

Knowledge of Tense, Aspect and Mood in Heritage Language Speakers: The Case of Hybrid Spanish for Business Courses *

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Abstract: This article reports on the grammatical knowledge displayed by a group of Spanish heritage speakers (HSs) when they submitted answers to online homework assignments in a hybrid language course for specific purposes (LSP). Participants received grammatical input through a combination of classroom and online instruction, a hybrid modality. We examined the performance of the HSs on the online assignments, and compared it with a group of L2 learners. The structures of interest were the preterite, imperfect and subjunctive mood in various propositions (volition, doubt, emotion, adverbial temporal clauses, and imperfect subjunctive). Analyses of variance showed no significant differences between the HSs and the L2 learners in the preterite-imperfect contrasts. On the use of subjunctive morphology, HSs were less accurate in subjunctive sentences with adverbial temporal clauses and with the imperfect subjunctive. We conclude that complex subjunctive subordinations remain a vulnerable area in HSs' end-state grammars even after instruction. We argue that heritage differential acquisition of the subjunctive in naturalistic contexts (vs formal instruction in L2 learners) has had an impact in adult heritage subjunctive knowledge. LSP courses may help them integrate language-related competencies via discourse diversity found in non-academic contexts by creating connections to other disciplines.

1. Introduction

The field of Spanish heritage language research has been prolific in recent years, (Cuza & López Otero, 2016; Foote, 2010; Montrul et al., 2014; Montrul & Perpiñán, 2011; Pascual y Cabo & Gómez Soler, 2015; among others). There are not, however, many articles documenting how heritage speakers (HSs) fare in hybrid language for specific purposes (LSP) mixed with L2 learners. These courses provide students with important linguistic tools to succeed in the professions (Sánchez-López, Long, & Lafford, 2017; Long, 2018). They contribute to develop specific practical skills and inter-cultural competences. Spanish for medical personnel, Spanish for law enforcement workers, and Spanish for businesspeople are some instances of LSP courses, which have become popular recently. In this project, we compare a group of L2 learners with a small cohort of heritage speakers (HSs) enrolled in a *hybrid* LSP course in a large research university where online homework tasks supplement classroom instructional time.

We analyzed both groups' answers to online homework activities with the preterite-imperfect distinction and subjunctive mood with various propositions. The project expands the question of whether HSs and L2 learners display differential grammatical knowledge when receiving identical instruction and input in a formal university setting. We first provide an overview of how HSs and L2 learners differ in their language acquisition contexts. Then we

* We would like to thank the audience of FLYM 2019 for their comments and suggestions. Special thanks to Diego Pascual y Cabo and Timothy Gupton for their feedback. All remaining errors herein are our own.

analyze tense, aspect and mood in Spanish HSs and L2 learners. Next, we present the hybrid course in question, the methods section and the results. We conclude with a discussion and some pedagogical implications intended for educators teaching mixed classes of HS and L2 learners.

2. Literature Review

2.1. How HSs and L2 Learners Differ in their Spanish Acquisition Context

These are two distinct groups of learners. HSs have learned the heritage language at home with parents and other relatives in a naturalistic environment while L2 learners have learned it in a formal, instructed classroom setting or a study-abroad format. The two groups of bilinguals had different input and linguistic experiences over the years. HSs have received input from childhood, but they may not necessarily apply grammar rules consciously as adult L2 learners do. HSs mostly engage with the oral variant of the language through conversations with relatives and not through explicit rule input, (Beaudrie & Fairclough, 2012; Cuza, 2013; Montrul, 2016).

There can also be internal variability within a single group of HSs. Some HSs only get to speak the majority language upon school entrance (sequential bilinguals). This means they solely keep the heritage language up to age five. Other HSs acquire two or more languages from birth (simultaneous bilingualism). Sequential and simultaneous HSs may thus differ in their grammar knowledge and conscious use of rules (Pascual y Cabo & Gómez Soler, 2015) adding to the question of heritage variability. There may be other factors like degree of exposure to literacy in the heritage language, input quantity and quality, and heritage degree of activation and processing, all of which points at potential differences within a single sample of HSs (Kupisch and Rothman, 2018; Putnam and Sánchez, 2013).

Age of language exposure may also play a role in how HSs acquired the heritage grammar when compared to L2 learners. Some studies have revealed advantages of age onset of bilingualism on the part of HS in phonology and oral production in general. Some HSs retain the phonological system of the heritage language with minor differences between them and traditional native speakers (Au et al., 2002). The age effect advantage is not that clear on grammatical production tasks. On gender agreement, HSs do well (Montrul et al., 2014). HSs also retain important aspects of verbal morphology in the heritage language (Montrul, 2016). Knowledge of tense and basic subject-verb agreement seems to be more entrenched in the heritage grammar compared with other verbal categories, like aspect or mood. The latter require the integration of specific semantic and syntactic properties. On some verbal properties and long-distance dependencies, HSs traditionally perform below the line of adult L2 learners (Montrul, 2008; Potowski et al., 2009).

2.2. Tense, Aspect and Mood are Complex Grammatical Categories in Spanish

Here we focus on aspect and mood as complex functional categories of Romance languages connected to explicit classroom instruction. Some of the homework activities of the LSP course tested knowledge of these categories. HSs may be at a disadvantage for the acquisition of aspect, having learned Spanish in a naturalistic context at home, absent of explicit rules. In Spanish, aspect is marked by means of morphological inflections on verbs and by lexical complements. The preterite is associated with actions completed in the past as in (1). A telic meaning prevails in the preterite, and the action is presented as concluded. The imperfect refers to progressive and habitual actions of the past, as in (2). The emphasis is not so much on completion, as these actions are in progress in atelic fashion (Montrul & Slabakova, 2003). Aspect is perfective for the preterite and imperfective for the imperfect.

- (1) Alex se bañó en la piscina ayer.
alex REF bathe in the swimming pool yesterday
'Alex took a dip in the pool yesterday'
- (2) Alex se bañaba en la piscina todos los veranos.
alex REF bathe in the swimming pool every summer
'Alex used to take dips in the pool every summer'

Mood is also a complex functional category of Romance languages signaled in Spanish by means of specific morphology. Mood has different lexical wrapping in oral and written contexts, as it signals the communicative intention of the speaker; to offer wishes and opinions. It is easy to distinguish the indicative from the subjunctive even if both appear in embedded clauses given the intention expressed in the main clause. To refer to real events in Spanish, indicative is the mood of choice, (3). To express wishes or doubt, Spanish prefers the subjunctive, (4). The subjunctive may result ambiguous when conjunctions that link the main and the subordinate clause complicate mood selection (5). Thus, the real/unreal distinction between indicative and subjunctive is not enough to allow us to characterize all possible realizations of the subjunctive in Romance languages (Georgi & Pianesi, 1997). There are cases where the subjunctive is obvious, as in (6). The use of an impersonal expression in the initial clause automatically triggers it in the subordination. Other subjunctive clauses are complex, involving knowledge of temporal connections, (7).

- (3) Lee sabe que su madre ha llegado.
lee know that her mom IND arrive
'Lee knows her mom has arrived'.
- (4) Lee quiere que su madre llegue pronto.
lee want that her mom SUBJ arrive promptly
'Lee wants that her mom arrives promptly'.
- (5) La abuela cocina rico de manera tal que los niños se lo comen/coman todo.
granny cook delicious so that the children REF it IND/SUBJ eat everything
'Granny cooks delicious meals so that the children eat/would eat it all'.
- (6) Es importante que prepares el informe para mañana.
it is important that (pro) SUBJ prepare the report for tomorrow
'It is important that you prepare the report for tomorrow'.
- (7) Leslie vendrá a casa cuando termine su trabajo.
leslie return to home when (pro) finish SUBJ his work
'Leslie will return home once he would finish work'.

2.3. Tense, Aspect and Mood in Traditional Native Speakers, L2 learners and HSs

Heritage grammar may contain errors in aspectual morphology (Benmamoun, Montrul & Polinsky, 2013). Aside from the atelic/telic semantic difference, Spanish has distinctive morphology marked in the imperfect, quite differently from English, as seen in the corresponding translation of (2). The imperfect tense may result challenging for both, HSs and L2 learners. In the case of L2 learners, there is no morphology in English to indicate aspect. English uses lexical devices. In HSs

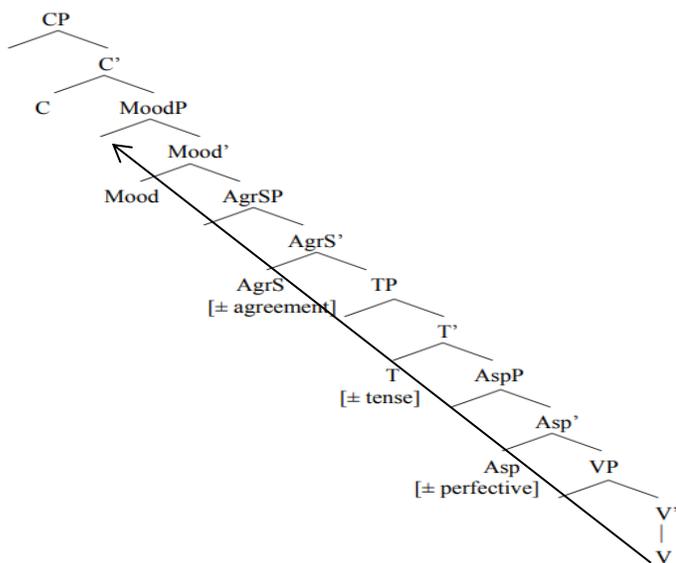
with reduced formal input in the heritage language, the imperfect signals a departure from the more common preterite. The imperfect is more difficult to understand and produce than the preterite. L1 Spanish children learn to formulate completed actions in the preterite first. It is only years later that they get to understand the semantics of the imperfect, around ages 7-8 (Hodgson, 2005). The imperfect is a late-acquired morpheme in Spanish.

Since the subjunctive brings forward the position of the speaker to the given postulate, it is semantically motivated. Spanish-English children and adult HSs may control a basic use of it with volition verbs (4). However, they lack native-like sensitivity with ambiguous clauses as in (5); preferring use of the indicative mood overall if given a choice (Castilla-Earls et al., 2018; Silva Corvalán, 2014; Van osch & Sleeman, 2016; Viner, 2016). In Spanish L1 acquisition, the category of *aspect* is acquired at the same time as *tense* just before age two in Spanish monolingual children to distinguish between progressive and non-progressive actions with gerunds only, (López Ornat et al., 1994). The subjunctive only surfaces in the speech of Spanish children after age 2 (Bosque, 1990). Children use it to express wishes and to give orders in the negative form, as in (8):

- (8) Que no te bañes tú.
 that NEG REF SUBJ bathe you
 ‘Don’t bathe’

Aside from semantic considerations, there is also the syntactic complexity of these functional categories in Spanish. Functional categories like Tense (TP), Aspect (AspP) and Mood (MoodP) are **above** the verb (VP) in the syntax (Georgi & Pianesi, 1997). As a Romance language with strong verbal features, Spanish verbs are dynamic entities and they overtly move in Spanish up from the Verb Phrase (VP) to check syntactic features through inflectional morphology (9). Each feature (tense, aspect, mood) heads a projection in Spanish. Knowing these categories also involves knowing their syntactic distribution. To be able to process and internalize them, the learner must identify features associated with them, and the specific realizations of the verb when it checks these features (9). HSs may have gaps in overall knowledge of tense, aspect and mood compared with L2 learners, as formal schooling in the social majority language has prevailed in HSs (Valdés, 2000). Their knowledge may also connect to the order in which they are acquired in the heritage language: tense, followed by aspect and then mood; in that specific order. It results interesting to compare traditional native Spanish speakers, HSs and L2 learners who differ in their acquisition modalities to see how these categories have been retained in the heritage language by HSs.

(9) Upward verb movement adapted from Cinque (1999)



Some empirical studies have documented tense, aspect and mood with all three groups. Montrul (2009) compared a group of Spanish-English HSs raised in the US with a group of traditional native speakers. Participants completed oral/written morpheme and judgement recognition tasks. She found that accuracy in aspect superseded accuracy in mood in the HSs. Her results supported the *Regression Hypothesis* (Jakobson, 1941) in which order of acquisition is related to order of language loss, and the *Interfaces Hypothesis* (Tsimplici & Sorace, 2006) in which some grammatical domains are *vulnerable* and require the integration of processing, understanding and production. In Montrul (2009) the group of HSs was less accurate in the imperfect (69.9%) when compared to the preterite (92.2%). However, the HSs did not differ significantly from the group of traditional native speakers in oral production. The heritage group preferred indicative overall.

In a follow up study, Montrul & Perpiñán (2011) also investigated knowledge of aspect and mood through morphology recognition and sentence conjunction tasks. They compared a group of L2 learners and HSs. The L2 learners were more accurate with imperfect and subjunctive morphology compared with the HSs. There were also proficiency effects. Low and intermediate HSs were able to discriminate more in imperfect sentences with achievement and state predicates (compared to the L2 learners), but these differences disappeared at the advanced level. The advanced L2 learners were more on target. Some subjunctive clauses resulted challenging for the HSs. These were adverbial clauses with *cuando* ('when') and *de manera que* ('so that'), similar to Example 5. These clauses are explicitly taught in the Spanish classroom. They are acquired after various semesters of study, a formal experience many HSs lack.

Authors like Pascual y Cabo, Lingwall and Rothman (2012) have commented that the external syntax-discourse interface shows greater variability in HS acquisition. They argue that another possible explanation for the observed divergence in modality selection is insufficient input. That is, HSs receive insufficient input from prior generations of speakers of their family, who may be HSs themselves or be undergoing L1 attrition, to acquire modality distinctions.

3. A Hybrid Course: Spanish for Business and Finance

The benefits of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) have been widely documented in the last decades. Interacting with educational software allows students to get immediate, individualized feedback. On a given educational platform, every response is graded on the spot, and there is more autonomy and accountability from the learner (Henshaw, 2016). In this mixed class of L2 learners and HSs, they accessed online activities weekly and submitted answers by a given deadline (8:00 am on the mornings the class met -twice a week).

Online activities were required twice a week from any computer equipped with internet access. For classroom activities, the role of the instructor was that of a "communication facilitator". Extensive grammar or vocabulary instruction was discouraged. Students worked in groups (mixed L2 and HSs) with the activities presented in the textbook during class time and for an oral presentation project. Lessons were mostly student-centered. The institution has a separate track aimed at HSs, but they are welcome in this course if they place at the intermediate level (having taken Elementary Spanish), and demonstrate that it will fit within their plan of studies. Opening the course solely to HSs would also limit class enrollment as the population of HS is less numerous than that of L2 learners on campus (approximately 19% of the undergraduate student population is composed of HSs).

The syllabus of Spanish for Business and Finance does not emphasize any particular varieties of the Spanish spoken in the US. Like many other Spanish language courses syllabi, it focuses on a standard, universal variety of Spanish (Beaudrie, 2015). The textbook contains multiple references to standard business practices of Latin America. These references are contained in the section 'Notas Culturales' (*Notes on Cultural Practices*). As part of class requirements, students also prepare an oral presentation in pairs with topics from the main textbook. Written exams and essays also support formal evaluations for this course along with online homework and the formal presentation. As this is a mixed class, there is student collaboration for classroom activities, including undertaking the oral presentation project.

4. Methods

4.1. Research Questions and Hypotheses

These are the research questions that guided this study:

1. How does a group of HSs compare to a group of L2 learners in their knowledge of preterite and imperfect as measured by accuracy in homework online assignments they completed as part of a hybrid course?
2. How does a group of HSs compare to a group of L2 learners in their knowledge of the Spanish subjunctive in various uses as measured by homework online assignments in a hybrid course?

For both research questions, we predicted the L2 learners would be more accurate. They have been exposed to this content in prior language courses. HSs may control the basic use of the subjunctive with volition or emotion (Castilla-Earls et al, 2018; Viner, 2016), but may not necessarily apply grammar rules as adult L2 learners do with regards to complex grammatical content, (Silva Corvalán, 2014). Some realizations of the subjunctive may be challenging for HSs.

There were two independent variables: *Student type* (L2, HS learner) and *structure type* (preterite/imperfect past tenses, subjunctive of volition, subjunctive of emotion with impersonal expressions, subjunctive of doubt, adverbial subjunctive of time, and imperfect subjunctive). The

dependent variable was *accuracy* which was measured by the total number of points received in a given online homework section with the structures of interest.

4.2. Participants

All participants were undergraduate students majoring in different disciplines. They had completed the prior course, Elementary Spanish or an equivalent course with a grade of C-, or earned a score of 37-45 on the institution’s Spanish Placement Test. Participant average age was 19.5. There was a small cohort of HSs ($n = 27$), and a larger group of L2 learners ($n = 176$). The institution’s HS student population is composed mainly of first, second and third-generation Cuban-Americans and first-generation Puerto Ricans. All students submitted their answers to the homework assignments via the online platform as registered users. We submitted answer points to 2 x 6 factorial ANOVAS with student type and structure type as main factors.

5. Results

Table 1 presents an overview of the means and standard deviations for the HSs and the L2 learners in each of the grammatical structures analyzed.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for HSs and L2 learners by Group

Structure Type	HSs		L2	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Preterite-imperfect contrast	68.03	34.07	71.83	28.72
Subjunctive of volition and emotion	65.07	37.98	72.38	33.41
Subj with impersonal expressions	61.66	39.48	65.46	34.72
Subjunctive of doubt	57.10	36.64	64.60	34.91
Adverbial subjunctive of time	39.18	38.18	53.13	35.82
Imperfect subjunctive	57.74	39.98	64.66	34.40

The factorial ANOVA revealed no significant main effect for student type, $F(1, 202) = 2.442, p = .120$, and a significant main effect for structure type, $F(1, 202) = 48.57, p > .000$. Tests of between-subjects effects for the preterite/imperfect homework section did not show significant differences between the L2 and the heritage group, $F(1, 202) < 1, p = .533$. In the subjunctive tests to indicate volition and emotion, there were no significant differences between both groups either, $F(1, 202) = 1.08, p = .300$. Analyses for the subjunctive with impersonal expressions did not show significant differences between both groups either, $F(1, 202) < 1, p = .604$, and neither did tests for the subjunctive of doubt, $F(1, 202) = 1.09, p = .296$. However, tests of between-subjects effects on adverbial subjunctive with future temporal clauses showed significance, $F(1, 202) = 5.61, p = .019$. HSs were less accurate than the L2 group on the subjunctive adverbial clauses containing conjunctions (Figure 1). As to the imperfect subjunctive, the results approached significance, $F(1, 202) = 3.18, p = .076$ (Figure 1). The L2 learners surpassed the HSs.

Further tests of within-subjects effects on the small cohort of HSs ($n = 27$) for all structures of interest indicated that adverbial subjunctive temporal clauses were challenging when compared to other structures. The results were significant, $F(1, 26) = 4.23, p < .001$. Differences in the sample of HSs appear in Table 2. Though the high standard deviation numbers may point at intra-variability in the heritage sample, this was not a research goal of this study and remains to be tackled in future analyses.

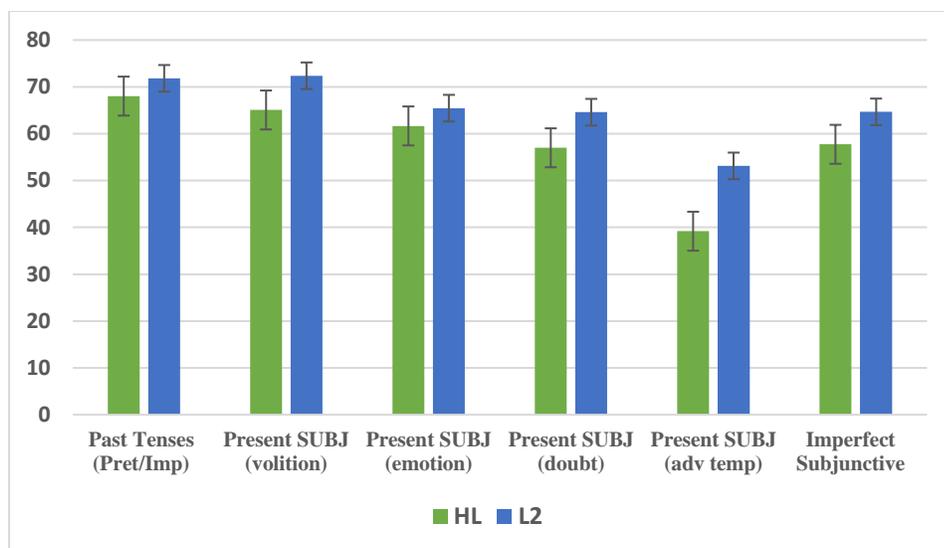


Figure 1: HSs vs L2 learners' grammatical accuracy by structure type

Table 2: Structure mean and standard deviations in HSs

Structure Type	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Preterite-Imperfect	27	68.03	34.07
Subjunctive in Nominal Clauses	27	65.07	37.98
Subjunctive in Adjectival Clauses	27	61.66	39.48
Subjunctive in Adverbial Clauses	27	39.18	38.18

6. Discussion

The results support L1 theory for order of acquisition of tense, aspect and mood in Spanish (Bosque, 1990; López-Ornat et al., 1994). Content acquired earlier is preserved more in the L1 by HSs. The results support previous findings on the grammatical knowledge of tense, aspect, mood with HSs (Montrul, 2009; Montrul & Perpiñán, 2011) for written and interpretation tasks. They align with Montrul's (2009) research in the sense that HSs are more accurate on grammatical aspect than on subjunctive morphology, which is of later acquisition. The hypothesis for the first research question was not confirmed. There were no significant differences between the HSs and the L2 group on online homework answers on the past tenses; preterite and imperfect. As previously stated, in Spanish L1 acquisition, the category of *aspect* is acquired at the same time as *tense* just before age two in Spanish monolingual children to distinguish between progressive and non-progressive actions (López Ornat et al., 1994). HSs were more on target on the online activities that focused on tense and aspect (preterite-imperfect) compared with more challenging forms of the Spanish subjunctive mood.

Hypothesis 2 was confirmed for some subjunctive sentences. L2 learners are more target-like in formal contexts of subjunctive use like present perfect, temporal adverbial clauses and imperfect subjunctive. These constructions are acquired after various semesters of study in formal settings, out of which L2 learners and traditional Spanish monolinguals have benefited more than HSs. This is not to say that HSs do not command use of the subjunctive at all. They seem to retain the basic use of it to indicate volition or emotion, which surfaces earlier in L1 Spanish. By contrast,

knowledge of the perfect tenses and of temporal subjunctive subordinations with adverbial clauses seem a more vulnerable grammar area in the heritage grammar. These constructions are generally acquired in the L1 after substantial formal instruction.

We return now to earlier semantic and syntactic considerations to discuss further online homework findings. Bosque (1990) reinforces the semantic criterion for mood selection. The speaker chooses subjunctive (and not indicative) as a direct reflection of the intended meaning. Mood selection is always intentional and never arbitrary. Subjunctive in Spanish results a form with various meanings in embedded clauses, which may pose challenges to speakers with limited formal instruction in it (Montrul, 2009). In the subjunctive with temporal adverbial clauses, the meaning of the sentence connects with the precise timing of an action. Understanding meaning in temporal adverbial clauses and conditional sentences with the imperfect subjunctive implies not only knowledge of mood, but knowledge of tense as well (Kempchinsky, 1990). This is particularly challenging for HSs who have not acquired the subjunctive in a formal setting like L2 learners have, and who lack exposure to classroom instruction on subjunctive realizations.

Suñer and Padilla in Bosque (1990) suggest that the automatic agreement rule between the verb of the main clause and the one of the subordination does not always apply with the subjunctive. The subordinate verb may acquire its own temporal value when joined by a temporal expression. Therefore, some sentences may accept both moods (like Examples 5 and 7) in the presence of certain temporal conjunctions. Finally, there seems to be a reason for HSs to struggle with complex adverbial subjunctive subordinations. In L1 Spanish, adverbial clauses with the subjunctive are learned around ages 7-8 (Blake, 1983; Pérez-Leroux 1998). By that time, HSs are learning the social majority language in schools with an emphasis on literacy.

Difficulties experienced by this cohort of HSs with adverbial clauses of time in the subjunctive connect with heritage differential acquisition. As suggested by Kupisch and Rothman (2018), differential HS grammars trace back to them receiving childhood input that is qualitatively different from other bilinguals. HSs lack formal literacy training in the heritage language compared to L2 learners, who learned the L2 in an instructed setting. HSs use the language in fewer contexts than traditional monolinguals. Heritage aural mode predominates in contexts that involve family interactions. The HSs in this cohort were sequential bilinguals who had started English school at age 5 and may have lacked opportunities to learn adverbial clauses with the subjunctive in the L1 Spanish classroom. Of all structures tested, the subjunctive in adverbial clauses and the imperfect subjunctive resulted the most challenging for HSs. We acknowledge our study focuses on one component of the course (online homework assignments) and not on other course constituents. We did not compare both groups on vocabulary retention or course grades either, and did not administer an online measure to investigate heritage implicit knowledge or grammatical representation.

7. Conclusion

Hybrid-LSP courses at the intermediate level may provide opportunities for multimodal instruction to HS and L2 learners, as they are technology-enhanced courses with challenging vocabulary and grammar. As courses oriented for the professions, they offer many possibilities for the construction and negotiation of meaning beyond the classroom to meet HSs' professional goals. Students practice real-life situations with vocabulary and forms. The course format also allows for the inclusion of dynamic projects, which bring students in tune with their future professions. They facilitate acquisition of vocabulary and grammar forms in a nontraditional learning module. Counting with a project-based component in LSP courses supports research by Long (2017):

“...94% of respondents believe in some form of community service learning... including but not limited to face-to-face workshops and webinars...”

Students can work towards a community-oriented project that encourages them to use language and discourse for the real world. Language-related competencies can be integrated via discourse diversity found in non-academic contexts. LSP courses create connections to other disciplines, and diverse opportunities for grammar enhancement. We support a mixed environment for both L2 and HSs students when they display higher performance in the L2/heritage language and are willing to work towards a common goal; in this case learning complex vocabulary related to their future professions. Denying entry to any student on grounds of differential grammar acquisition trajectory would be detrimental to their growth.

The HSs who participated in this project did not differ significantly from the L2 group on preterite-imperfect answers to the online activities. They seem to be more in control of tense and aspect connected to the preterite and the imperfect and less on challenging subjunctive uses. However, it is difficult to pinpoint an end-state subjunctive heritage grammar with a precise characterization. It seems the early advantages of bilingualism allowed HSs to retain the basic use of aspect and mood. As per homework online answers, uses of the subjunctive to indicate volition, emotion and doubt with impersonal expressions seem stable in the heritage language. By contrast, late-acquired subjunctive subordinations with adverbial clauses of time remain challenging in adult HSs. Hybrid mixed language for specific purpose (LSP) courses can contribute to expand multi-modal language learning opportunities for HSs –including difficult subjunctive uses. LSP courses should motivate them further in the study of the heritage language, as they establish connections to future professions through grammar and discourse.

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