

English as a Foreign Language

English as a Foreign Language:

*Perspectives on Teaching,
Multilingualism and
Interculturalism*

Edited by

Fotini Anastassiou and Georgia Andreou

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INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this book is to introduce readers to ongoing research on teaching English as a foreign language and to highlight recent trends in theories of acquisition, teaching, and development of communication and intercultural skills.

Ever since the importance of multilingualism has been largely acknowledged, more and more research has been conducted on the acquisition and learning of a second language, a third language and a foreign language. This is mainly because of the vast mobility of populations between countries and mixed marriages (Barnes, 2005). Since there are far more multilinguals compared to monolinguals in the world (Tucker, 1998), it is just as important to investigate the way bilinguals use their languages while still in the process of learning their second or third language or a foreign one. A child's ability to communicate in more than one language is surely a complex ability and thus represents a complex phenomenon, too. This phenomenon entails acquiring more than one grammatical system as well as language learning processes that are not part of a single vacuum. Grosjean (2001) has proposed his language mode hypothesis according to which a bilingual's languages are active to varying degrees when an interaction takes place; that is, there is a base language and then there are other languages that can be activated to varying degrees.

As English as a third language is increasingly recognized as a common world reality, research around this particular subject certainly provides useful answers to questions regarding the most desirable pedagogical method when teaching English at school: What are the strategies that students use when learning foreign languages? What is the best age for introducing additional languages in the school curriculum? And what is the attitude of the pupils that learn a foreign language—and English in particular, since it is a global language? According to Crystal (2003: 4), a global language takes up this role when it is “a priority in a country's foreign language teaching even though this language has no official status”. In addition, the concept of a heritage language is deemed as a rather significant one, now that research has finally focused on this crucial factor, since bilinguals often learn English as a foreign language while

speaking one or even two languages already (Anastassiou and Andreou, 2018).

Migration and globalization have been two factors that have rapidly transformed today's societies into multicultural ones. Multiculturalism is the outcome of different cultures living together or approaching one another, especially when these cultures are called to coexist in the same place. The term "multicultural" defines a social reality and describes a situation that involves people from different cultural backgrounds, while the term "intercultural" describes the process of exchange between different cultures—that is, the process of this interaction between individuals or groups of people with different cultural backgrounds (Guoming, 2010). Therefore, multiculturalism refers to the coexistence of different cultures whereas interculturalism refers to a dynamic relationship which is formed through the interaction of people who come from different cultural backgrounds. While multiculturalism simply refers to the coexistence of different cultures, interculturalism concerns the process of this coexistence. Thus, the purpose of multiculturalism is its evolution to interculturalism, and the notions of multilingualism and the acceptance of diversities and the customs of people coming from different cultures are deemed obvious attributes of today's societies (Samovar, Porter and Stefani, 2000).

Intercultural education has gone beyond the limits of just school education and is perceived as a new pedagogical response to a continuously changing cultural reality. The rapid transformation of societies into multicultural ones demands changes at a sociopolitical level and a significant coordination of all authorities and institutions, as well as the development of strategies that enable a smooth coexistence of all people. The sociopolitical challenges became more apparent in education as more and more children that came from migrant families were enrolling in schools that were not prepared to implement multilingual and intercultural education yet (Andreou and Anastassiou, 2014). What became apparent was that several Western countries that were used to sending out migrants were now becoming the host countries for migrants from different parts of the world. This new situation called for decision making and actions that would facilitate intercultural education and would provide all of the stakeholders (e.g., parents, educators, school administrations and pupils) with all the necessary guidelines, methodologies and tools. The key factor in the acceptance of diversity has not been met adequately and what has been the norm in most schools was the effort to assimilate pupils that came from migrant backgrounds. In particular, there has been a lot of effort to teach pupils the host country language as a second or foreign one (which is

understandable for the whole educational system) without taking any special steps to include teaching of the heritage language of these pupils, too, or to include teachers that came from the same heritage background of these pupils within the school (Anastassiou, 2014). “Intercultural competence and skills” as a term has been used to identify the prospect of an ‘intercultural opening of the host country; it is the ability to function effectively across cultures, to think and act appropriately, and to communicate and work with people from different cultural backgrounds—at home or abroad’ (Leung, Ang and Tan, 2014). The steps that a society may take in order to implement specific policies and strategies within school lead to the development of intercultural awareness, competence and skills that may indeed broaden the outcomes of an educational system. English as a foreign language is the first foreign language usually taught in most schools and, in that sense, English has become a medium of international communication and a medium of development of intercultural skills.

The very notion of communicative competence, like the other aspects of culture and communication, is a diverse concept which varies across cultures as a result of different levels of expected participation, different beliefs, different social situations, different types of knowledge, and different values and standards (Zhang and Zhang, 2015: 56). Intercultural communication competence can be defined as a person’s ability to engage in productive intercultural dialogues of meanings and relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds. To make the intercultural interaction productive, one needs to have the ability to construct meaning and rapport with people from different cultural backgrounds through appropriate and effective use of verbal and nonverbal language (Song, 2009). The objective of English language teaching as an international language has much in common with intercultural communication. Thus, English language teaching should be oriented towards the promotion of intercultural competency education through English.

Furthermore, current research being conducted with psycholinguistic tools used to tap into L2 learners’ cognitive processes involved in second language and foreign language learning has a lot to offer when it comes to understanding the principles that govern learners’ L2 knowledge and their cognitive processes. This knowledge may provide a clearer picture of the nature of language learning and, consequently, may inform second/foreign language pedagogy. Another aspect of teaching additional/foreign languages is the one entailed in teaching learners with learning difficulties. Researchers (e.g., Bialystok, 2001; Bishop and Snowling, 2004) have

explored the different ways language learning processes affect the development and skills of learners that have literacy difficulties or dyslexia. A common finding in the studies on dyslexia language learning is that dyslexic language learners will continue to struggle with the acquisition of their literacy skills in the new language system (Reraki, this volume). Also, according to Asker-Arnason et al. (2012), studying writing from a dynamic point of view, through process-oriented rather than product-oriented research, might offer a “window to cognition” in writing. In that sense, studying dyslexic learners’ L2 writing is a field that can enhance our knowledge regarding the way these learners acquire foreign languages and promote the improvement of foreign language teaching methodology.

The collections of contributions in the present volume will give the reader a general idea of where research on English as a foreign language is heading in the areas of teaching, pedagogy, intercultural and multilingual studies, and teaching students with learning difficulties. The authors situate their research within current debates in terms of theory and empirical data. In the present volume readers will find several chapters discussing issues of English as a foreign language in a wide variety of settings, countries and orientations, coming from Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Turkey, the UK and the USA.

Mariana Bono and Silvia Melo-Pfeifer discuss conceptual issues surrounding the term “heritage language”, focusing on its semantic potential and limitations from a multilingual perspective. They review the literature with a focus on how the label “heritage language” and the epistemological framework it springs from compare with other concepts and research orientations in the field of foreign language education in different geographical contexts. They then attempt to conceptualize the notion of linguistic heritage from an integrated multilingual perspective that advocates the inclusion of the speakers’ competence in their heritage language within a larger, heterogeneous, plural and dynamic set of communicative resources, which usually includes English. When we talk about “heritage language”, we rarely think about English. Hence, in the scope of this volume, the authors intend to think about how learning English (mainly in the case of recently arrived migrants) in Anglophone countries or as a foreign language in non-Anglophone countries can compromise, hinder, or encourage the acquisition and maintenance of heritage languages.

Fotini Anastassiou, Georgia Andreou and Julie Baseki focus on the factors of heritage language and literacy. They studied bilingual children that came from immigrant families but were born and raised in Greece. The majority of these children had only acquired literacy in Greek, while literacy in their heritage language, Albanian, was not promoted by their families and the education system. According to the findings, the children who had been taught and had acquired literacy showed greater attainment of English as a foreign language. The implications of this study point to the importance of the factor of promotion of biliteracy in learning a foreign language. The factor of literacy can help us build better curricula and provide the speakers with the much-needed certainty that formal education in their heritage language is valuable too.

Kyria Rebeca Finardi, Felipe Furtado Guimaraes and Nathielli Souza Moreira review the concepts of interculturality and internationalization of higher education, discussing the relationship between these concepts and foreign languages in general and English in particular, drawing on some considerations regarding the use of an approach for the teaching-learning use of foreign languages known as the intercomprehension approach. According to Finardi and Csillagh (2016), no account of multilingualism is complete without considering the role of English in it nowadays. Additionally, according to Finardi (2017), the intercomprehension approach may be a relevant solution for including other languages apart from English in the curricula of Brazilian schools, especially after the educational reform that made the teaching of English mandatory and thus jeopardized the offering of other foreign languages in public schools in that country. The review offered here concludes that interculturality, internationalization and intercomprehension are related inasmuch as the intercomprehension approach and interculturality can help to mitigate negative effects of internationalization, such as the strengthening of the hegemony of English as the academic *lingua franca*.

Valentina Piacentini and Ana Raquel Simões discuss a CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) project in the Portuguese school context and focus on possible plurilingual and intercultural implications experienced by participants in this project. Previous studies have shown that students' foreign language skills benefitted from CLIL; however, research has yet to be developed to understand if CLIL—recognized as a possible plural approach for plurilingual and intercultural education—might be a significant opportunity to foster students' awareness of Otherness. Piacentini and Simões designed a descriptive-explanatory case study of the CLIL-type “English Plus” project (with the English use/learning integrated with

History and Science education, in 2010–2013 and since 2014 onwards, respectively), and they present, here, participants' relationships with English and foreign languages in general. The results reveal that CLIL students show an affective dimension of plurilingual competence, with a clear awareness of Otherness, and that the experience with English through the project can foster their curiosity and capability for other languages and cultures, although English teaching practices are mainly oriented to varieties and cultures of the UK and USA.

Rosita Maglie and Mario Marcon discuss teaching and learning in the field of early foreign language acquisition in English. They focus on developing intercultural awareness and pluricultural competence through the use of children's fiction and instructional strategies as reconciliation tools. The study uses children's literature and instructional strategy (i.e., corpus-based language teaching) to reconcile emerging and consolidated theory and practice in the field of English as a foreign/second language (EF/SL). The two-parent family portrait displayed in children's literature has undergone undeniable changes. Children may live in two-parent families, but also in single-parent families, adoptive families, foster families, divorced families, blended/stepfamilies, etc. Therefore, traditional nuclear family representations quietly condition children to reinforce stereotypical family images. Accordingly, this study helps teachers of (very) young learners use common corpus-based techniques to teach a new language and at the same time integrate children with all sorts of backgrounds into their programme so that all of them understand that differences in language, culture, religion, gender and ability are good. Queer children's literature promotes the idea that families with gay parents are in many ordinary ways *just like* other families, thus endorsing gender equity and social justice.

Natasa Stylianou-Panayi discusses the factor of motivation, intrinsic or extrinsic, integrative or instrumental, as an important factor for a learner's success. Many different types of motivation have also been proposed depending on the context of language learning. Previous studies have shown that achievement was influenced by motivation (Dornyei, 1990) or that learners had positive attitudes towards the learning of the English language and were highly motivated at the same time (Che Mat and Yunus, 2014). Also, measuring variables such as effects of motivation, language anxiety, intercultural learning or students' attitudes towards a second language can also be influenced by other variables such as age, gender and background. The current study focused on examining seventh- and tenth-grade students from state and private schools in Cyprus

regarding motivation and attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language. The results showed that there are statistically significant differences in motivation between gender and age, since tenth-grade students had higher means in motivation.

Minka Paraskevova presents a research project that studies the role of creativity in the classroom and links it to the learning process of students. It further discusses an investigation of acceptability, suitability and possible benefits to the learner of creative language reading and writing tasks in the process of English language learning in higher education in Bulgaria. Also, she studies whether students' creativity could be used as a tool for successful language acquisition and reflective practice in higher education and how it could be applied in practice. Through the application of participatory action research and creative teaching practices, the project empirically tests the responses of the learners according to their skills, age, abilities and interests and evaluates learners' autonomy and confidence with the completion of each task and the level of reflective practice with the target language. The overall result was that there is a gradual updating of knowledge and creative practices from the visual and concrete to the imaginative and abstract learning and thinking. The study also showed possibilities for how tutors could make language learning more varied and fit for the language abilities of learners by designing materials to nurture learners' creative thinking.

Banu Inan-Karagul, Doğan Yuksel and Mehmet Altay discuss assessment as one of the most important learning/teaching processes when the quality of instruction is taken into consideration. Even though teachers use assessment for many different purposes, such as achievement, diagnosis and progress, how much teachers are aware of their assessment literacy levels and how they make use of them for their own educational context still remain issues that have not been adequately addressed. The authors' study investigates the assessment literacy levels of EFL teachers working in different schools (state and private) in Turkey. The data of this study were initially collected by means of an assessment literacy questionnaire adapted from Vogt and Tsagari (2014), and then focus group interviews were carried out to identify the assessment literacy awareness levels of the teachers. The researchers aimed to refer to multiple data sources to be able to contribute to the validity of the findings of the study. The analysis of the data reveals important findings related to the participant teachers' assessment-related backgrounds and their perceived needs together with their awareness levels.

Roberto Ferreira and Carolina Bernales examine two online research methods that have gained ground in applied linguistics in the last decade: eye-tracking and electroencephalography (EEG). Eye-tracking is based on the eye-mind hypothesis, according to which what is fixated on by the eye is being processed by the mind. Thus, by tracking people's eye movements, researchers can identify what readers are attending to and make inferences about the amount of cognitive effort that is required to process a given stimulus. EEG is an electrophysiological technique that can record brain activity directly on the scalp while participants are performing a task (e.g., reading a word, translating a word from one language to another). Both eye-tracking and event related potential (ERPs) have been used to investigate a diverse range of areas pertaining to L2 and foreign language acquisition, such as reading, listening, writing, translation, language assessment, lexical access and representation, and syntactic ambiguity resolution. In this chapter, the authors discuss the scope of questions eye-tracking and ERPs can help applied linguists answer, as well as their limitations when investigating L2/foreign language learning in more ecological contexts.

Maria Reraki discusses her attempt to develop dyslexia-friendly environments in three primary EFL classrooms in Greece with the participation of the EFL teachers. The author introduced the dyslexia-friendly practices to the teachers as a way of enhancing the inclusion and support of learners with dyslexia. As a whole classroom approach was followed, the impact of the dyslexia-friendly practices was also explored with reference to the dyslexic students' EFL peers. Positive outcomes were shown regarding all learners' motivation, with less significant changes shown in their performance. This is probably due to the limited time in which the dyslexia-friendly practices were employed (seven weeks). The chapter looks into the use of inclusive practices in EFL settings along with potential developments in the field of English language teaching for learners that struggle with the acquisition of literacy skills.

Julie Baseki, Georgia Andreou and Fotini Anastassiou aimed to investigate the effect of spelling, as an intrinsic part of transcription ability, on the overall quality of the written compositions produced and on how composing higher-level processes relate to product characteristics. InputLog enabled them to investigate the writing profiles of dyslexic and non-dyslexic children and assess composing skills in both Greek and English as a foreign language through two different approaches to writing assessment, dictation passages and picture-elicited narratives in both languages. According to their results, children with dyslexia scored

significantly below their peers regarding overall text quality, and they produced shorter and less cohesive/coherent texts. Dyslexic writers' spelling profiles, as well as their revising and pausing behaviour, seem to be lagging rather than deviant, while both revising and pausing behaviours indicate that spelling has been the main concern for both groups of writers and confirm the dyslexics' deficient error detection mechanism.

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CHAPTER ONE

ENGLISH AND HERITAGE LANGUAGES FROM A MULTILINGUAL PERSPECTIVE: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES FOR INTEGRATION

MARIANA BONO AND SÍLVIA MELO-PFEIFER

1. Introduction

Defining the notion of *heritage* in linguistics and language education is not an easy task. Heritage studies are a relatively new field of research, especially in Europe, where it is still under construction (Kagan & Dillon, 2008) and where, depending on national research traditions, several terms coexist to name the relationship between speakers and a language whose status can be highly volatile. Depending on the speakers and their circumstances, the same language can be referred to as their mother tongue, *langue d'origine*, home language, heritage language, second language, or foreign language. Heritage language (HL) as a construct is so deeply intertwined with others that its definition depends on how we portray the whole picture. While it is always possible to narrow the focus to the dynamics between a home language and a national language (as is often done in SLA studies with the pair L1/L2 (source language/target language), such an approach implies a duality that is now seen as clearly inadequate to describe the complexities of language profiles and linguistic landscapes in late modernity (Melo-Pfeifer, 2019). More often than not, these terms have to be pluralized in order to dress a fair portrait of the individual's linguistic repertoire. In a European context, the notion of HL appeared until recently under different labels, embedded (or even hidden) in the literature of bilingualism and code-switching. Increasingly, heritage studies represent an emerging area of research devoted to multilingual competence and third language acquisition.

In our previous research dealing with Portuguese migrant populations in Germany and Portugal, we noted the apparently undistinguished use of several concepts to name these speakers, as well as to define their language *of origin* and to promote its use and maintenance (Melo-Pfeifer & Schmidt, 2012). These different concepts circulate in theoretical and empirical research, in individual discourses and on legal texts. They include “heritage language” (Cummins & Danesi, 1990; García, 2005; Valdés, 2005); “migrant languages”; “*langue et culture d’origine*” (Bertucci & Corblin, 2007), “Herkunftssprache” (Bauer & Chlosta, 2010), “home language” (Little, 2010) and sometimes even “mother tongue” (Ghaffar-Kucher & Mahajan, 2013) or “first language” (Montrul, 2005). More recent is the use of “emergent bilinguals” (García & Kleifgen, 2010).

Concepts are both tools for thought and action and a consequence of those processes (Mercer, 2000). They are actualized in social and discursive practices whereby they acquire cognitive, volitive, affective, and ideological undertones. Because they depend on social dynamics, concepts are unstable and may be used to fulfill an array of functions, even if some of those functions are not explicitly acknowledged by the institutions or the individuals who use them. Since every concept is rooted in an epistemological tradition and possesses a discursive history of its own, the above-mentioned terms have different semantic properties; they convey different perceptions of self and other, of language status, language needs and linguistic repertoires (García, 2005). Far from being neutral, the constructs used to designate immigrant languages to frame language policies, for instance, can have a critical impact on the development of educational programs geared towards language maintenance, the assimilation into the host society through mastery of the national language, or the promotion of linguistic diversity through foreign language instruction. Each label has its own connotations and problems and is more or less permeable to multilingual reconfiguration.

This chapter attempts to clarify the theoretical relationships that the notion of heritage establishes within the field of language teaching and learning, particularly from the perspective of the acquisition and development of a *multilingual competence*, a term that generally refers to the language practices deployed by multilingual speakers. The notion of multilingual competence aims to replace a segmented vision of language skills. It stands for a holistic, multi-faceted and dynamic set of resources that can be construed and shared in context to meet specific discursive needs, and that evolves to reflect the speaker’s life experience (Coste, Moore & Zarate, 1997; Bono & Melo-Pfeifer, 2012). It encompasses all previously

acquired linguistic competences (whether in a mother tongue, a foreign or heritage language).

2. Heritage Language: semantic networks and their implications

In the North American tradition, the term *heritage language* has been used to portray three different sociolinguistic realities (Fishman, 2001). It can refer to the indigenous languages spoken by Amerindian communities, the languages of immigrant minorities and colonial heritage languages. These flexible categories raise a number of problems when it comes to analyzing the relationship speakers entertain with their languages and what it means to be part of a minority. Indeed, heritage languages are generally considered to be minority languages, but a language with a local minority status (as is the case of Spanish in the United States) can double as an international language of global reach. Likewise, a heritage language can have several millions or a few thousand speakers; it can have an important presence in the school curriculum of a given country or region, or be absent from it (compare Spanish and Portuguese in the US). A heritage language can also be mainly perceived as the community language of a stigmatized group (the Arabic-speaking communities in post 9/11 America, as referred by Bale, 2010). The minority status usually attributed to a HL cannot therefore be the only factor to account for the different sociolinguistic situations in which heritage speakers may find themselves and the way they relate to their languages (Carreira & Kagan, 2011; Bono, 2016).

Beyond demographic considerations, we know that from a social and emotional perspective, the home language of immigrant groups can be or become an unwanted heritage, especially when it identifies the speaker with a stigmatized minority or when the prevailing national mindset – as it is voiced in social and institutional (including educational) discourse – promotes a monolingual path to success, both in academic and economic terms: “heritage sometimes carries a negative connotation, pointing out to the (ancient, primitive) past rather than to a (modern, technological) future” (Hornberger & Wang, 2008: 16-17). Similar remarks have been made by García, who has objected to the use of the term “heritage” in the United States on the grounds that its rear-viewing perspective denies languages other than English the vitality that one would associate with languages which are currently spoken by millions of speakers in the country and abroad. She further argues that the widespread adoption of

this concept is a politically motivated attempt at silencing the word “bilingual” and replacing it with “heritage languages”:

In fact, for many of us, Spanish is no more our heritage language than English is. Both languages form part of our bilingual and transcultural identities, and perhaps **it is our bilingualism that is our heritage**, a heritage important in our globalized world, but increasingly denied to U.S. citizens in U.S. global politics (García, 2005: 603, our emphasis).

After providing several examples that attest to the phasing out of the words “bilingual” and “bilingual education” from the national discourse, García warns that recognition of HL in education can be a fallback position, not conducive to the realization of the nation’s potential for bilingualism and biliteracy.

In francophone research, the term *langue d’origine* is intended to designate “rather vaguely, the language spoken in the learner’s original environment, and it is not always clear whether by ‘environment’ we refer to the family or the home country” (Vigner, 2009:37, our translation). In its reference to a home country and the family, this definition is close to the German notion of *Herkunftssprache* (Bauer & Chlosta, 2010; Kniffka & Siebert-Ott, 2009). According to Bauer and Chlosta, the term describes the languages spoken by migrants workers or refugees and their families (Bauer & Chlosta, 2010: 242). A crucial area of study in European research concerns the integration in the school system of children with an immigrant background and the role of their home languages in the development of academic competence and the acquisition of the national language (Auger, 2010; Kniffka & Siebert-Ott, 2009; Vigner, 2009). Kniffka and Siebert-Ott argue that

the offer of HL classes for these pupils follows the idea that good knowledge of the mother tongue favors the acquisition of a second language. An important aspect of this success lies in the coordination of first and second languages’ foundations, especially regarding the initial processes of learning to read and write (Bauer and Chlosta, 2010: 158, our translation).

European scholars pursue a research agenda that aims to develop an integrated perspective for the teaching and learning of the heritage language alongside the language of the host country, with the overarching goal of promoting the development of competences in both (see studies included in Fürstenau & Gomolla, 2011).

At a different level, *language of origin* hints to a social and emotional connection with the language of the community. While this may be the case for the first generation of migrants (Moussouri, 2010), it can be counterproductive to attribute an origin (a country of provenance, a specific religious or linguistic affiliation) to subjects who do not recognize themselves in these categories and for whom their origin relates back to a past that they wish to put behind (Bertucci & Corblin, 2007). The idea of “origin” can be taken to imply that the individual belongs elsewhere; it can be construed as social stigma by the speakers themselves and/or other members of the society. Additionally, there may not be a single geographical origin but several, as individuals (and their families) go through different experiences of mobility that multiply their sense of where they come from and explain where they stand at a given point in time. Identifying oneself with a particular origin or provenance can also be a matter of personal choice, an act of agency, a (re)creation based on social representations of languages and cultures. Finally, heritage speakers can distance themselves from their origins in certain circumstances and assert them in others, depending on contextual elements and the way in which they perceive their interlocutors and are perceived by them.

A recent publication in English by the Council of Europe, “The linguistic and educational integration of children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds”, features the term “home language” to refer to “the language(s) spoken at home by children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds” (Little, 2010:11), a definition that firmly locates the home language within the realm of the family and the community. Its authors are careful to acknowledge that the home language need not be the sole language of the family: “the term is used without prejudice to the fact that in many cases the language of schooling may be adopted as a language of at least some home communication by at least some family members” (idem). The reverse situation also needs to be pointed out, namely, that the use of the term may restrict the discursive space invested by this language to the home and the community, ignoring its potential to occupy other spaces and serve a combination of purposes.

The terminological fluctuation permeating heritage studies may help to explain sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic issues, and illustrates the complexities related to the use of these concepts when trying to understand how citizens come to terms with their language itineraries (Little, 2010), their identity and their place in society. It also throws light on the expectations of the host community regarding immigrants’ achievements, their linguistic needs, their abilities, and the challenges they face.

Depending on where they find themselves in their new country, migrants can be variously designated as “heritage speakers”, “heritage language learners”, “host country’s language learners”, “culturally and linguistically diverse”, “members of a linguistic minority”, “recently arrived”, “having to surpass linguistic barriers” or “with special needs”. Each of these labels carry semantic connotations that entail images of immigrants as either already having, or having yet to acquire, legitimate linguistic resources, as possessing or being dispossessed of a means of socialization and a viable path to success. As an alternative, García and Kleifgen (2010) have proposed the use of “emergent bilinguals”, a less biased term to refer to subjects who are in the process of acquiring the national language. Each of these designations has its advantages and drawbacks; each carries ideological, ethical, educational and political undertones; each can alternatively erode, ignore or value the heterogeneity of multilingual repertoires and discursive practices (Hélot & Ó Laoire, 2011). We will come back to these issues in section four hereafter.

3. Heritage languages within a multilingual perspective: reshaping a research field

Taking into account the challenges raised by the conceptual and terminological issues discussed in the previous section, we argue that the term *heritage language* is more adequate and carries less negative connotations than the designation *language of origin*. Unlike the notion of *home language*, it can be used to describe communicative practices that are not necessarily restricted to a domestic context and to specific interlocutors within that context. Furthermore, heritage languages benefit from an “in-between” status in terms of mother tongue/foreign language and formal/informal instruction. Heritage language learners’ productive and receptive skills are quite heterogeneous and asymmetrical – often with highly developed listening comprehension and interaction skills (Melo-Pfeifer & Schmidt, 2012:3). From a terminological and methodological viewpoint, it appears critical not to isolate the heritage language as a separate entity in the linguistic repertoire, but to approach it from a resolutely multilingual, integrated perspective, in which the speakers’ competence in their HL is recognized as belonging to a larger, heterogeneous, plural and dynamic set of communicative resources (Bono, 2016; Faneca, Araújo e Sá & Melo-Pfeifer, 2016).

In heritage studies, particularly in North America, the notion of linguistic heritage is sometimes used to depict an unchanging and unchangeable

state of affairs, and heritage speakers' competence (their oral and written production, their pragmatic performances) is more often than not measured against the kind of competence displayed either by native speakers of the same language or by speakers who learn it as a foreign language. Most studies to date follow this contrastive approach and deal with the advantages and the drawbacks experienced by heritage speakers when they attempt to use and/or to learn the HL. Equally, most empirical analyses exhibit a normative approach and focus on the deviation from the standard variety as spoken by an idealized native speaker. Linguistic proficiency remains the main criterion that enables the analyst to assess HL speakers and learners' competence (Kagan, 2005).

In the context of instructed language learning, a considerable number of publications deal with heritage speakers' learning advantages and difficulties with regards to specific aspects of the language (phonetics, the lexicon, syntax...) and the concept of 'interference' is central to their arguments (see, for a synthesis, Kagan & Dillon, 2008). Heritage speakers are usually credited with an advantage related to their extended lexical resources and their strong oral comprehension and production skills, which constitute a set of prior knowledge that can be activated for the purposes of further language learning. On the other hand, the fossilized "deviant" forms used by the local community and developed through extensive contact with English (or the national languages of European countries) are considered to pose a challenge to the learning process. Once again, comparative approaches prevail, and the empirical data tend to come from language courses where heritage speakers are enrolled alongside traditional "foreign language" learners.

However, it is now clear that the notion of deficit (a result from the comparison against the so-called native speakers) cannot and should not be used to account for heritage speakers' language production. Their linguistic resources have intrinsic value and are deployed to perform very specific functions, which are clearly shaped by the speakers' lived experiences. To a large extent, the roles and values with which heritage languages are invested depend on the speakers' linguistic awareness and on the degree of development and maturity of their multilingual competence, not only in terms of their knowledge of other languages, but also with regards to their attitudes, motivation and the images that they form of different languages and cultures. As Blommaert states,

There is nothing wrong with that phenomenon of partial competence: no one needs all the resources that a language potentially provides (...). Our

real “language” is very much a biographical given, the structure of which reflects our own histories and those of the communities in which we spend our lives (2010: 103).

From a multilingual perspective, the heritage language becomes one among many other mobile semiotic resources (Blommaert, 2010, that are developed, adapted, valued or devalued, with varying degrees of effort, according to the social context and the communicative situations in which heritage speakers are involved. If we follow Blommaert, this set of communicative and – we would like to add – cognitive resources are acquired as a result of the experiences of mobility that the speakers undergo during their lifetimes, as far as these experiences expose them to contact with different interlocutors and a range of discursive practices. Hence, heritage speakers’ linguistic biography is a crucial factor to understand the “puzzle” of their language resources, particularly in order to make sense of their beliefs about their linguistic heritage and the way in which the HL is used, transmitted and learnt.

A multilingual approach to the notion of heritage language (Melo-Pfeifer & Schmidt, 2013) underscores the following issues:

- From a sociolinguistic perspective, the HL may or may not be directly related to migration; there is a multiplicity of contexts in which mobility takes place. Additionally, the concept of linguistic heritage may need to be pluralized, for example, to describe bilingual families living in a third culture (for example, the child of Italian-Albanian parents living in Germany). Finally, this is a construct that, in many situations, lacks a real-life referent in those cases in which the language has not been transmitted to the younger generations, with the resulting language shift and the creation of new linguistic repertoires (see Cook, 2003, on language attrition).
- From a social and emotional point of view, the HL can be, simultaneously, a reality its speakers may want to hide to avoid being associated with a particular group and a label imposed from the outside, with the ensuing potential for conflict at an affective level: “To categorize children based on their alleged, reconstructed, fantasized provenance is to determine those origins for them, to fossilize them, to choose them on their behalf” (Castellotti, 2010 :89, our translation).
- From an educational perspective, the HL can be a language of instruction (for example, in the so-called European sections offered by some high schools in Europe, in bilingual schools...) and/or a

language that exists outside the classroom, that children acquire in their communities before or while attending school; it can also be part of the school curriculum when taught as a foreign language. Each of the possibilities in terms of the academic status (or lack thereof) of the HL bears on the social images surrounding the language in question and its varying degrees of legitimacy.

- In terms of language acquisition and language use, the HL is first learnt at home in early childhood (in which case it can be said to approach the notion of “mother tongue”), but, if the language is also taught within the school system, its mother tongue status then shifts to a foreign language status. We go from a language spoken within the family to a language that is not (or is no longer) the main language of communication for the speaker. When this shift takes place, factors such as the mode (informal, formal) or the order (L1, L2) of acquisition may not suffice to account for the characteristics of the heritage language and its speakers/learners.

In sum, a HL is a community language, generally transmitted from one generation to another in a society where this language coexists with others, and that is part of the speakers’ multilingual repertoire. Valdés (2005) and García (2012) among others have referred to the interdependence and the cross-fertilization of linguistic resources within an enlarged communicative competence (see also Melo-Pfeifer & Schmidt, 2012). It is important to note at this point that the HL is not necessarily the first or the sole language acquired during early childhood, nor it is always vowed to suffer from language attrition, despite the dominant role played by the national language in most aspects of the speakers’ life and social interactions, or the learning of further languages, notably English, at school. Finally, the considerable variation between individuals needs to be acknowledged when attempting to define what constitutes a heritage language: “a critical component of this definition has to do with identifying continua of proficiencies, reflecting the tremendous variation in heritage language observed by researchers” (Polinsky & Kagan, 2007:370).

Researchers working from different theoretical and analytical frameworks agree that the maintenance of a HL, its intergenerational transmission and its role in keeping a community together depend largely on the language being valued and accepted by both the migrant community and the host community (Tse, 2001). The impact of social representations on intercultural encounters being both undeniable and unavoidable, it is critical to study the images associated with heritage languages, not only by the linguistic majority (other-representation) but also by the heritage

speakers themselves (self-representation) (see Melo-Pfeifer & Schmidt, 2014 on shared social representations of heritage speakers and learners).

4. Perspectives on a research agenda

4.1. Heritage languages in language policies and legislation

Understanding concepts and their semantic networks from an emic perspective is critical when we seek to involve subjects in discussions about national and international language policies and to broaden public understanding of language guidelines, linguistic relationships and educational linguistic policies (Ricento, 2006). Public understanding of political issues that bear on immigration and linguistic, cultural, and economic integration is highly relevant, since it underpins legislation and is simultaneously influenced by legal texts and their enforcement (Shohamy, 2006).

When immigrants face financial or political struggles, when they are alienated by critical problems regarding the near future and the urgency of integrating into the host society, they do not always engage in discussions related to language education in their own language. Because of social pressure and prevailing discourses valuing skills in the language of the nation, the right to maintain the “original language” and the affective and cognitive potential of its use become secondary concerns, reinforced by social representations (Castellotti & Moore, 2002) and reproduced by several social actors (teachers, school administrators, politicians...) through different means of communication. From the perspective of the host country, immigrants are expected to integrate pacifically into the host society and to learn its language(s) if they intend to stay. Issues related to the affective and cognitive assets associated with bilingualism are again quite distant from these concerns. Instead, the questions of productivity and linguistic and cultural distance are frequently raised as part of public and political debates to support or criticize language policy initiatives, particularly at school (Hélot & Ó Laoire, 2011). As Hélot and Ó Laoire underline, “responses from the state can either collide with the demands from the local community, or be tacitly accepted and met with no resistance” (2011: XV).

Both perspectives are visible on legal texts related to immigration language policies, which reveal the image a society has of its immigrants and their linguistic needs, in terms of maintaining and using their languages, depending on their hypothetical and dynamic life projects.

These legal texts also project a self-image for the immigrants, the rights they should reclaim, the needs they are supposed to have and the actions they should engage with, since laws become visible in the linguistic micro politics of everyday life (namely at work or at school) and in public debate (because of language policies' cost-effect relationship or the integration of immigrants). Besides, concepts used to name immigrants and their languages as well as intervention measures are differentiated and may convey different images of migration dynamics, actors, needs and expectations. In fact, as García and Kleifgen claim, the use of different terms contributes to construe different scenarios (2010:3), and has major consequences for children, parents, teachers, policy makers and communities. A closer look at the terms used in legal documents in different languages may help to discover the hidden agendas in language education.

4.2. Patterns of self-determination among heritage speakers

In the light of the complex and multidimensional layers of meaning attributed to the concept of heritage in the fields of language acquisition and language education, and given the inextricable link between language and identity, patterns of self-determination and self-categorization among HL speakers are a valuable topic of research to refine our understanding of critical social and emotional issues underlying HL use and HL learning. As mentioned in the previous section, speakers' emotional attachment to their language (whether they present and represent themselves as heritage speakers, and how this position interacts with other definitions of the self) is as important as their actual linguistic ability. The label "heritage speaker" cannot and should not be automatically assigned on the basis of biographical information alone. In the emic perspective outlined, among others, by Hornberger and Wang (2008), HL speakers are defined not only by their familiar or ancestral ties to a particular language, but also – and crucially – by how they exert their agency in determining whether or not they are HL speakers and/or HL learners (see also Hornberger, 2005: 607). How do speakers negotiate (appropriate, accept, reject, subvert, and eventually transmit) their linguistic and cultural heritage? How much agency are they afforded in these processes? In any case, the different ways in which speakers position themselves are revealing of social dynamics in which language is one among many other factors in play. Cross-disciplinary research appealing to discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, educational studies and social psychology is needed to further our understanding of the driving forces behind language development and

growth on the one hand and, on the other hand, language attrition and language loss.

Finally, for the field of heritage linguistics and HL education to succeed in accurately portraying these speakers, old ideas about what *is* a language have to give way to theoretical and empirical frameworks in which languages are fully recognized as discursive constructions (as opposed to hermetically sealed systems) which undergo extensive cross-fertilization and constant change (Blackledge & Creese, 2010:31). In language contact situations and multilingual environments, personal narratives constitute a promising area of study to gain in-depth knowledge of the language practices and representations amongst HL speakers. The need to understand these language practices (largely unappreciated and unrecognized within the educational institutions and society at large) arises equally from the notion that discourses about language play a fundamental role in the way people create and attribute meaning to both social and linguistic practices and to the relationships between groups. Personal narratives give voice to cultural and historical conceptions of language and provide access to socially situated systems of representations. The study of discourses about heritage languages, their maintenance and their growth, and of the lived experiences of their speakers, is extremely valuable and can be expected to remain a fruitful line of research because it throws light on the complex forms and the symbolic dimensions underlying language learning and language use among heritage speakers.

4.3. A multilingual perspective on HL teaching and learning

As far as language education is concerned, a significant body of research – particularly in North America – is devoted to studying the ways in which the school can work towards preservation and transmission and against a potential loss (Valdés et al., 2008). As an increasing number of colleges and universities develop special tracks in their language programs specifically geared for heritage speakers, the question of how a HL should be taught (as a foreign language? as a native language?) remains open. Many scholars have pointed to the damaging effects of the disconnection between early education and secondary and post-secondary education in this respect. In early education, the languages spoken at home and in the community have to give way to the national language, the mastery of which is regarded as the *sine qua non* condition for overall academic achievement. When foreign language instruction is introduced in the curriculum (national differences notwithstanding, at some point in middle school), the nature of preexisting competences and their impact on further

language learning are far from being a focal point, and when educators do pay attention to them, they overwhelmingly adopt a monolingual perspective whereby incomplete, partial knowledge is seldom recognized as a strategic asset.

In the North American context, Cummins (2005) has described a “no win” logic by virtue of which the school system deprives children of the very same resources it aims to develop. The school will ignore, and sometimes effectively suppress, heritage linguistic resources in schoolchildren while simultaneously claiming to develop competence in foreign languages - “often the very same languages and often in the very same children” (Hornberger, 2005:606). Similar remarks have been made in a European context, (see, for example, Coste, 2008 on the role of the national language in the schooling of children in France), where efforts to promote multilingualism fall short of any significant attempt to support the teaching of HL (De Bot & Gorter, 2005). Valdés et al. (2008:107) argue that reflecting on the role that educational institutions should play in language maintenance and language enrichment is one of the greatest challenges facing the field of HL teaching.

A multilingual perspective on instructed language learning has the potential to significantly contribute to an integrated approach that goes beyond a dynamics of conflict between language maintenance and the development of new competences in English and other (national) languages, and emphasizes transfer and cross fertilization of linguistic resources. Heritage languages represent valuable resources to learn English as a second or foreign language, provided that pedagogical practices are implemented to allow them to co-exist and interact in the classroom (for instance, through translanguaging pedagogies and practices; see García & Wei, 2014, for an in-depth discussion). Studies involving heritage speakers who learn additional languages suggest that early multilingualism and multiliteracy are predictors of enhanced language learning skills and overall academic performance: “for minority language children who have maintained their heritage language and supported it with literacy knowledge, we can expect superior third language performance relative to other minority language children who do not read or write in their heritage language” (Swain & Lapkin, 1991:640; see also Cummins, 2008; Tucker, 2008).

5. Conclusion

HL studies are a relatively young field within a discipline founded upon binary models (learning and teaching a second language to native speakers of another language) and a “no difference” assumption that implies that all language acquisition processes are equal and follow the same stages, regardless of the speaker’s repertoire (De Angelis, 2007). Since heritage speakers straddle the boundaries between first and second language acquisition, they do not fit into traditional models of language learning. The interest and the advantages of approaching the study of heritage language education from a multilingual perspective are many. Research devoted to third or additional language acquisition has contributed to build consensus around the idea that previous learning experiences (both in formal and informal environments) and prior linguistic knowledge, however partial this knowledge may be, have a positive effect on further language learning (Bono, 2011; Hoffman & Ytsma, 2004; De Angelis, 2007; Moore & Gajo, 2009). To a certain extent and despite significant differences in the contexts and cultures surrounding language teaching and learning, most heritage language learners are revisiting a language acquired in their childhood. However, following years of formal education and socialization in the national or majority language, the learning process is filtered by their knowledge and competence in this language, which has to all effects become dominant in these speakers’ lives. The resulting learning experience, which some describe as re-acquisition (see, for instance, Valdés, 2005), is not altogether different from the acquisition of a third language. Heritage learners are exposed to and expected to learn a language or a variety of that language or certain skills in the language that are different from the competences they have acquired at home. Further research will undoubtedly throw light on the cross-linguistic interplay between different but interconnected systems: the HL spoken at home and in the community, the HL as it is taught at schools, colleges and universities, the mainstream language, and other languages commonly offered within foreign language programs.

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