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Pragmatic Instruction May Not Be Necessary Among Heritage Learners of Spanish: A Study on Requests

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Summary/Abstract: This paper studies the pragmatic competence of U.S. heritage learners of Spanish in an attempt to determine (a) the degree of pragmatic transfer from English to Spanish experienced by heritage learners when producing different types of requests in Spanish; and (b) how to best teach pragmatics to students of Spanish as a Heritage Language (SHL). Additionally, the study compared the differences and similarities between the development of the pragmatic competence in SHL students and in
students of Spanish as a second language (L2). Oral and written discourse completion tasks were used to assess requests in Spanish HL/L2 pragmatics. The results indicate that the pragmatic interventions only helped the Spanish L2 group, and that the Spanish HL group was already aware of the pragmatic principles that regulate requests in Spanish. Furthermore, no cases of negative pragmatic transfer were found in the Spanish HL data, so the study concluded that there is no need to teach heritage students pragmatic norms.