

Evaluating Heritage Speakers' Proficiency: Oral Proficiency Rubrics and a Vocabulary Test for Portuguese as a Heritage Language

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Despite the increasing interest in heritage language (HL) acquisition and education, the area of HL assessment remains one of the least explored in the field. Several controversial issues seem to impact projects whose goals are to assess the language proficiency of HL speakers (HS). Some arise primarily from the reuse and/or adaptation of assessment tools originally created for L1 or L2 speakers (Kagan and Dillan, 2008; Draper and Hicks, 2000; Valdes, 1989). Others come from the perceived gap in the development of HL modalities, i.e., written proficiency might in some instances lag oral proficiency (Gatti and Grave, 2020). Some studies have explored and, in some cases, challenged these paradigms (Kagan and Friedman, 2003; Martin et.al., 2013), but there is still much to be done to understand the linguistic development of HS and to create the assessment tools needed by language programs.

With these needs in mind, our research group started a series of projects to study HL assessment looking into different language modalities and properties. In this presentation we describe two of our latest projects on (i) the creation of oral proficiency rubrics, and (ii) the development a computer-based vocabulary language test. The goal of the first effort is to compare two rubrics to evaluate oral production by HS. The first rubric is exclusively functional and evaluates how well participants performed each of the communicative tasks proposed. The second rubric is more comprehensive, including descriptors for vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, and communicative competence. We used the two rubrics to assess the production of 20 HS that participated in an oral interview based on different everyday topics. We show the results obtained by using these two different sets of criteria and discuss the implications for each one. The second project is centered on the development of a computer-based VLT for Portuguese as L2 and HL – *Teste de Verificação Lexical do Português Brasileiro* (TVLPB). This project is a collaboration with colleagues from the Federal University of Minas Gerais in Brazil. After explaining how the test was created, we compare the vocabulary test scores with the scores from the oral interview from the same group of participants cited above. This is a first attempt to validate the TVLPB and see how vocabulary measures compare to other types of language assessment tools in heritage populations.