



## **How Do Heritage Students Perform on Proficiency Tests?**

**Report by**

**Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS), University of Oregon**

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**Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS) • <http://casls.uoregon.edu>**

**5290 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403 • 541-346-5699**

## How Do Heritage Students Perform on Proficiency Tests?

### Question:

How do heritage students in high school compare to non-heritage students in terms of language proficiency?

### Answer:

Heritage students show higher levels of language proficiency in all skills, but the difference is strongest in productive skills. Heritage students have markedly higher speaking and writing scores than those of non-heritage students, particularly in the early years of high school language programs. By the fourth year, non-heritage students are catching up. The progress of heritage students is slower overall, probably because most high school programs do not challenge these students to reach high levels of proficiency.

### Research Summary:

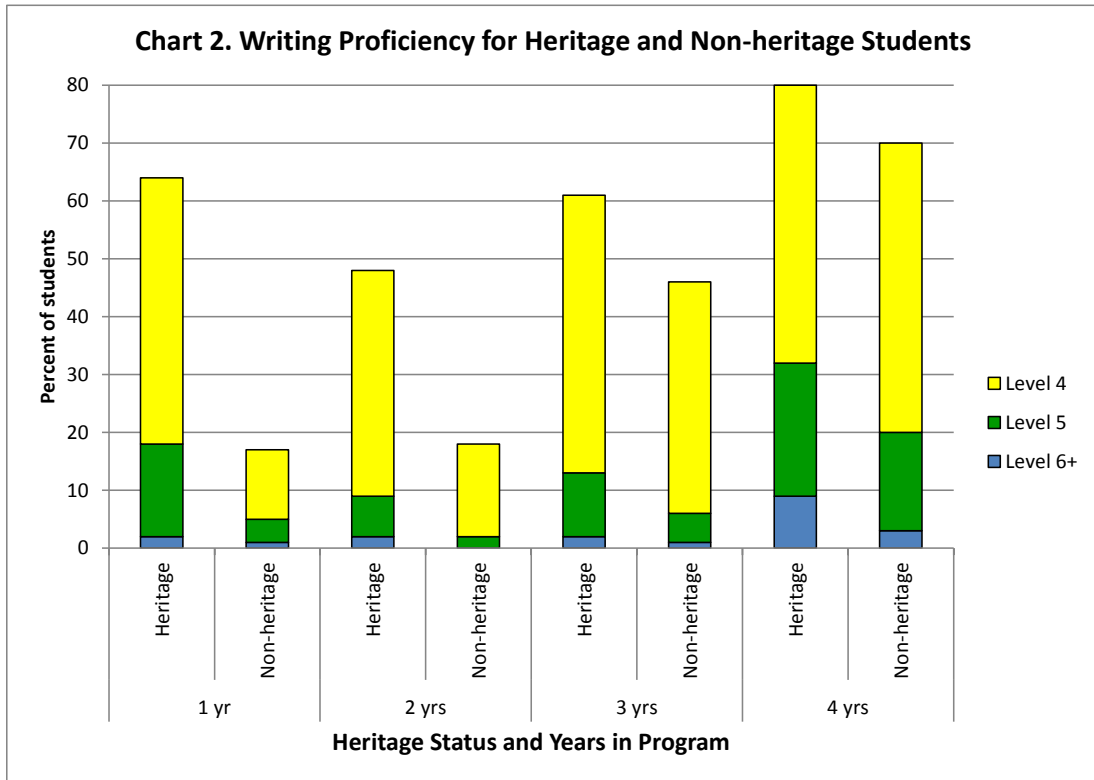
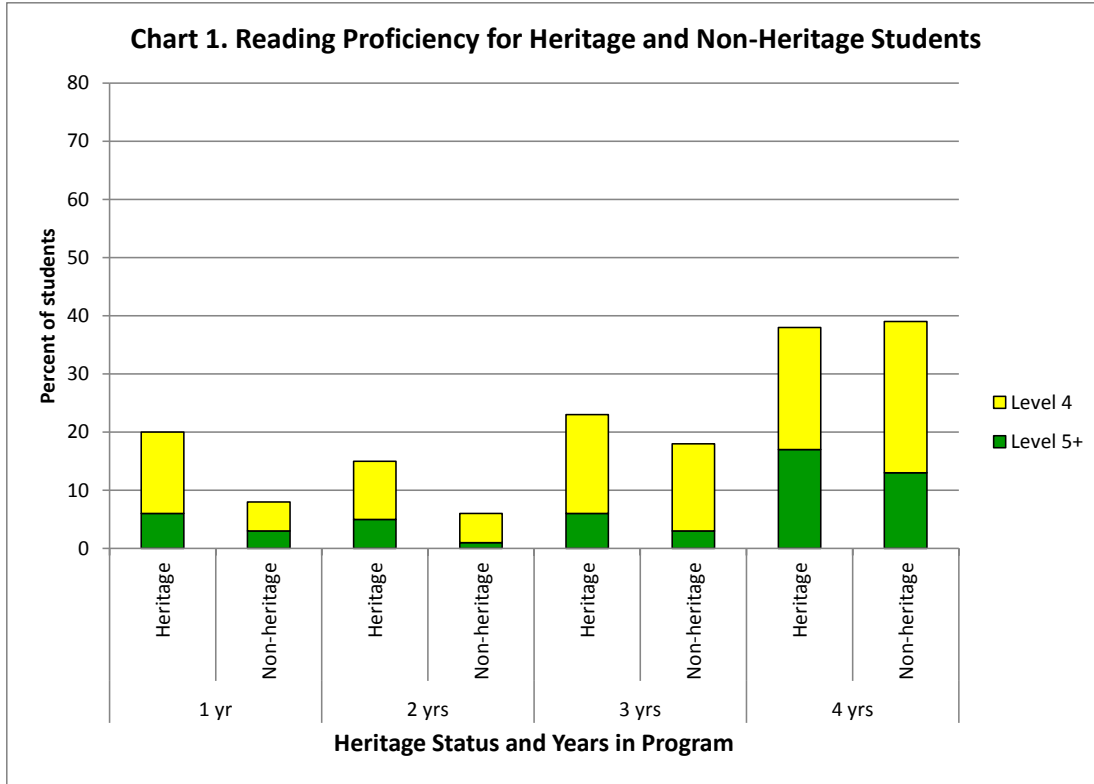
The first step in answering a question about heritage language students is in defining just what a “heritage student” is. Some students may be using the language at home on a daily basis, while others might have ethnic connections to groups of people who speak the language, but do not use it at home with their families. In our study, we compared students who used the language of study at home with students who had no immediate family members who spoke the language with them.

The results shown in Charts 1 to 3 below indicate that, in first- and second-year high school classes, heritage students were approximately three times as likely to be in the range of benchmarks 4 to 6, similar to the ACTFL Intermediate range. In third-year classes, the gap narrows, and, by the fourth year, non-heritage learners attain roughly equal levels of proficiency.

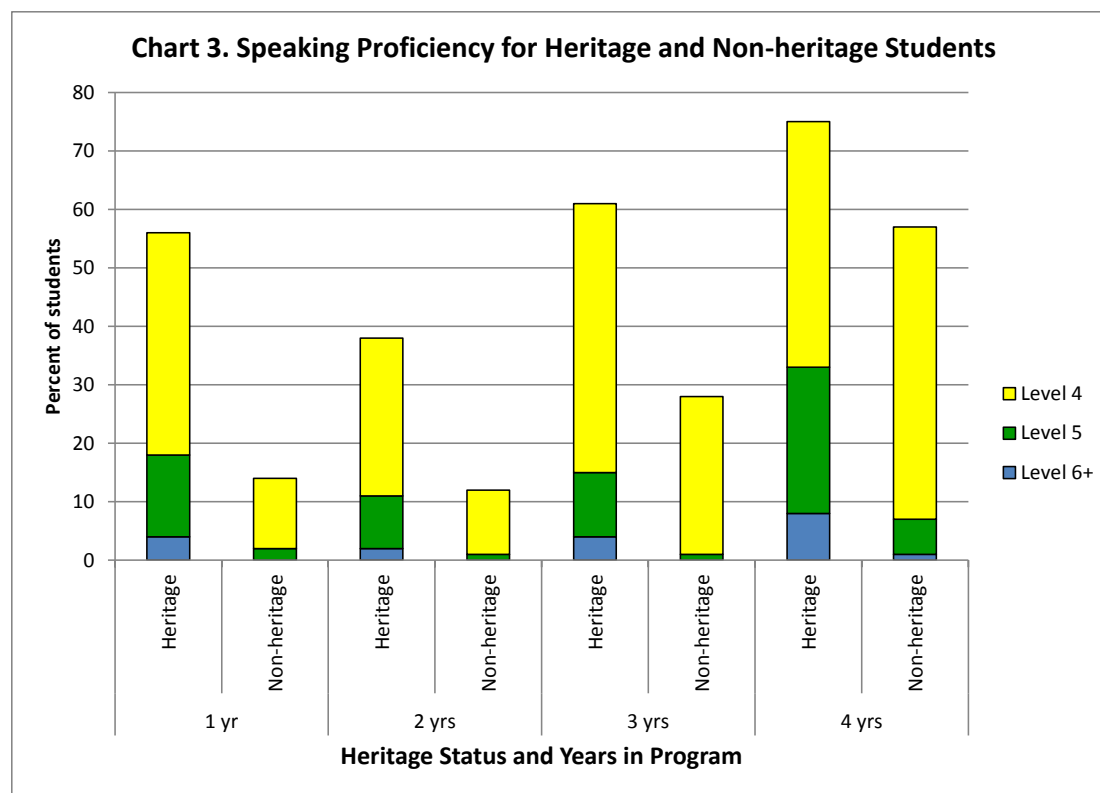
Note that reading skills are markedly lower for all students, as compared to writing and speaking skills. Few students in either group reach benchmark 6, the highest level measured by the Standards-based Measurement of Proficiency (STAMP); most students fail to reach the Advanced levels of proficiency in four years of high school study, regardless of whether they are heritage learners or not.

This research shows that the challenge in first- and second-year classrooms is to accommodate the high productive skills of heritage students. Many are already capable of speaking *and* writing in the Intermediate range. Instruction that develops Advanced-level productive skills would be most useful for this group of learners. In all four years, an increased focus on reading skills would be useful for both heritage and non-heritage learners.

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### Data Analysis:

To answer the question of how heritage students' language proficiency compares with non-heritage students, CASLS researchers selected students in high school programs who took the Standards-based Measurement of Proficiency (STAMP) in 2008, 2009, or 2010 and had one to four years of language instruction. During the STAMP administration, students completed a brief questionnaire about their home language use. Students who said they used the language of study with family members on a daily basis were labeled "heritage" learners for the purposes of this study. Students who said their first language was something other than the language of study and also said they never used the language of study at home were labeled "non-heritage" learners. Students who had two or more years of immersion experience were eliminated from the study.

The final dataset contained reading scores for 1,898 heritage and 21,488 non-heritage students. Of these, 1,627 heritage and 19,995 non-heritage students had also taken the writing portion of STAMP, and 1,431 heritage and 17,256 non-heritage students had taken the speaking portion. The students were enrolled in 751 classes situated in 271 schools in 115 districts and 30 states. Although this study is based on a convenience sample, it represents a regionally diverse cross-section of U.S. high school students.

All students took the multiple-choice reading assessment. Most also took a writing and/or speaking assessment. Trained raters evaluated students' writing and speaking samples. STAMP

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results are reported on the benchmark scale, where descriptors for levels ranging from 1 to 6 are based on the descriptors of ACTFL levels Novice-Low to Intermediate-High. Benchmark scores are available for reading, writing, and speaking.

Tables 1 to 3 below show the percentages of students in each group who scored at each benchmark level.

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**Table 1. Reading—Heritage and Non-heritage Students at Each Benchmark Level**

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Time in Program	Status	Count	Benchmark Level				
			1	2	3	4	5+
1 yr	Heritage	707	22.6%	27.3%	30.4%	13.6%	6.1%
	Non-heritage	4,703	52.2%	24.9%	15.5%	4.9%	2.5%
2 yrs	Heritage	368	25.5%	31.3%	28.0%	10.1%	5.2%
	Non-heritage	5,975	36.7%	34.2%	22.8%	5.3%	1.0%
3 yrs	Heritage	648	16.7%	28.5%	31.2%	17.3%	6.3%
	Non-heritage	8,755	12.8%	32.9%	36.3%	14.9%	3.2%
4 yrs	Heritage	113	4.4%	21.2%	36.3%	21.2%	16.8%
	Non-heritage	2,055	5.2%	20.5%	35.1%	26.3%	12.9%

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**Table 2. Writing—Heritage and Non-heritage Students at Each Benchmark Level**

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Time in Program	Status	Count	Benchmark Level					
			1	2	3	4	5	6+
1 yr	Heritage	535	0.7%	7.1%	28.6%	45.8%	16.1%	1.7%
	Non-heritage	4,228	8.0%	24.2%	51.5%	11.8%	3.7%	0.7%
2 yrs	Heritage	344	2.0%	6.1%	43.9%	38.7%	7.0%	2.3%
	Non-heritage	5,193	3.7%	17.2%	61.2%	15.9%	1.5%	0.5%
3 yrs	Heritage	613	1.1%	4.6%	33.3%	48.5%	10.9%	1.6%
	Non-heritage	8,567	0.8%	4.2%	50.0%	39.8%	4.6%	0.5%
4 yrs	Heritage	109	0.0%	2.8%	17.4%	47.7%	22.9%	9.2%
	Non-heritage	2,007	0.3%	1.4%	28.6%	49.8%	16.5%	3.3%

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**Table 3. Speaking—Heritage and Non-heritage Students at Each Benchmark Level**

Time in Program	Status	Count	Benchmark Level					
			1	2	3	4	5	6+
1 yr	Heritage	561	2.5%	9.8%	31.0%	38.3%	14.1%	4.3%
	Non-heritage	3,480	12.0%	31.9%	42.6%	11.7%	1.6%	0.3%
2 yrs	Heritage	254	1.2%	15.7%	46.1%	26.8%	8.7%	1.6%
	Non-heritage	5,082	7.4%	28.3%	51.9%	11.3%	0.9%	0.2%
3 yrs	Heritage	396	1.0%	7.6%	30.1%	46.5%	11.1%	3.8%
	Non-heritage	7,415	1.1%	10.3%	60.0%	27.5%	1.0%	0.1%
4 yrs	Heritage	84	1.2%	1.2%	22.6%	41.7%	25.0%	8.3%
	Non-heritage	1,279	0.2%	3.1%	39.2%	50.0%	6.3%	1.2%