: ch. 3; Prada 2021 for translanguaging).

To date, Spanish heritage pragmatics pedagogy has focused on forms of address (*tú* vs. *usted*), discourse markers, metapragmatic awareness, politeness, and speech acts, and how these speakers' contact situation affects their communication style (Gironzetti 2021; Showstack and Wilson 2020; Xiao-Desai 2019). In the following section, I will elaborate on what has been published in relation to speech acts.

Current Literature on Heritage Language Speech Acts

Pragmatic competence has been described as "the ability to use language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context" (Thomas 1983: 92). Focusing on L2 pedagogy, Bardovi-Harlig (2013) defines it as "how learners come to know how-to-say-what-to-whom-when" (68-69). Within pragmatics, speech acts have been traditionally related to the

concept of the illocutionary force, i.e., the goals and purposes that a speaker aims to achieve by saying what they say, to the extent that "speaking a language is performing speech acts" (Searle 1969: 16). While the classic taxonomy provided by authors such as Austin (1962) or Searle (1975) intended to develop an inclusive classification of speech acts, L2 teaching and research have narrowed the scope and focused on those acts that are "expressions that carry out a communicative task, such as requests, invitations, refusals, and compliments" (Bachelor and Barros García 2019: 24; see also Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan 2010 for a recent compilatory volume on pragmatics and speech acts, and its relevance toward communicative competence and L2 learning).

Nevertheless, while relevant in L2 pedagogy as several scholars have demonstrated (e.g., Félix-Brasdefer and Cohen 2012; Koike 2008; Taguchi and Roever 2017), some authors hesitate about the need of teaching pragmatics to heritage language learners (HLLs). The reason behind it is that these students are expected to come to class with an already high proficiency in pragmatics (Barros García and Bachelor 2018: 165; Gironzetti 2021: 74, Showstack 2016). For instance, Taguchi et al. (2017) found that learners with a heritage background outperformed their L2 peers in both comprehension and production of pragmatic expressions. Consequently, they affirm that HL speakers have an "advantage" in pragmatic competence over the non-native speakers in the same course level (29). Even though these authors studied the competence of Chinese students, it may not be very different in the case of Spanish. Table 1 provides a general overview of the research conducted on Spanish HL speech acts in the last two decades.

Table 1. Overview of recent publications on Spanish HL speech acts

	Participants	**Region**	**Speech Act**	**Assessment Method**
Pinto & Raschio (2007)	22 native speakers of Spanish; 40 native speakers of English; 21 heritage speakers of Spanish enrolled in advanced, upper-division university courses	California and Mexico	Requests	Written DCT (online)

Pinto & Raschio (2008)	22 native speakers of Spanish; 40 native speakers of English; 21 heritage speakers of Spanish enrolled in advanced, upper-division university courses	California and Mexico	Complaints	Written DCT (online)
Elias (2015)	9 heritage speakers of Spanish (2nd-generation Mexican descendants), 8 advanced and 1 intermediate according to a DELE proficiency test	Across the United States	Refusals to invitations	Open role plays; Retrospective verbal report
Showstack (2016)	21 heritage speakers of Spanish enrolled in intermediate university Spanish courses; 21 L2 learners of Spanish enrolled in intermediate university Spanish courses; 7 native speakers of Spanish	Kansas	Apologies	Written DCT; Written questionnaire on their experiences with apologies
Barros García and Bachelor (2018)	18 heritage speakers of Spanish scoring intermediate-high on a placement exam following ACTFL standards; 16 L2 learners of Spanish enrolled in second semester college-level Spanish	Midwest	Requests	Written DCT (before and after the semester); Oral DCT (before and after the semester)
Bachelor and Barros García (2019)	39 heritage speakers of Spanish enrolled in Spanish 200-level courses or above; 23 L2 learners of Spanish enrolled in beginner L2 Spanish courses	Midwest	Compliments	Multiple-choice DCT (before and after the semester)

In one of the first speech acts studies in this century that included Spanish heritage speakers, Pinto and Raschio (2007) worked on the degree of directness and the number of downgraders to mitigate the force of the requests used by native speakers of Spanish (NSS) from Mexico, native speakers of English

(NSE) from California, and heritage speakers of Spanish (HSS). The latter were undergraduate students who were taking advanced courses in Spanish linguistics and who defined Spanish as their first language. Using a written Discourse Completion Task (DCT),[3] they found that directness was more frequent in NSS (although indirect requests were the most popular choice in both cases), whereas NSE used more downgraders. Heritage speakers displayed characteristics typical from both groups.

These results coincide with previous studies that pursue a cross-cultural analysis among native speakers of both languages. In fact, Spanish and English seem to be opposed in the way that both languages mark politeness (Pinto, 2005: 2). Ballesteros Martín's (2001) contrasted Spaniards and British and found out that the former ones tend to favor positive politeness (by joking, exaggerating, being optimistic…) whereas the latter ones align with negative politeness (by minimizing imposition, apologizing, being pessimistic…). C. García (1989), on her part, studied the contrast between Venezuelans and Americans. She found that the English speakers in her study favored giving options to the hearer and not imposing, whereas the Spanish speakers preferred to sound friendly. Both authors conclude that Spanish speakers tend to adopt more direct strategies and fewer downgraders, something that might be perceived by English speakers as too imposing.

To the extent that HSS showed pragmatic features from the other English and Spanish speakers assessed, Pinto and Raschio (2007) conclude that these speakers exhibited a "unique" request style between both monolingual groups. The fact that they lived in an English-dominant culture influenced their Spanish as they tended to imitate the pragmatic speech conventions of the English speakers, similar to what occurs at the morphosyntactic, semantic, and lexical levels (150). Therefore, this might indicate that pragmatic competence could experience analogous cross-linguistic phenomena as the ones described in the previous section for other linguistic subfields in heritage language acquisition.

In a subsequent study with similar participants, Pinto and Raschio (2008) focused on how HSS produced complaints. They examined semantic formulas, downgraders, upgraders, and the number of words used between NSE, NSS from Mexico, and HSS. As in their previous work, they found that HSS showed a pragmalinguistic conduct that imitated to some extent both monolingual groups. Heritage speakers behaved akin to NSE in the use of justification of the speaker over other semantic formulas such as openers and threats, which were more frequent in NSS. On the contrary, HSS used more complaining utterances

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3 DCTs consist of short descriptions of different communicative scenarios followed by a blank space for the test-takers to write an appropriate reaction to it (Pinto and Raschio 2008: 228). Other methods employed in speech acts assessment are role plays, verbal reports, and observations in a naturalistic setting (see Taguchi and Roever 2017: ch. 4 for some considerations on these data collection techniques).

with no downgraders than NSE (240). In addition, the authors compared their heritage speakers to L2 learners from previous literature and suggested that both (1) tend to overcompensate for their lack of competence by using a larger number of words (verbosity), and (2) they move along a gradual pragmatic continuum where English and Spanish pragmatic conducts are located at each pole (241).

In Elias' (2015) study of refusals to invitations, the author observed nine heritage speakers of Mexican descent (second generation) born in different parts of the United States. She concluded that their pragmatic attitude coincided with previous research on refusals conducted in Argentina (C. García 2007), Peru (C. García 1992), and Venezuela (C. García 1999), despite mixed reactions towards insistence after the initial refusal, a response considered acceptable in most of the Spanish cultures but not in English (Elias 2015: 21). As those Spanish mono-linguals, HSS opted for indirect refusal strategies during an assessment based on different role-play scenarios. The researcher also added a retrospective verbal report to test the participants' self-evaluation of these assessed contexts. This method led her to identify that her students were aware of pragmatic differences between the Anglo and Hispanic cultures that surrounded them, as this was something that they had to deal with daily. Along with the reported similarities between Spanish monolinguals' and heritage speakers' refusals, these findings suggest that the latter are competent in Spanish pragmatics even though their input in this language is limited.

Further, Showstack (2016) contrasted apologies production between HSS, intermediate L2 Spanish learners, and first-generation Spanish-speaking immigrants living in Kansas. She found that HLLs' apologies were much closer to the Spanish monolinguals than to the L2 learners. Although they did share some similarities, the author reaches the conclusion that HLLs may have a metapragmatic awareness capability that differs from that of their L2 peers. Moreover, her participants showed more interest in learning the local pragmatic conduct rather than those belonging to other Spanish-speaking countries, as they wanted to be able to successfully communicate with their family and community.

Up to this point, we can summarize that HSS show a pragmatic knowledge highly influenced by the two languages that are present in their communities. Taguchi and Roever (2017) call this phenomenon a "hybrid pragmatic system" (267). We have seen as well that, even if they differ from monolinguals, HLLs start from an advantage point in relation to their L2 counterparts. But what happens if HSS receive explicit instruction in pragmatics in the classroom setting?

Barros García and Bachelor (2018) conducted a study on requests with higher education students in the Midwest, including three groups: HLLs, a beginner L2 experimental group, and a beginner L2 control group. They measured their pragmatic ability through two DCTs, one written and one oral. During the semester, the students in the first two groups attended three pragmatic lessons on request strategies in different formality and imposition

situations, and the three groups took both tests again at the end of the course. The researchers discovered that, while the L2 group did take advantage of the explicit pragmatic instruction in comparison to the control group, the HLLs not only did not improve their pre-test results, but these lowered after the semester. This outcome, along with the fact that HLLs had not shown negative pragmatic transfer, makes them conclude that explicit teaching could not only have been unnecessary but also counterproductive.

Lastly, Bachelor and Barros García (2019) reached similar findings when focusing on compliments. In this case, they used four groups: intermediate HL and beginner L2 experimental groups, and intermediate HL and beginner L2 control groups. After three lessons during the semester consisting of explanations of compliment sentences and video clips analysis, the Multiple-Choice DCT pre-test and post-test that they designed didn't show much improvement from the HLLs, suggesting that this group already had a high pragmatic competence at least at the Spanish 200 level or above. For this reason, they reaffirmed that, while they encourage teaching pragmatics to L2 learners, pragmatic lessons may not be necessary for HL students.

Although NSE, L2 Spanish learners, NSS, and HLLs were considered, the aforementioned Pinto and Raschio's (2007, 2008) studies focused on the contrast between the last two groups. Therefore, they found that HLLs experienced some pragmatic influence from English that prevented them from becoming native-like proficient, but this may not suffice to defend the teaching of pragmatics to this group. As critiqued by Bachelor and Barros García (2019), this relatively lower proficiency turns into a benefit when compared to L2 students (26), and so, intermediate and advanced HLLs could be pragmatically competent enough to skip instruction in this area.

One Step Further: Sociolinguistic Issues and Study Abroad

The studies explored in the last section lead us to think that HSS generally show a degree of pragmatic knowledge that situates them at some point beyond the L2 learners, but still behind monolingual speakers. Hence, lower communicative input may affect pragmatic competence in a similar fashion to other linguistic areas such as morphology, syntax, or lexicon. As it occurs with these fields, HLLs may require specialized pragmatic instruction that addresses their actual needs, although becoming less necessary sometimes. Nevertheless, we should still consider the role that the environment and the sociolinguistic context play in how HLLs learn pragmatics in contrast to the other linguistic disciplines, which would ultimately help us understand some of the conflicts depicted so far. Two major questions are posed below.

What Pragmatic "Dialect" Should We Teach (If Any)?

A tendency toward pragmatic overgeneralization might entail an inaccurate and misleading practice even when we are referring to the same language. Although some studies that focus on cross-cultural differences have generalized upon Spanish by choosing one of its dialects (e. g., Blum-Kulka et al. 1989b) or combined speakers from diverse Hispanic countries (e. g., Félix-Brasdefer 2003), differences between specific regions must also be taken into consideration (Félix-Brasdefer 2003; C. García 1996).

For instance, although the following three groups belong to a "positive politeness culture" (Elias 2015: 5; C. García 2007: 562), Venezuelan Spanish tends to favor positive politeness through solidarity and direct strategies, such as being direct or imposing when making an invitation (C. García 1999), whereas Peruvian and Argentinean Spanish prefer deference and respect toward the hearer (C. García 1992, 2007). Farr (2000) and Showstack and Wilson (2020: 463) also indicate that pragmatic differences arise even in the same geographical region, as it happens with the contrast between urban, rural, and indigenous populations in central Mexico. The plausibility of establishing national or even language-related pragmatic patterns based on short-scale experimentation constitutes a matter that deserves further discussion within the field, especially in the case of languages such as Spanish, with so many speakers, dialects, and geographical dispersion.

Moreover, I find it problematic to compare monolinguals' pragmatics (even from a concrete Spanish-speaking region) with the bilingual pragmatics in the United States. The latter could be deviating from the "norm" simply because they are following the pragmatic conventions of their own region, which is, in addition, a bilingual environment. This could explain the "uniqueness" that Pinto and Raschio (2007, 2008) refer to in their articles, and not a supposed deficiency in acquisition. In this case, another inconvenience must be considered: the pragmatic conducts of US Spanish speakers may also vary in different populations from large cities such as New York, Miami, or Los Angeles (Pinto and Raschio 2008: 242).

To the extent that HLLs are generally interested in communicating with their local community, as noticed in Showstack's (2016) article, the answer to the question of what pragmatic dialect we should teach is the local dialect. Taguchi and Roever (2017) insist on this matter as they argue that "pragmatic norms are co-constructed and locally negotiated" (274). Therefore, an exploration of the community's pragmatic features represents a necessary first step that must guide how HL pragmatics are brought to the classroom.

Regardless of the diatopic variation, there may still be contexts in which HLLs can take advantage of pragmatic instruction as well. In Taguchi et al.'s (2017) study, heritage speakers showed a lesser proficiency in formal and written

contexts, suggesting that their bilingual advantage, thanks to their early exposure to the language at home, decreases when measured in relation to the pragmatic functions required in other registers and domains, such as when they must communicate with instructors, university officers, or other professionals (30).

Heritage speakers don't receive this kind of input unless they participate in bilingual education programs and, for this reason, developing their formal language and expanding their communicative repertoire have usually been formulated as some of the goals for HL instruction (e.g., Gironzetti 2021; Potowski 2005; Valdés 2001). Hence, placement and diagnostic tests, already existing and essential tools in HL program design (see for example Beaudrie 2012; Fairclough 2012), must explore potential students' needs regarding pragmatics as much as they do in relation to grammar, vocabulary, or the contrast between their oral and written skills. Similar methods as the ones used for research may be useful for this purpose as well (e.g., role-plays, DCTs, etc.)

How Does Pragmatic Knowledge Evolve in an Immersive Context?

A good example of how individuals develop their pragmatic competence can be observed when exposed to the target language in a different country. Study abroad programs have been depicted as an ideal opportunity for students to learn pragmatics and speech acts (Schauer 2010; although cf. Barron 2003 for some difficulties and challenges that may hinder expected pragmatic development progression), and they can also help us analyze how heritage speakers' Spanish proficiency might be affected by being surrounded by pragmatic conducts in another language. Exposure to cultural practices during these academic programs is remarkably beneficial for pragmatic acquisition as these social circumstances can hardly be reproduced in a classroom setting (Taguchi and Roever 2017: 177-78).

Focusing on L2 pragmatics, Bachelor and Hernández's (2012) study found that Latin American students who had spent 2 years learning English in the United States had already experienced a noticeable pragmatic transfer from American English to their L1 Spanish when compared to the pragmatic strategies of American English monolinguals and Spanish monolinguals in their home countries. Therefore, they argue that spending time studying abroad is even more relevant to the acquisition of pragmatics than their level of grammatical competence (as long as they were competent in English to some degree), as the effects of pragmatic influence were assessed in relation to their Spanish proficiency, their native language (14-15).

This study can also inform HL pragmatic instruction. The findings illustrate the impact that a study abroad stay in a different language environment could have on L1 speakers, specifically when we attend to their pragmatic behavior. Consequently, this must invite us to reflect on how determinant the pragmatic

influx may be when, as we know, HSS have spent many years in the United States, if not their entire lives. It also accentuates the fact that, if the local pragmatic variety is the pedagogical target, as argued in the last subsection, then HSS may acquire it in a naturalistic fashion and not require explicit teaching in this regard.

Yet, some authors highlight the benefits of study abroad programs for this profile of students. Heritage learners may find in a foreign educational environment a good opportunity to contrast between the pragmatic practices that they learned at home and those from the host community (Showstack and Wilson 2020: 463), which will help them promote their metapragmatic and socio-cultural knowledge.

In summary, the sociolinguistic environment particularly influences pragmatic acquisition. As related throughout this section, immersion in a different region for an extended period may exert by itself a determining influence on a speaker to shift their pragmatic behavior toward the one of the local communities, acting as another possible setback regarding the necessity of explicitly addressing pragmatics in HL instruction. Furthermore, HLLs seem to be more interested in learning their own community practices rather than another one coming from a different territory. This matter leads us to consider that the Spanish spoken in the United States has different pragmatic varieties which are yet to be defined. Lastly, HLLs may indeed benefit from pragmatic instruction for those contexts and domains not usually experienced at home, as those from formal and academic situations, or as a strategy to stimulate metapragmatic and socio-cultural awareness.

Conclusion and Future Lines of Research

Pragmatics and speech acts show some similarities and differences when compared to morphology, syntax, and lexicon in HL acquisition. As in those fields, heritage speakers are influenced by their socio-cultural experiences, including the amount and type of input that they receive in the minority language and in which domains they use this language. On the other side, pragmatics and speech acts are extremely sensitive to context and specific interactions, and researchers must follow alternative methods for its study and analysis (e.g., DCTs, role plays, retrospective reports). To the extent that pragmatic competence plays an important role in developing successful communication (Félix-Brasdefer and Cohen 2012; Koike 2008; Thomas 1983), more studies in this regard should be conducted when applied to HL acquisition and pedagogy.

Apart from contrasting the pragmatic differences between monolingual speakers, L2 learners, and HLLs, it might be interesting to focus on how the US Spanish pragmatic behaviors diverge in different parts of the United States. This way, we could attempt to establish preliminary specific speech acts "dialects"

from large communities in cities such as Miami, New York, or Los Angeles, since "different communities tend to develop culturally distinct interactional styles" (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989a: 7). As Félix-Brasdefer (2020) notes, the intralingual variations of US Spanish are still among the under-explored areas of Spanish pragmatics (282); thus, the pragmatic norms in different regions may entail subtle variations highly influenced by the English language and practices (Pinto 2012; Pinto and Raschio 2008). A more careful exploration of speech acts behavior within concrete geographical areas would help improve and clarify the comparison among diverse types of students, and also what are the local varieties that are of their interest.

Additionally, it may be revealing to conduct some sociolinguistic studies that compare how the speech act systems diverge in different generations of speakers. This way, we could attempt to establish some sort of incomplete or simplified speech acts patterns inherited from the previous generation, similar to other disciplines measured in HL acquisition (e.g., Montrul 2002; Silva-Corvalán 1994, 2018). Analogous research should be promoted in the case of different linguistic domains and registers.

As observed in this paper, pragmatic instruction for HLLs, unlike their L2 peers, may be unnecessary as heritage speakers have already developed advanced speech acts practice and metapragmatic awareness as a result of their bilingual experience. Nevertheless, explicit teaching could be beneficial in the following cases: (1) when the students find themselves in a basic level of language proficiency (probably below the intermediate level), in which case they could benefit from L2 pedagogical practices; (2) in those contexts apart from the home domain to which HL students have little exposure, (3) in the event that they are interested in becoming familiar with the pragmatic strategies of a different community, either national or foreign; and (4) as a way to raise awareness of different pragmatic and socio-cultural practices. The diversity in the students' interests and needs corroborates once more the paramount role of placement and diagnostic tests in HL courses.

When exercised in a classroom setting (e.g., through reading or listening to dialogues, evaluating situations, role-playing, etc.; see Olshtain and Cohen 1991 for a more in-depth description of these teaching techniques), evidence has indicated that pragmatics shall not be presented as a set of rules to be learned since they are highly dependent on the context and the speech community. Conversely, lessons on pragmatics must recognize this fact and have the students reflect on their own practices, experience, and observations, since promoting metapragmatic awareness this way contributes to developing critical and cultural thinking in our heritage learners (Showstack 2016). As some authors maintain (Leeman 2018; Potowski 2005; Schwartz 2001; Van Deusen-Scholl 2003), individual, community, and cultural reflection are essential to the success of a HL program and the empowerment of the students. And I find that pragmatics,

deeply linked to sociocultural behavior, should find its way into the curricula in order to fulfill this demand.

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