
**Different perspectives on heritage language development: Introducing a special issue of* Language Learning

**What this research was about and why it is important**
There has been a significant rise in interest in heritage language speakers. Heritage speakers are individuals who, in their infancy, acquire a family language that differs from the language of their social environment, but later in life become dominant in the language of that environment (essentially, a second language). Heritage speakers thus acquire more than one language but are exposed to unbalanced input in each (they see or read different amounts and types of each language). Thus, they frequently show variable, unbalanced language performance. Such observations raise important challenges about long-standing assumptions about how heritage languages are learned and maintained. In this article, the researchers introduce six different studies reported in a special issue of the journal *Language Learning* devoted to heritage languages.

**What the researchers did**
The six featured contributions are written by researchers working on various aspects of heritage languages: sociolinguistic (the role of heritage languages in society), usage-based (the role of input), and generative (the role of internal representations of language). The studies examine various factors that facilitate and (in some instances) hinder the development of heritage languages.

**What the researchers found**
Each contribution to the special issue is summarized:
- Lourdes Ortega argued that we should think of bilingualism and competence in a heritage language as being “graded” (not as “present vs. absent”) and that examining heritage language learning has important consequences for social justice, as issues such as marginalization and social inequities influence it.
- Monika Schmid and Tuğba Karayayla examined the roles of age, attitudes, and language use, focusing on UK-resident Turkish–English bilinguals’ production of lexical and grammatical features in their heritage language (Turkish). They revealed the importance of rich and varied environment for attaining advanced proficiency in a heritage language.
- Cristina Flores examined oral data from Portuguese returnees who grew up in Germany, but moved to Portugal during their childhood and/or adolescence. Her findings showed length of exposure to German to be an important predictor for the speakers’ retention of grammar knowledge.
- Paulina Łyskawa and Naomi Nagy investigated a grammar feature (case marking) in the speech of heritage speakers of Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian in Toronto. Their findings generally showed no differences in how heritage Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian speakers and native speakers of these languages use case marking.
- Eve Zyzik explored word preferences by heritage speakers of Spanish using a judgment task with conventional words (those listed in dictionaries) and creative words (those that are possible, yet not in existence). Her results indicated that heritage speakers of Spanish were less likely than monolingual Spanish speakers to reject creative words, which implied that the lexicons of heritage speakers and native speakers are different.
- In another article about how we think about language knowledge, Joshua Bousquette and Michael Putnam examined data from three moribund varieties of heritage German (i.e., those in which the oldest generation is the final one possessing advanced fluency in the language) and dispelled the myth that individual speakers undergo language death. Their analyses revealed that these final speakers still possessed a highly functional grammar in their heritage language.

**Things to consider**
- All contributions highlight the role of heritage speakers’ age at the time of exposure to their languages and the role of input quality and quantity in language development and maintenance.
- This volume’s diverse perspectives show that the study of heritage languages will benefit from coordinated research efforts from researchers representing different theoretical frameworks.


*This summary has a CC BY-NC-SA license.*