
Bilingualism, Heritage Language Learners, and SLA Research: Opportunities Lost or Seized?

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In this article I invite a reconceptualization and expansion of the field of second language acquisition (SLA) by examining possible intersections between SLA and the area of language instruction currently referred to as the teaching of heritage languages. I discuss the ways in which the opportunity of broadening SLA-and-instruction research can be seized by current researchers so that it can address the most intractable educational problems involving language. Drawing from current research on bilingualism, I first describe the challenges of providing language instruction for heritage speakers and examine the bilingualism of these unique language learners. I then offer an overview of the questions raised by the study of heritage language learners. Finally, I describe communities of professional practice and existing disciplinary boundaries and conclude with a discussion of the ways in which the field of SLA can draw from other areas in order to affect the educational futures of language minority children around the world and, at the same time, contribute to our greater understanding of the human language faculty.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS ARTICLE IS TO invite a reconceptualization and expansion of the field of second language acquisition (SLA) by examining possible intersections between SLA and the area of language instruction currently referred to as the teaching of heritage languages. In proposing a reconceptualization of SLA, I am well aware of the existing disagreement within this field about the relationship between SLA and language pedagogy. Some researchers (e.g., Crookes, 1997; Spolsky, 1990) consider that a relationship between these two areas is fundamental, while others (e.g., Sharwood Smith, 1994) view SLA as engaged in basic rather than applied research and in contributing, not to the teaching of language, but to the understanding of the workings of the human mind while following the methodological standards of quantitative-experimental scientific

inquiry. My own position concurs with the former. I agree with Ortega's injunctions (this issue) about the role and purpose of research: (a) that research should be inspired by considerations of societal needs, and (b) that in carrying out research we should embrace with genuine concern questions of "for whom" and "for what."

In proposing a reconceptualization of SLA, I argue that an intersection between the area of heritage language teaching and SLA responds to Cook's (2002) proposal to researchers to alter the perspective of SLA by including second language (L2) users. I also suggest that a meaningful connection between these two areas would begin to address recent criticisms about the narrowness of SLA (Block, 2003; Firth & Wagner, 1997; Johnson, 2004) by focusing on the complexities of heritage language speakers within whose lives commonplace concepts such as *mother tongue*, *first language*, *second language*, *dominant language*, and *home language* become problematic. I maintain that the term *Second Language Acquisition*, as Block (2003) has argued, has "built-in

assumptions about monolingualism and separable L1 [first language] and L2 competences" (p. 44). These assumptions have not allowed the field to engage in the examination of instructed language acquisition beyond L2 learners or to address the most challenging issues and problems that arise in various educational contexts for the most vulnerable minority language speakers around the world. A reconceptualized field of SLA, as I envision it in this article, would examine language learning in various language education contexts and view the language education field as going beyond beginning, intermediate, and advanced L2 instruction and as involving several types of language acquisition/development as well, such as acquisition of second dialects, acquisition of a standard language, acquisition or development of specialized language registers and styles, and acquisition of written language. I strongly believe that this reconceptualization has the potential to allow the field of SLA to address today's most intractable educational problems involving language.

The article is organized as follows. I first describe the challenges of providing language instruction for heritage speakers and examine the bilingualism of these unique language learners. In doing so, I draw on a bilingualist perspective of L2 and heritage language acquisition that emerges from the study of bilingualism and has been advocated by some in SLA (notably, Cook, 1992, 2002). I argue, however, that the term *L1/L2 user* is a better choice than *L2 user* as a synonym for the heritage language learner. I then offer an overview of the questions raised for the field of SLA by this particular educational endeavor. Finally, I describe communities of professional practice and existing disciplinary boundaries and conclude with a discussion of the ways in which the opportunity of broadening the field of SLA can be seized by current researchers so that it can directly affect the educational futures of language minority children around the world and, at the same time, contribute to our greater understanding of the human language faculty.

HERITAGE LANGUAGE SPEAKERS: PROBLEMS OF DEFINITION

In recent years, the term *heritage language* has been used broadly to refer to nonsocietal and nonmajority languages spoken by groups often known as linguistic minorities. Those members of linguistic minorities who are concerned about the study, maintenance, and revitalization of their minority languages have been referred to as *her-*

itage language students. Such minorities include populations who are either indigenous to a particular region of a present-day nation-state (e.g., Aborigines in Australia, speakers of Breton in France, Kurds in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq) or populations that have migrated to areas other than their own regions or nations of origin (e.g., Mexicans in the United States, Turks in Germany, Moroccans in Spain, Pakistanis in England). Minority languages or heritage languages include indigenous languages that are often endangered and in danger of disappearing (Scots Gaelic, Maori, Romani) as well as world languages that are commonly spoken in many other regions of the world (Spanish in the United States, Arabic in France).¹ Because these speakers may acquire and use two or more languages in order to meet their everyday communicative needs in such settings, they have been referred to as *circumstantial bilinguals/multilinguals* (Valdés & Figueroa, 1994) and contrasted with *elite* or *elective bilinguals/multilinguals* who learn a L2 in classroom settings and have few opportunities to use the language for genuine communication. Circumstantial bilingualism/multilingualism is generally characteristic of populations who occupy subaltern positions in particular settings, whether they are indigenous minorities in established nation states (e.g., Bretons, Samis, Kurds) or other border crossers such as migrants, refugees, nomads, and exiles.

As the work carried out by Fishman (1964, 1985) has made evident, minority language communities in the United States have been deeply committed to maintaining their community languages. In spite of strong assimilative pressures, these communities have nevertheless established language programs (e.g., Saturday schools) where children are expected to develop existing heritage language proficiencies. Within the last few years, moreover, individuals concerned about the erosion and disappearance of minority languages have turned to educational institutions in the hope that formal classroom instruction, by revitalizing and developing the home languages of young speakers of indigenous and immigrant languages, will be able to retard language shift. Fishman (2001) has argued that for these individuals and communities it is the historical and personal connection to the heritage language that is salient and not the actual proficiency of individual students. Armenian, for example, would be considered a heritage language for American students of Armenian ancestry even if such students were themselves English-speaking monolinguals. In terms of strengthening and

preserving Armenian in this country, such heritage students would be seen as having an important personal connection with the language and an investment in maintaining the language for future generations. Their motivation for studying Armenian would thus contrast significantly with that of typical students of foreign language.

I have argued elsewhere (Valdés, 2000a, 2000b, 2001) that the foreign language teaching profession currently uses the term *heritage student* in a restricted sense that is distinct from the broad sense of the term outlined above. In the foreign language teaching profession, the term designates a student of language who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken. The student may speak or merely understand the heritage language and be, to some degree, bilingual in English and the heritage language. This definition is distinct from the scenario described above where individuals work with endangered indigenous or immigrant languages that are not regularly taught in school (e.g., as in the case of Armenian). This difference has to do with actually developed functional proficiencies in the heritage languages. Moreover, for foreign language teaching professionals, the term refers to a group of young people who are different in important ways from English-speaking monolingual students who have traditionally undertaken the study of foreign languages in U.S. schools and colleges. This need to distinguish between the two groups of students arose in the Spanish-teaching profession during the 1970s. At that time, the terms *native speakers of Spanish*, *quasi native speakers of Spanish*, and *bilingual* students were common. A dissatisfaction with these labels led to increased use of other terms such as *home background speakers* (as used in Australia) and *heritage language speakers* (as used in Canada). Members of the profession in the United States are currently engaged in examining the use of the term *heritage language student* as they research the various types of students who have a family background in which a non-English language is, or was, spoken.

LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION AND HERITAGE SPEAKERS IN THE UNITED STATES

The use of the term *heritage student* in the restricted sense adopted within the foreign language teaching profession is relatively new, and its use was not generalized until the publication of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (ACTFL, 1996). Up to that time, Spanish instructors were the only members of the foreign language teaching profession who had worked with

large numbers of students who already understood and spoke the language that they taught. They had been doing so since the early 1970s, in response to increasingly large numbers of Spanish heritage students who turned to already existing foreign language programs in language departments at the postsecondary level in the hope of developing their home languages. The large number of Spanish speakers entering the country undoubtedly was part of the trend that significantly affected the Spanish-teaching profession. College- and university-level faculty who had experience in teaching Spanish as a foreign language opened their doors to students who, in some cases, were more fluent in the language than they were, but who could not talk about the language using the terminology used in the teaching of traditional grammar. Individuals involved in teaching Spanish to such students in the classroom setting quickly discovered that these young people had a very difficult time learning grammar rules taught to foreign language students. Not only did they become confused by explanations of aspects of the language that they already knew (e.g., the difference between *ser* and *estar*), but they also refused to confine themselves to the limited vocabulary of the textbook. Because many Latino students who entered college had been schooled exclusively in English, they had no experience in reading and writing in Spanish. Worst of all—from the perspective of some faculty—they were often speakers of stigmatized varieties of Spanish (e.g., rural Mexican Spanish, rural Puerto Rican Spanish). There were no textbooks on the market that could adequately deal with the “problem,” and there was little agreement among Spanish-teaching professionals (most of whom had been trained in literature) about what to do and how to do it. The consensus, reflected in the textbooks of that period (e.g., Baker, 1966; Barker, 1972), was that bilingual hispanophone students were in need of remediation, of techniques and pedagogies that would help undo the damage that had been done at home.² The terms used during those years by the Spanish-teaching profession to refer to these students—*native speakers of Spanish*, *quasi native speakers of Spanish*, or *bilingual* students—reflected this deficit orientation. As mentioned earlier, with time, other more positive terms such as *home background speakers* and *heritage language speakers* gained currency.

Since the early 1970s, the teaching of commonly and uncommonly taught foreign languages has greatly expanded. Interest in heritage students and improvements in educational approaches and resources began in the late 1990s

and continue today. Increased attention to the role of formal instruction in maintaining heritage languages has come about as a consequence of the events of September 11th, which brought to the nation's attention the strategic importance of "foreign" languages. As a result, the intelligence and military communities (Muller, 2002) have expressed a growing interest in expanding the nation's linguistic resources by both teaching non-English languages and by maintaining the heritage or home languages of the 47 million individuals who reported speaking both English and a non-English language in the latest census in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). For many individuals concerned about language resources, the development of strategic languages can only be brought about by expanding the mission of foreign language departments to include the maintenance and expansion of the varieties of non-English languages currently spoken by immigrants, refugees, and their children.

Professional activities focusing on the teaching of heritage languages have increased enormously. The American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP) initiated its *Professional Development Series Handbooks for Teachers K-16* with *Volume 1: Spanish for Native Speakers* (AATSP, 2000). The National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) in cooperation with the AATSP developed a language-based resource, *Recursos para la Enseñanza y el Aprendizaje de las Culturas Hispanas*, known as REACH (<http://www.nflc.org/REACH/>), for teachers of Spanish to heritage speakers. The NFLC also developed *LangNet*, a searchable database that includes Spanish and contains numerous resources for the teaching of heritage languages. In collaboration with the AATSP, the NFLC also conducted a survey of Spanish language programs for native speakers (Ingold, Rivers, Tesser, & Ashby, 2002). The Center for Applied Linguistics and the NFLC launched the Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages (<http://www.cal.org/heritage/>). The Alliance sponsored two national conferences, in 1999 and 2002, on the teaching of heritage languages in which many members of the Spanish-teaching profession participated. The first conference led to the publication of the volume *Heritage Languages in America* (Peyton, Ranard, & McGinnis, 2001), in which much attention was given to the teaching of uncommonly taught languages, and also to the publication of a special issue of the *Bilingual Research Journal* focusing on heritage languages (Wiley & Valdés, 2000). The second conference led to the publication of a re-

port on research priorities on the teaching of heritage languages entitled *Directions in Research: Intergenerational Transmission of Heritage Languages* (Campbell & Christian, 2003).

THE BILINGUALISM OF AMERICAN HERITAGE LANGUAGE STUDENTS

American heritage language students include children of native American background, foreign-born immigrants who came to the United States at a young age, the native-born children of foreign-born immigrants, and occasionally the native-born children of native-born individuals of immigrant background. The experiences of these heritage speakers are similar. They speak or hear the heritage language spoken at home and in their immediate communities, but, with few exceptions (e.g., Foreign Language Elementary School programs, Bilingual Education), they receive their formal education entirely in English. They receive no instruction in the heritage language during the elementary or secondary grades and, as a result, become literate only in English.

Heritage Learners as L1/L2 Users

In the last several years, Vivian Cook, a very distinguished researcher in the area of SLA, has made a strong case for the study of what he refers to as *multicompetence* (Cook, 1992, 2002). He has argued that it is of particular importance for the SLA field to engage in the study of the *L2 user*, an individual who has knowledge of and uses a L2, rather than to engage in the exclusive study of the *L2 learner*, an individual whose task of acquisition is seen as not yet finished. Drawing from research on bilingualism, he has pointed out, moreover, that L2 users are, by definition, different from monolingual speakers. Rejecting the view that the ultimate state of L2 learning is to pass undetected among native speakers, Cook (2002) emphasized that "the minds, languages and lives of L2 users are different from those of monolinguals," and that "L2 users are not failures because they are different" (p. 9). In suggesting the term *L2 user* and rejecting the designation *bilingual*, Cook (2002) pointed out that the term has "contradictory definitions and associations in both popular and academic usage" (p. 4).

Although I do not disagree with Cook about the contradictory definitions of the term *bilingual*, I nevertheless argue that the term *L2 user* is not entirely appropriate for the description of heritage language learners who may, at different points in their lives, exhibit various degrees of

language expertise and language affiliation in spite of their language inheritance (Leung, Harris, & Rampton, 1997; Rampton, 1997). Even though the term *L2 user* implies the continued use of the L1, and even though recent work on L2 users (Cook, 2003a) is clearly concerned about the relationship of the L1 to the L2 and of the L2 to the L1, it is my position that the term *L2 user* still tends to emphasize and focus attention primarily on the L2. In this article, I therefore use the term *L1/L2 user* interchangeably with *heritage student* to describe heritage learners, many of whom acquire the L2 in a combination of naturalistic and instructed settings.

The L1/L2 User Continuum

Although absolutely equivalent abilities in two languages are theoretically possible, except for rare geographical and familial accidents, individuals seldom have access to two languages in exactly the same contexts in every domain of interaction. L1/L2 users do not have the opportunity to use two languages to carry out the exact same functions with all individuals with whom they interact or to use their languages intellectually to the same degree. They thus do not develop identical strengths in both languages. Heritage L1/L2 users are bilingual individuals who manifest very different strengths in their two languages and who may best be thought of as falling along a continuum of different types of bilinguals such as that presented in Figure 1.

In Figure 1, different size fonts indicate different language strengths in language A and language B for different L1/L2 users. A recently arrived immigrant, for example, might be represented as Ab (dominant in the immigrant language and in the beginning stages of learning English). Similarly, a fourth-generation L1/L2 user could be represented as Ba (having acquired English as a L1, dominant in English, and still retaining some proficiency in the immigrant language). In minority language communities all

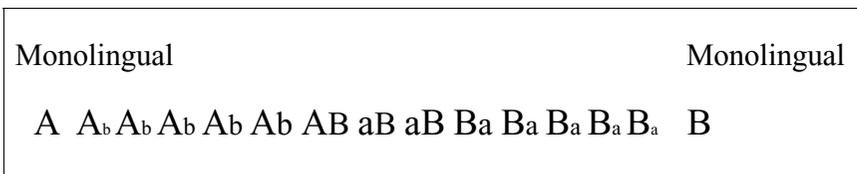
over the world, such different types of L1/L2 users live together and interact with each other and with monolinguals on a daily basis, using one or the other of their two languages. L1/L2 users will fluctuate in their preference or perceived strengths in each language, depending on the nature of the interaction, the topic of discussion, the domain of activity, and the formality or the informality of the situation.

Heritage Learners (L1/L2 Users) as Speakers of Contact Varieties of Language

L1/L2 users are speakers of what is known in the field of bilingualism and sociolinguistics as *contact varieties of language*. Languages are said to be *in contact* (Weinreich, 1974) when they are used alternately by the same speakers to engage in communication. A Singaporean youngster, for example, who uses Chinese at home, English in school, Malay in the market place, and both Chinese and English with his same-age friends, lives in a setting in which Malay, English, and Chinese are in contact. The young speaker himself is considered to be the locus of language contact.

Contact varieties of language have developed in very different types of settings all over the world, most frequently as a result of a socio-historical background involving nation-building, conquest, colonization, and immigration. Examples include the so-called *New Englishes* (spoken around the world in postcolonial settings (e.g., Indian English); the varieties of Spanish spoken by Quechua, Aymara, and Maya bilinguals in Latin America; as well as Canadian French; Louisiana French; Chicano English; and varieties of U.S. Spanish. In the United States, all non-English languages spoken by indigenous or immigrant minorities as well as by political refugees, exiles, and professional elites are in contact with English in that these non-English languages are used alternately with English by the same speakers. As is the case with all languages in contact—depending

FIGURE 1
A Continuum of L1/L2 Users



on a variety of social factors—the results of such contact may include language shift (the abandonment of the regular use of the non-English language) as well as development of ways of speaking that are different from those used by monolingual speakers in countries of origin. In such settings, bilingual individuals develop a special bilingual communication mode (Grosjean, 1997), used primarily with other bilinguals, that is characterized by widespread borrowing of lexical items as well as by code-switching, the alternating use of two languages at word, phrase, or clause levels. Over time, contact varieties of language are often characterized by loss, addition, and replacement of linguistic features.

The Knowledge Systems of L1/L2 Users: A Bilingualist Perspective

By definition, L1/L2 users have internalized two implicit linguistic knowledge systems, one in each of their languages. Whether they acquired the societal language and the heritage language simultaneously as infants or sequentially as young children or as adolescents, L1/L2 users utilize their two languages on an everyday basis with interlocutors who are both monolingual in each of their two languages as well as bilingual in both languages. Moreover, as Grosjean (1985) and Cook (1997) have argued, L1/L2 users are not two monolinguals in one, but rather specific speaker-hearers who have acquired their two languages in particular contexts and for particular reasons. Viewed from a bilingualist rather than a monolingualist perspective, L1/L2 users have acquired two knowledge systems that they use in order carry out their particular communicative needs, needs that may be quite unlike those of monolingual native speakers who use a single language in all communicative interactions.

Also arguing for a bilingualist perspective on L1/L2 users, Grosjean (1997) contended that, at any given moment, bilinguals are in states of activation of their languages and language processing mechanisms that are either monolingual or bilingual. Depending on the base language used and the interlocutors involved, a L1/L2 user will be either in (a) a monolingual mode in language A, (b) a monolingual mode in language B, or (c) a bilingual mode. While the language user is in one or the other of the monolingual modes, the other language is deactivated to some extent and transfer between the two languages is reduced. While the speaker is in the bilingual mode, however, because both languages are active, transfer between the two languages as well as the tendency to code-

switch is evident to a greater degree. Grosjean argued that, since language behavior in different modes most probably reflects how bilinguals process their two languages, research on bilingual competence and performance must take into account language mode.

The notion of the native speaker—especially as applied to bilingual individuals—is neither simple, obvious, nor straightforward (Davis, 1991, 2003). From some perspectives (e.g., Coulmas, 1981), potential informants can only be speakers “whose first language it is” (p. 4). According to this view, there is a qualitative difference between a L1 and a L2. Other students of the concept of native speaker take an even more extreme position. Ballmer (1981), for example, argued that bilingual individuals are not native speakers of either of their languages. According to Kramsch (1997), “originally, native speakership was viewed as an uncontroversial privilege of birth. Those who were born into a language were considered its native speakers, with grammatical intuitions that non-native speakers did not have” (p. 363). Kramsch argued that a close examination of the concept reveals that it has often been linked to social class and to education. She maintained that the native-speaker norm that has been recognized by foreign language departments in the United States, for example, is that of “the middle-class, ethnically dominant male citizenry of nation-states” (p. 363). By implication, the language of non-middle-class citizens of such nations has been considered suspect.

Taking a slightly different perspective, Haugen (1970) contended that the native-speaker norm, even as a popular concept, is difficult to apply to most bilinguals:

To be natively competent in two languages would then mean to have had two childhoods, so that all the joys and frustrations of the fundamental period of life could penetrate one's emotional response to the simple words of the language. It would mean to have acquired the skills of reading and writing that go with two separate educational systems such as all literate societies now impose on their adolescents, or the corresponding rigorous forms of initiation and skill development that formed part of all nonliterate societies. It would mean to have two different identities, one looking at the world from one point of view, the other from another: it would mean sharing in the social forms, prejudices, and insights of two cultures. In short, it would mean being two entirely different people. (p. 225)

More important, is it perhaps not the case that all monolingual native speakers would be successful if measured against the norm of the educated

native speaker? It thus makes little sense to use a monolingual native-speaker norm to evaluate the competence of L1/L2 users. As Cook (1997) has argued, it is not clear why we should “ever compare two types of people in terms of a book-keeping exercise of profit and loss” (p. 294).

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE STUDY OF L1/L2 USERS

The greatest challenge facing the foreign language profession in teaching L1/L2 users who elect to maintain or develop their L1 in formal instructional settings is the design of instruction that is not only appropriate for their current and future needs but that is also based on coherent theories of instructed language acquisition for these particular groups of learners. Ideally, pedagogical approaches designed for L1/L2 users would be based on an understanding of the implicit linguistic knowledge systems of these learners and on a familiarity with the processes involved when speakers of such nondominant first languages attempt to develop or re-acquire these languages in formal instructional settings. At present, although we have some knowledge of the role of instruction in restructuring the interlanguages of L2 learners,³ we have no information about the role of formal instruction in restructuring or reshaping the knowledge systems of learners who are in many ways quite different from traditional classroom learners.

Identifying Key Differences among L1/L2 Users

Given the complexity of the bilingual experience and the fact that there are few L1/L2 users who are ambilingual, we can hypothesize that there are important differences in the implicit linguistic knowledge systems of various types of L1/L2 users who are grouped under the label *heritage speakers* in an academic context. A research agenda designed to support theories of the development/reacquisition of heritage languages that are acquired as L1s by these users, therefore, would need to begin by developing procedures for examining similarities and differences among individual heritage speakers of the same language as well as between categories of heritage speakers of different languages. These procedures would be directed to the development of typologies of heritage speakers that are potentially important for classroom instruction. What are needed are typologies that go beyond the traditional generational categorizations (first, second, third generation) of immigrant speakers commonly used in

sociolinguistic research as well as beyond other categorizations that have focused on recency of arrival, schooling, and access to the standard language (e.g., Valdés, 1995). For pedagogical purposes, useful classifications should be able to provide information about the linguistic proficiencies of L1/L2 users, the characteristics of their underlying implicit knowledge systems, and the differences among L1/L2 users of the same generation and background.

In order to provide adequate instruction for L1/L2 users, it is important to determine not only speaking fluency in general, but also the number of registers and varieties that speakers can produce and understand as well as their levels of literacy in the heritage language. Fine-grained categorizations are a necessary preliminary to the detailed study of both inter- and intraheritage learner variation in the various subsystems of their nondominant language. Assessment procedures are needed that adapt or draw directly from methodologies used in the study of fossilization in L2 learners (Han, 2003) and that include oral and written proficiency tests, dialect- and register-sensitive cloze procedures (Gibbons & Ramirez, 2004), and grammaticality or acceptability judgments. A focus on the linguistic forms frequently examined by L2 researchers might be especially useful in comparing L1/L2 users with L2 learners and in examining the role of instruction in the development/reacquisition of heritage languages in classroom contexts.

Identifying the Communal Language

It is clear that, in order to understand the knowledge systems of L1/L2 users, an analytical model is needed that is capable not only of “tracing changes in relative L1 competence over time, after immigrants have arrived in the L2 environment” (Kenny, 1996, p. 6), but also of providing information about what Mufwene (2001) referred to as the *communal language* to which they have been exposed as well as the *I-Language* (an individual speaker’s idiolect). A speaker who has been raised in a community within which the communal language is a contact variety of that language, for example, will produce speech that may appear flawed from the perspective of an urban or prestige monolingual variety. Such seemingly flawed speech, however, might nevertheless be generated by a fully acquired linguistic system that has not undergone attrition. As Kenny (1996) argued, in understanding language loss or attrition, researchers must go beyond a structural approach that is limited to the identification and analysis of

linguistic elements that appear to be either different or missing when compared to the speech of normative L1 speakers. In immigrant communities, the various incoming varieties of the heritage language may have converged to produce a new dialect through processes involving accommodation, the development of interdialectalisms, leveling, and simplification (Penny, 2000). The resulting communal language may have undergone a series of both downward and upward changes through the imitation of both the features used by high prestige speakers as well as features used by less privileged speakers who nevertheless enjoy covert prestige. Features that were stigmatized in the original home country, for example, may spread among speakers who need particular “street credibility” (Penny, 2000, p. 69). In addition, moreover, through its contact with the dominant language, the communal language may have also undergone contact-induced language change (Thomason, 2001; Thomason & Kaufman, 1988) through lexical and structural borrowing. Finally, changes may have taken place in the communal language that, while originating in the monolingual environment, may have been accelerated because of contact with the dominant language.⁴

TOWARDS A THEORY OF HERITAGE LANGUAGE REACQUISITION/DEVELOPMENT

Briefly stated, the real world problem in the case of L1/L2 users who elect to study their L1 formally is designing instruction that is appropriate to their current and future needs and goals. In order to design appropriate instruction, it is necessary to determine which students—by formally studying their L1—are involved in one or more of the following processes: (a) acquisition of incompletely acquired features of the L1 as a “second” language, (b) first language (re-)acquisition involving the acquisition of features that have undergone attrition, (c) acquisition of a second dialect (D2 acquisition), (d) development of discourse skills in the written and oral language including the acquisition of formal registers and styles (R2 acquisition) and literacy, and (e) expansion of receptive proficiencies into productive grammars.

Incomplete Acquisition of the Heritage Language

Some heritage speakers seeking formal instruction in their L1 may have incompletely acquired some features of the language. In her work on the Spanish of Los Angeles, for example, Silva-Corvalán (1994, 2003a, 2003b) reported on the Spanish of young children in Los Angeles who

at school age had not yet acquired the complete tense, aspect, and mood system of Spanish. Explanations she considered include (a) the limited access to Spanish language input, given that in Los Angeles the use of Spanish in the home appears to be much less frequent among both second- and third-generation speakers than among first-generation speakers; and (b) the extended, intensive contact with the societal language in the school context, which appears to interrupt the normal process of L1 acquisition in later childhood. Heritage language children move through the same stages of acquisition at an early stage as do youngsters in monolingual settings, although at possibly a different rate and, once the L2 becomes dominant, their use of the L1 decreases significantly. Silva-Corvalán argued that, without L1-based school support, such children would not completely acquire the linguistic system of the language as used by normative L1 speakers.

The use of a simplified verb system (as well as the uneven control of the heritage language often made evident by the constant use of pauses, hesitations, and fillers) may not, however, indicate that the language has been incompletely acquired by a heritage speaker. What will not be immediately clear from superficial assessments is whether flawed production is due to interrupted acquisition, individual language attrition, or “full” acquisition of a contact variety of the heritage language that is now quite different from the varieties of the heritage language originally brought to the community.

A theory of instruction supporting the development/reacquisition of a nondominant L1 for such learners will require an understanding of how and whether the implicit systems of speakers who have incompletely acquired the heritage language, speakers whose heritage language has undergone attrition, and speakers of a heritage language that has undergone extensive change are alike or different. What needs to be explored is how these different systems—if indeed they are different—might be reshaped by formal instruction. In the case of incomplete acquisition, the instructional problem to be solved might involve, for example, the full acquisition of tense, aspect, and mood in the L1. Instructional approaches might, therefore, include L2 methodologies used in the teaching of both the oral and written language to L2 learners.

Reacquisition of Features after Attrition

In the case of language attrition (the erosion, decay, contraction, or obsolescence of a language), the process of reacquisition might be

quite different. Much attention, therefore, must be given to the study of suspected language attrition among heritage learners. What needs to be understood is both the process and the speed of attrition in individuals who are members of particular communities as well as the subsystems that undergo attrition. In a foundational article on language attrition, Anderson (1982) argued that language attrition researchers must take into account comprehension and production, uses of both oral and written language, traditional linguistic levels (i.e., phonology, morphology, syntax) as well as functions, domains of use, and discourse competencies of the speakers in question. Anderson maintained that for each linguistic feature examined, researchers must have what he terms a *baseline comparison* (p. 85); that is, they must have two types of normative data: (a) the normal use of particular features by fully competent speakers, and (b) the use of the features by the individuals being studied before they underwent language attrition. Anderson emphasized that a distinction must be made between *dysfunctional attrition*, which causes a reduction in communication, and *cosmetic attrition*, which involves the reduction of features that are socially valued but which does not interfere with communication.

Unfortunately, diagnosing attrition and distinguishing attrition from incomplete acquisition as well as from full acquisition of a contact variety of a language on the basis of language assessment procedures is not simple. The same features listed by Anderson to signal attrition (use of analytic vs. synthetic structures, use of lexical borrowings, convergence of syntactic form, cognate transfer, literal translation) could be indicative of all three types of conditions. In the case of language attrition, the goal of instruction is either reacquisition of the subsystems that have undergone attrition, or the reversal of ongoing attrition of particular subsystems and features, or both. One can conjecture that if attrition is caused by a removal from "the type and quantity of linguistic input and linguistic interaction necessary to maintain the full lexical, phonological, morphological, and syntactic distinctions that are made by fluent competent speakers of this language" (Anderson, 1982, p. 91), reversal of attrition would need to involve rich input and intensive interaction typical of monolingual linguistic environments. Without evidence to the contrary, one could not conclude that direct forms or form-focused instruction or other typical pedagogies used in L2 instruction would be particularly beneficial in the process of reacquisition or reversal of attrition. This is, however, an empirical question, and one that can only

be answered by examining the effects of different types of instruction designed to reverse attrition in a category of students who have been carefully identified as having undergone attrition in their heritage language.

Instruction for Heritage Speakers of Contact Varieties: D2 and R2 Acquisition

For the L1/L2 user who has fully acquired a communal language that has undergone extensive changes through its contact with other varieties of the same language and with the dominant language, the instructional problem to be solved is quite different. If the goal is for such speakers to acquire the normative monolingual variety through formal instruction, what needs to be understood is the process of D2 acquisition. These L1/L2 users are not involved in acquiring parts of a system that they have incompletely acquired, nor are they involved in reacquiring subsystems that have been lost. In this case, heritage speakers are involved in acquiring an additional variety of the same language. What they must learn is which features of the communal language correspond to the features of the normative monolingual varieties of the language and which features do not. A possible theory of D2 acquisition, for example, might parallel theories of L2 acquisition and propose that in acquiring D2s, learners move through a set of interdialect grammars until they reach the desired end state. In addition, if the goal of heritage language instruction is also for these D2 learners to develop reading and writing skills, literacy instruction would ideally be based on an understanding of the differences and similarities between literacy acquisition in a D2 and literacy acquisition in both a L1 and a L2.

If the goal of heritage language instruction for L1/L2 users who are acquiring a D2 is also for them to extend their repertoires to include styles and registers of the heritage language appropriate for communicating in academic or professional settings, instruction must be based on an understanding of the acquisition of additional registers by monolingual speakers who have not had access to contexts in which these particular registers are used. The instructional goal to be achieved in this case is the acquisition of additional registers (R2 acquisition), that is, a set of discourse practices that are directly tied to values and norms of a particular social group (Gee, 1990). As Gee also pointed out, however, particular discourse practices are difficult to acquire in classroom settings because learners may have little or no access to speakers who use these particular specialized

registers. In attempting to add such higher registers of their heritage language to their repertoires, L1/L2 users may attempt to produce these registers by transferring and adapting features of similar registers from their L2. A possible theory of R2 acquisition might, therefore, parallel theories of L2 and D2 acquisition and propose, as did Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci (1998), that in acquiring second or additional registers, learners move through a set of interregisters until they reach the desired end state. Clearly, in order to develop adequate and effective instruction for heritage learners whose goal it is to acquire additional varieties and registers of the heritage language, careful research must be carried out on the process of D2 and R2 acquisition in naturalistic settings as well as on the effects of different types of instruction on both of these processes.

Receptive and Productive Grammars

A final category of heritage speakers includes L1/L2 users who cannot or will not speak the heritage language although they are able to participate in interpersonal, face-to-face communication with bilingual individuals who speak to them in this language. These passive L1/L2 users exhibit strong receptive proficiencies in their heritage language, which, although limited, still exceed the receptive proficiencies acquired by beginning and even intermediate learners of a foreign language. At a minimum, receptive L1/L2 users offer evidence of having acquired what Clark (2003) referred to as *C-representations*, that is, a system of representations for comprehension of the language that allows them to parse the stream of speech into meaningful units. How this system is related to the productive system in the L1 and to the receptive and productive systems in the L2 is of central importance to the development of pedagogical approaches for developing the existing proficiencies of such speakers in a classroom setting. A theory of heritage language growth or development for such individuals must be based on a better understanding of comprehension and production grammars (Swain, Dumas, & Naiman, 1974). We need to understand (a) how and why these two types of knowledge systems develop independently, (b) how comprehension and production grammars are related, (c) whether the presence of comprehension grammars supports the acquisition of production grammars in specific ways, and (d) whether these individuals are more similar to L2 learners than to L1 speakers.

Questions for the Study of Instructed Heritage Language Acquisition

In sum, the challenge of designing instruction in the L1 for L1/L2 users raises a number of important theoretical issues for practitioners who want to maintain or develop heritage languages as well as for researchers seeking to understand the human language faculty. Some of these questions include:

1. How can the different sources of “flawed” language production (interlanguages? interdialects? interregisters?) in the L1 of L1/L2 users be identified?
2. How does the “flawed” language production of L1/L2 users compare with that of L2 learners?
3. How do monolingual L1 speakers acquire a range of registers and genres in their L1?
4. What is the order of acquisition of particular features of R2s and second genres by L1 speakers?
5. How do monolingual L1 speakers acquire a D2?
6. What is the order of acquisition of particular features in a D2 by L1 speakers?
7. Are notions of interdialect or interregister useful in describing the acquisition of additional registers and dialects of L1 by L1/L2 users?
8. What types of conditions account for the acquisition of receptive versus productive competence in L1/L2 users?
9. How can comprehension grammars (as opposed to productive grammars) be described?
10. What accounts for the development of exceptional bilinguals (simultaneous interpreters) among heritage speakers (see Valdés, 2003)?
11. What can formal classroom instruction accomplish for L1/L2 users? Are there types of instruction that can reverse language attrition? What types of instruction can result in the acquisition of a range of registers and styles?

CHANGING THE FIELD: COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AND DISCIPLINARY BOUNDARIES

In considering a reconceptualization or expansion of the field of SLA that could take on the challenge of examining the questions presented above, researchers might first examine existing professional communities of practice and make evident the epistemological and methodological assumptions and research traditions that are part of each contributing field. In a recent work on the nature of academic language (Valdés, 2004), I argued that scholarly discussions do not take place in a social vacuum. Even without the insights

offered by the Bakhtin Circle⁵ about the nature of intertextuality, it is very generally accepted that scholars engage in an ongoing dialogue with other members of their academic communities and their professional organizations. Scholars respond to each other's papers, engage in polemical debates about theories and their implications, and write dense scholarly tomes, sometimes understandable exclusively to other members of the same inner scholarly circle. The context for all discussions, including academic debates, encompasses a multitude of dialogues that help shape, reconfigure, and constantly change the multivoiced utterances of the various speakers. The discussion of L2 acquisition, with its focus on L2 learners, is no exception. The various existing approaches in SLA have developed and evolved in communication with a particular set of voices that are part of specific professional worlds. The study of heritage language speakers and the discussion of heritage language students, as well, have taken place in separate communities of practice. Given the various boundaries of academic professions, the dialogues about these particular areas of knowledge are unfortunately made up of a series of unconnected conversations that often fail to be heard by scholars who are members of other closely related professions.

Heritage language speakers have been the focus of researchers engaged in the study of bilingualism. As is made evident by Figure 2, bilingualism has been studied from the perspectives of the disciplines of sociolinguistics, linguistics, and psycholinguistics.

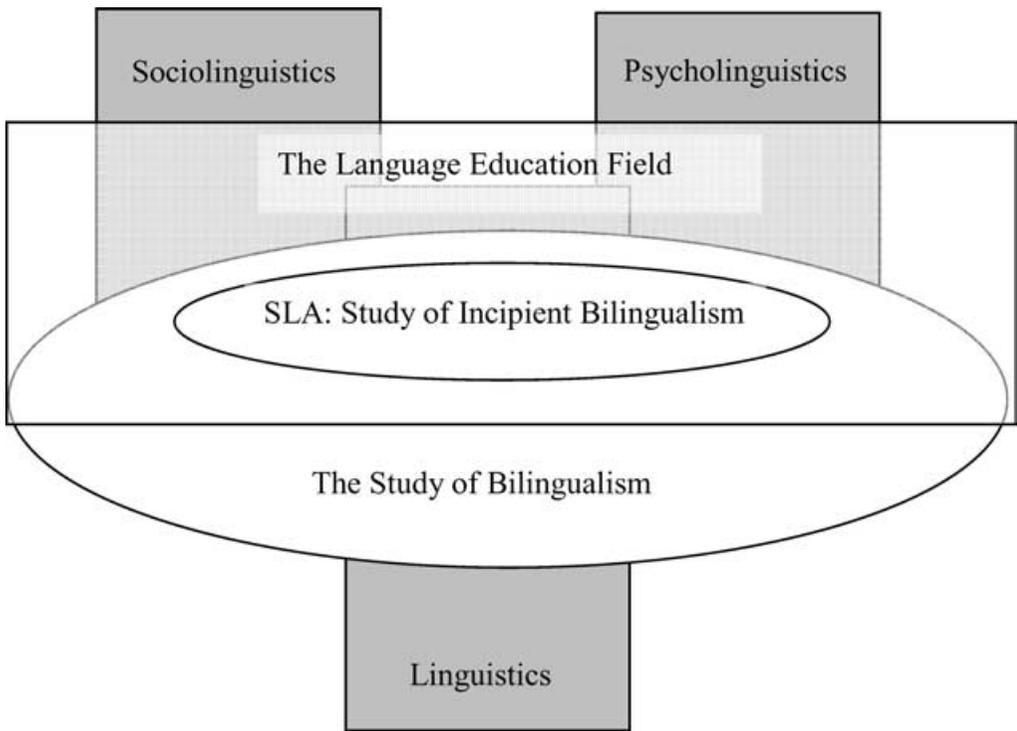
Research conducted from the perspective of each of these three disciplines asks different questions about the nature of bilingualism and bilingual individuals. The sociolinguistic study of bilingualism, for example, has centered on the study of societal bilingualism. Phenomena such as language maintenance, language shift, reversal of language shift, and language death have been of particular interest to sociolinguists. By comparison, linguistic studies of bilingualism focus primarily on understanding how languages in contact can influence one another and how grammatical changes due to language contact differ from other kinds of grammatical changes. Researchers working in this tradition, for example, have attended to grammatical borrowing and the examination of the influences of one language on another, including phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical transfer. Researchers have attempted to classify types of borrowing, to identify the social and cultural determinants of such borrowing, and to examine structural con-

straints on borrowing. The psycholinguistic study of bilingualism, however, centers on study of the bilingual individual. Four general areas have been of particular interest to researchers: (a) biligualistic development and attrition, (b) information processing in bilingual individuals, (c) neuropsychological foundations of bilingualism, and (d) bilingualism and cognition. Studies of biligualistic development include research on stages of bilingual development, differentiation in linguistic systems, age-related specifics of consecutive bilinguality, and the role of context in bilingual acquisition. Research on information processing in bilinguals includes work on language representation, bilingual memory, and separate versus common processors. Attention has also been given to the development of models of bilingual information processing. Neuropsychological studies of bilingualism, however, include a focus on hemispheric preference and on neuropsychological development.⁶

As seen in Figure 2, then, the broad study of bilingualism involves three different but related disciplines: sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and linguistics. As will also be noted from the figure, however, the study of incipient bilingualism, the focus of SLA research, is only a narrow subarea of the field of bilingualism, the use of two languages across a lifespan. Moreover, as a number of researchers have recently pointed out, SLA primarily draws from the fields of linguistics and psycholinguistics (Atkinson, 2002; Block, 2003; Firth & Wagner, 1997; Johnson, 2004). It does not attend to the social context of language use in a broad sense, and it has, to date, focused primarily on L2 learners rather than L2 users. Figure 2 suggests that the study of SLA should also involve the perspectives of the sociolinguistic study of bilingualism.

Finally, in the United States, the language education field encompasses both L1 teaching and L2 or foreign language teaching. In the case of various aspects of L1 teaching and learning, the language education field draws from research in linguistics, psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics to focus on the language development of L1 speakers, on the acquisition of academic English by speakers of nonstandard varieties of English, and on the development of reading and writing by both mainstream and linguistic minority students. The broad language education field has also concerned itself with the acquisition of English and with the acquisition of foreign languages. SLA, the study of incipient bilingualism, is but a small area of the language education field and has primarily informed L2 teaching. It is interesting that

FIGURE 2
The Study of Bilingualism



L1/L2 users who enroll in the study of their L1 have been studied not by L1 researchers, and until recently, not by SLA researchers, but by the community of foreign language teaching practitioners and researchers as well as by linguists and sociolinguists who are often members of foreign language department faculties.

The various communities of professional practice delineated here ordinarily have little to do with one another. Published research in journals rarely includes the perspectives of members of other communities of practice. Even when present at conferences, members of the various communities (e.g., L1 acquisition, L2 acquisition, language pedagogy, sociolinguistics) may attend competing sessions because large meetings are generally not organized to provide opportunities for dialogue among experts who are part of different professional compartments. Epistemological and technical questions are drawn from long-term traditions within each professional community. What counts as knowledge, what questions are worthy of attention, how theories are formulated and tested, and how research is carried out are part of the socializing professional experiences of every researcher.

Opportunities Lost or Seized?

In imagining the reconceptualization and expansion of SLA that engages in the study of L1/L2 users and that takes seriously societal needs in the area of language education, I also imagine a continuing conversation between members of the various compartments depicted in Figure 2. Using as a point of departure what I referred to at the beginning of this article as “the most intractable educational problems involving language,” a number of areas and questions that are crucial to school success of linguistic minority children all over the world come to mind. Given limitations of space, however, I will propose only three topics for continued consideration.

Terms Used to Refer to the Language Education Field

The terms used to refer to an area of inquiry are basic to the definition of a field. Unfortunately, the term *Second Language Acquisition*, as Block (2003) argued, has “built-in assumptions about monolingualism and separable L1 and L2 competences” (p. 44). A reconceptualization of language learning in various language education

contexts that can embrace the needs of L1/L2 users must of necessity view the language education field as including L1 instruction in its many manifestations and involving several types of language acquisition and development (i.e., acquisition of D2s, acquisition of a standard language, acquisition and development of specialized language registers and styles, acquisition of written language) as well as L2 instruction that takes into account beginning, intermediate, and advanced learners. I propose, therefore, that the term *Instructed Language Acquisition* (ILA) be considered carefully as a way of including a variety of questions and issues that will broaden the scope of the existing field. Alternatively, I suggest that the term *Educational Linguistics* proposed by Spolsky (1978) be discussed as a label that clearly signals the involvement of SLA in educational contexts.

Moving beyond the Monolingual Norm

As Cook (2002) argued in proposing a shift in the perspective of SLA researchers, the study of L1/L2 users requires a viewpoint that no longer focuses exclusively on the educated monolingual native speaker. It requires an understanding of both societal and individual bilingualism and a consideration of the methodological issues central to the study of the language behavior of bilingual persons that were raised by Wei (2000). As do other students of bilingualism, Wei has maintained that, in bilingualism studies, issues such as the bilinguality and ethnic origin of the researcher, the researcher's attitude toward bilingualism, the definition of *language* used by the researcher, the research agenda of the researcher, and his or her choice of appropriate methods for answering particular research questions are of key importance in obtaining valid results.

Expanding the investigation of instructed language acquisition beyond L2 learners to include L1/L2 users will also involve a rethinking of participant selection. Bilingual individuals do not constitute a homogeneous group and thus cannot be grouped together by SLA researchers without risking the almost immediate dismissal of the research by students of bilingualism. Citing Grosjean (1998), Wei (2000) pointed out that in choosing bilingual speakers in research the following factors should be considered: (a) language history and language relationship, (b) language stability, (c) functions of languages, (d) language proficiency, (e) language modes, and (f) biographical data.

Finally, moving beyond the monolingual norm must involve the rejection of the standard mono-

lingual language (e.g., standard Spanish, standard Russian) as the norm against which the L1/L2 users are measured. If researchers are serious about definitions of multicompetence (Cook 2002, 2003b) and about the rejection of the knowledge of the native speaker as the ultimate goal of L2 acquisition, they cannot simply compare production by L1/L2 users with that of native speakers of the standard language.

Potential Contributions of Various Areas of Knowledge to Specific Language Problems

The identification and examination of specific language problems and the potential contributions of various areas of knowledge to the solution of these problems might well provide an organizing framework for examining ethical issues revolving around knowledge and utilization. However, as Spolsky (1978) pointed out when discussing the field of educational linguistics many years ago, the notion that linguistic theories can be used directly in the solution of educational problems is naïve. Today, addressing educational problems involving language will require the collaboration of researchers from many different backgrounds, including nonlinguist educational researchers who have a deep understanding of educational policy, schools, classrooms, and ways in which knowledge about language might inform particular practices. A discussion of specific problems and the ways they can be approached from the perspective of different areas of inquiry can lead to a better understanding of what it means to generate theoretical knowledge and to contribute to educational practice.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have called for the reconceptualization and expansion of the field of SLA by using the teaching of heritage languages to L1/L2 users as a lens through which such a reconceptualization and expansion might be envisioned. I maintain that in taking seriously the questions raised by the teaching of a nondominant L1, SLA can position itself to respond to criticisms leveled at it because of its seeming narrowness and exclusive preoccupation with L2s from the perspective of cognitive psychology. I also maintain that the most difficult problems in education today involve issues of language and groups of children who are acquiring or are using the societal language while at the same time interacting with family and community members who speak a heritage language. The expansion of SLA to the study and

examination not only of the acquisition of L2, but also of L1 development in minority populations, L1 reacquisition, D2 acquisition, and R2 acquisition has much to offer both to the theory and the practice of instructed (rather than second) language acquisition. There is much that the study of L1/L2 users can contribute to our understanding of the human language faculty. Sánchez and Toribio (2003), for example, provided an excellent overview of the theoretical understandings that can be drawn from the study of bilingual speakers, including: characteristics of native language decline, identification of formal features resistant to deterioration, differences between faulty morphology in production and impairments in the interpretation of aspect, permeability of L1 grammars, and the structure of unconscious abstract linguistic knowledge as viewed through the use of grammaticality judgments of code-switched forms.

Expanding SLA to engage in the study of the possible results of L1 instruction for students who have already acquired some competence in this language bridges the distance between language education and a research field. Experience in attempting to teach the L1 to speakers who use the language in their everyday lives raises key questions that directly complement interests in L2 acquisition that have shaped the field. These questions include variability in learner language, the significance of learner error, the impact of input and interaction, language transfer, the characteristics of learner systems at different points in the acquisition/reacquisition/development process and, perhaps most important, the impact of formal instruction on the reacquisition/development of language.

Because language occupies a central position in education, there is a need to address instructional language problems in ways that can make a difference in the lives of children who have not been served well by existing educational institutions. Societal needs in the area of language are pressing. However, as Pennycook (1994) pointed out, schools are not "sites where a neutral body of curricular knowledge is passed on to students," but rather "cultural and political arenas within which various political, cultural, and social forms are engaged in constant struggle" (p. 297). Ideological contexts are very much a part of the students' success and failure in the acquisition, reacquisition, and development of both L1s and L2s. A mapping (Wetherell & Potter, 1992) of both the popular and the scholarly discourse on bilingualism is beyond the scope of this article, but researchers in instructed SLA who are interested

in contributing to the study of heritage language learning cannot afford to ignore the multilayered set of themes that contribute directly to a version of reality within which monolingualism is viewed as the normal and ideal human condition and bilingualism is viewed as profoundly suspect.

A discussion of research goals and social responsibility cannot take place, moreover, if there is little knowledge about the most challenging issues and problems that arise in various educational contexts or about the most vulnerable groups of L2 learners and L1/L2 users. Given the boundaries between areas and fields, few SLA researchers have engaged in the extensive study of minority language issues beginning with language policy and planning and including the examination of social, political, and economic contexts in which language education takes place. A reading of the critical language researchers (e.g., Bhatt & Martin-Jones, 1992; Canagarajah, 1999, 2002; Corson, 1997; Fairclough, 1989; Pennycook, 1994; Tollefson, 1991; Wallace, 1992) offers one perspective on such contexts as does work in the area of linguistic human rights (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; and Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1995).

The possibility of conceptualizing SLA so that it brings together researchers from various communities of practice is an exciting one. It is particularly exciting because of the possible impact that such a community might have on important language education issues and on what I have called the most intractable problems facing minority youngsters in American schools. I am convinced not only that SLA researchers have a particular expertise that can contribute in important ways to the solution of language problems that affect the lives of minority children all over the world, but also that the presentation of even contradictory research claims can inform important policy decisions. In California, for example, the proponents of Proposition 227, the antibilingual education initiative, claimed that after 1 year of English instruction in a classroom of multi-aged children, these students would be ready for an all-English academic curriculum. The opponents of the initiative, including SLA researchers of the stature of Kenji Hakuta, considered it essential to engage in the debate and try to bring reason to a politically charged anti-immigrant movement.

As was made evident by the recent Ebonics controversy (Baugh, 2000), the opinions of university researchers and scholars often become very much a part of national debates on issues in which the public has strong interest. The public's stereotypical view of the isolation of scholars in their "ivory towers" and the perceived irrelevancy of

their opinions to public debates has given way to a view in which scholarly “experts” have taken on the role of providing information and background to the courts, media organizations, and the public in general. As members of professional media organizations work to provide both background for their audiences and a balance of differing opinions, they seek out scholars who will present their views and participate in what Tannen (1998) called the “argument culture.” Scholars are expected not only to engage in a discussion of the complexity of the issues, but also to expand the public’s understanding of problems of enormous significance. For the field of SLA, it is time to seize this opportunity to contribute directly to a broader understanding of language.

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NOTES

¹ Valdés (1995) includes a definition of the term *linguistic minority* and a discussion of various perspectives on these minorities around the world. The article also includes a dated, but still useful, view of instruction of minority languages as academic subjects.

² For an overview of the teaching of Spanish as a heritage language see Valdés (1995). This overview includes an examination of the key areas (e.g., the teaching of grammar, testing and assessment, the teaching of the standard dialect) examined by both practitioners and researchers.

³ For a recent, thorough discussion of this topic, see Han (2003).

⁴ Gutierrez (2003), for example, argued that, in Spanish, the innovative use of *estar* in domains previously occupied by *ser* had its origin in a monolingual context but is advancing at a faster rate in bilingual communities in the United States.

⁵ I use the term *Bakhtin Circle* in the same way as Duranti and Goodwin (1992) and Moraes (1996) in order to avoid the debate concerning the specific authorship of the works of Voloshinov and Medvedev that have been attributed to Bakhtin.

⁶ Introductions to field of bilingualism include: Romaine (1995), Hamers and Blanc (2000), Wei (2000), and Bhatia and Ritchie (2004). Wei’s volume is organized to illustrate the contributions of sociolinguistics, linguistics, and psycholinguists to the study of bilingualism and includes an excellent bibliography.

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