Dear Reviewers and Editor Cuza,

Thank you sincerely for reviewing this manuscript and for your comments. I have addressed each of them below and in the manuscript. All changes in the manuscript, as well as the responses to reviewer comments, are in red text in the anonymized version. The full version does not include red text, but does include the blinded references. There are also minor additional changes to the manuscript that I have prepared, which I have outlined in the final section of this document. Happy holidays and have a happy and healthy 2024. I look forward to moving forward with the publication of this article.

Sincerely,

Author, Manuscript #2701479

**Responses to Reviewer #1**

I only had an issue with p. 18, l. 739-741 "...they allow those of us who are committed to promoting initiatives to maintain bilingualism to achieve social justice for bilingual speakers". My issue is that this is too important an idea to include it in a way that reads as an afterthought. It would require explaining what is meant by social justice, too. My suggestion is to develop it further, either here or in the conclusion, or to remove it.

Thank you for recognizing this component of the manuscript. I believe that the link between bilingual education and heritage language acquisition research is absent because statements of this nature often go unexplained in theoretical journals. This is an opportunity to elaborate about the importance of dual-language immersion schooling, particularly given the novel variables explored in this study, so I have added a number of references concerning the multiple impacts of this method of education, including academic and English language development.

p.1, l. 33 "it is essential understand". Insert "to"

Completed.

p.17, l. 699 "proceeding", shouldn't it be "preceding"?

Completed.

**Responses to Reviewer #2**

What was the generation of the HSs? Were they all 2nd generation immigrants (both parents 1st generation immigrants)? Were there any mixed families (e.g. 1 Mexican parent-1 American parent)?

All children were second generation as their parents were Spanish-dominant. This is now reflected in the manuscript.

What was the literacy level (in Spanish) of the participants attending a mainstream English school? Did they also attend a heritage school? Is it possible to test whether children attending a heritage school performed better than children attending solely an English only school?

This is a valid critique of this study, as the questionnaire did not target extracurricular exposure to Spanish (e.g., at Sunday school or in HL programs). However, the school district in which they were enrolled did not offer HL instruction or any form of bilingual education, including transitional classes (e.g., classes taught in Spanish with the goal of “fast-tracking” English development). I have addressed this as a limitation of the present study in the participants section.

The tasks used to examine production/comprehension of DOM involve reading. Doesn’t this put the English-only group at a disadvantage compared to the immersion group? My concern is that the differences between the English-only vs. Immersion school children could be amplified due to the limited reading skills of the former group.

Without question, this is a valid criticism on methodological grounds. It should be noted that the advantage for children in the dual-language immersion program was limited to production, which was an oral task. However, there was no difference at the receptive level on the written task. Previous research (e.g., Bowles, 2011a, 2011b) predicts the opposite effect, such that if differences between the DLI and ME school groups were to emerge, it should be in the written domain. For this reason, it does not appear that reading skills are at the root of differences between HSs in the two educational programs.

In pages 17-18 the authors mention that the lexical frequency of the verbs preceding DOM may affect performance. Couldn’t immersion education help in this regard by providing opportunities of exposure to less frequent verbs? Immersion increases not only the quantity of input/output but also the quality of input/output through exposure to a wider range of registers and texts. In this case the beneficial effect of immersion that the authors report could be attributed to both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the type of input/output that students receive in this context.

This is an excellent point. High levels of exposure to the HL in general should minimize frequency effects because those who are more exposed to the HL purportedly overhear a greater number of lexical items. By the same logic, HSs who are frequent producers/overhearers of their language have more instances of use of an individual grammatical structure with which to apply this structure to novel lexical items. Immersion should minimize frequency effects for two additional reasons: (1) the academic nature (quality) of the input is purportedly more extensive and (2) HSs may receive explicit, form-focused instruction in such instances. I have addressed this in the manuscript.

P1, line 29 […] moves away from strictly comparing heritage speakers (HSs) to other groups of bilinguals 🡺 to other bilingual groups or to monolingual norms?

I have reflected this change to reflect both: Spanish-dominant bilinguals and monolinguals.

p1, line 33: it is essential understand 🡺 it is essential to understand.

Changed.

p.18, line 707: benefitted 🡺 benefited.

The “tt” is standard in my variety of English and in order to be consistent with the other conventions in this manuscript I have opted not to make this change.

**Additional Changes**

The following are minor changes that I have made to the manuscript to improve clarity and/or to support the arguments made throughout, beyond the changes suggested by the reviewers. Note that this list does not include minor textual changes (changes in wording, sentence order, etc.).

* In the introduction, I added references to Potowski (2007) and Barnett et al. (2007). These references further illustrate the need for studies such as the one reported here that concern the development of Spanish and further contextualize the present experiment.
* I adjusted the axes on the forest plots in Figures 5-8 so that all were consistent. This means that it is easier to visualize the size of the effects across the statistical models relative to one another, rather than having different axis scales for each model.
* I added task to the statistical model with HS data only. Previously, task was only incorporated in the model with all participants. This had no impact on the results or their interpretation but further confirmed the effect of task was driven by HSs rather than the Spanish-dominant bilinguals, which is an intuitive finding that is now supported by inferential statistics.
* I have added references in the discussion to papers that show that Spanish HSs frequently produce more English in immersion programs than what would be expected. This allows us to reconcile the linguistic data reported here with research from bilingual education.