Identity and Motivation Among Heritage Language Learners of Italian in New Zealand: A Social Constructivist Perspective

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Arianna Berardi-Wiltshire

Abstract

Over the last two decades, New Zealand has become one of a small number of culturally and linguistically superdiverse nations in the world (Spoonley and Bedford, *Welcome to our world: Immigration and the reshaping of New Zealand*. Auckland: Dunmore Publishing, 2012), and yet the teaching of migrant heritage languages in New Zealand receives little governmental support, leaving the maintenance of these languages largely in the hands of self-funded ethnic community groups, which seldom possess the resources to implement effective language teaching initiatives. Based on a study of the self-reported experiences of heritage language learners of Italian in New Zealand, this chapter provides a microperspective on the learning journeys of five New Zealanders of migrant background who set out to learn their heritage language through courses of Italian as a foreign language. Designed as a longitudinal exploration of language learning motivation through a series of in-depth narrative interviews and detailed classroom observations, the study's main inquiry focuses on the significance of the learners' own constructions of their Italian identity (or *Italianità*) for the development of their motivational trajectories throughout 18 months of learning. By explaining the learners' motivation as the result of their own processing and reactions to key factors, relationships, and events both inside and outside the language classroom, the study illustrates the deeply personal and identity-dependent nature of the motivational processes observed, supporting a conceptualization of HL learning motivation that is in line with modern SLA theorizations of second language learning motivation as a dynamic, identity-related and socially constructed process.

A. Berardi-Wiltshire (✉)
School of Humanities, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand
e-mail: a.berardi-wiltshire@massey.ac.nz

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Introduction

> My Italian heritage certainly does not help my language skills, but I think perhaps the feeling... I sort of have an affinity to everything Italian [...]. The other people [in the course] don't have Italian blood, and I just get the feeling that they are not quite as passionate as I am. It's an advantage, because you've got the passion and you really want to do it. (Berardi-Wiltshire 2009, p. 1)

The above excerpt comes from Esther, whose grandfather migrated from Italy to New Zealand in the late 1800s. Esther never met her Italian grandfather or had any contact with any Italians other than her own relatives, until the age of 50, when, as part of a dramatic lifestyle change, she began to learn her heritage language (HL) through weekly evening classes at the local Italian social club, a task that still occupies her more than 20 years later.

While Esther's story is in many ways extraordinary, similar experiences are common among students enrolled in foreign language (FL) courses of Italian in New Zealand, where, unlike other countries with analogous migration histories such as Australia and Canada, the teaching of migrant HLs receives little legislative or institutional support, leaving the teaching and learning of these languages largely in the hands of individual ethnic communities that seldom possess the resources to implement effective language education initiatives. Within this state of affairs, the HL options available to adult learners are especially limited, as even where HL programs do exist, these tend to focus on mother-tongue retention and literacy for children, often leaving older learners little choice but to enroll in FL classes such as those offered by private language schools, universities, and other postsecondary institutions.

Drawing on a longitudinal study which explored the links between identity and language learning motivation in the self-reported experiences of five such learners

(Berardi-Wiltshire 2009), this chapter focuses on the complex relationship between learners' experiences with their HL, their motivation to learn it, and their sense of their own identity. Adopting a social constructivist perspective on language learning motivation (Williams and Burden 1997; Ushioda 2009) and of identity as a dynamic process of construction embedded within interactions and situations in which individuals find themselves (Crawshaw et al. 2001), the research here presented seeks to position itself within a growing body of empirical studies investigating the relationship between identity and HL learning by examining the ways in which learners and speakers of HLs construct, negotiate, and perform their identities in various educational and extracurricular contexts. Specifically, the main objective here is to provide insights into the role that these identity processes play in the arousal, management, and maintenance of the learners' motivation. By examining qualitative changes in the learners' motivation in relation to the ongoing construction, reconstruction, and negotiation of identity inherent to their day-to-day interactions with the learning setting and social context, the chapter explores the nonlinear and emergent nature of the motivational patterns observed, ultimately supporting a view of language learning motivation as situated, dynamic, identity-bound and socially mediated.

The chapter begins with an overview of recent advances in language learning motivation and identity theory and research within the field of HL education, followed by an outline of the study's own theoretical framework as rooted in socio-constructivist perspectives on motivation from the field of second language acquisition (SLA). The next section offers some background information on the country's linguistic situation and on the position of Italian within it. An overview of the featured study comes next, followed by a discussion of its main findings. The chapter closes with a summary of the study's main conclusions and some suggestions on future research directions.

Laying Out a Theoretical Framework

Heritage Languages, Identity, and Motivation

Since the emergence of HL education as an independent disciplinary field, much research concerned with issues related to HL learners' identity has been framed by a "common essentialist understanding of the relationship of language to culture among heritage language researchers and educators" (Leeman 2015, p. 105), and a long-held assumption that HL learners pursue the language in order to claim or retrieve aspects of one's ethnocultural identity (Lacorte and Canabal 2003) motivated by a desire to connect with "the intrinsic cultural, affective, and aesthetic values of the language" (He 2006, p. 2). Given the pervasiveness of these ideologies, it is not surprising to find that whether explicitly expressed or subtly implied considerations of learner identity permeate a significant part of motivational research in this field. However, unlike in the field of SLA where the last 20 years have seen a number of attempts at theorizing motivation and identity to account for their fluid and socially

constructed dimensions (for overviews see Dörnyei 2005; Ushioda and Dörnyei 2009), it is only recently that HL education research has begun to adopt similar perspectives (for overviews see Leeman 2015; He 2010). Common to studies within this emerging trend is the incorporation of theoretical frameworks and concepts from SLA endorsing postmodern and/or social constructivist views of language learning as related to discursive constructions and negotiations of identity (Davies 1990; Pavlenko 2003; Pavlenko and Blackledge 2003) and to issues of affiliation, participation, and belonging (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000).

From a related perspective, researchers have begun to explore the relationship between learners' identity and HL learning agency using Norton's investment and imagined community framework (Norton 2000; Kanno and Norton 2003). This framework, which reconceptualizes L2 motivation by framing it in terms of the learners' identity, the social context, and the personal aspirations at the basis of their engagement with the target language, emphasizes the relationship between language learning and a learner's sense of self and is thus particularly suitable for interpreting the experiences of HL learners, whose motives to learn the HL are frequently implicated in the construction of multiple, blended, and/or blurred identities in multilingual contexts, often within problematic learning settings (He 2010). A study from Wu et al. (2014) illustrates these points in relation to 14 learners at a charter middle school for Asian American students by showing how a mismatch between the students' true HLs (a range of Chinese "dialects") and the institutionalized surrogate HL (Mandarin) negatively influenced their investment in the target language, as when the learners realized that their investment in Mandarin would not help them achieve their own imagined identities, they lost interest in learning the language. On the other hand, a study by Wong and Xiao (2010), which also explored the learning experiences of students of Mandarin from various Chinese dialect backgrounds, found that while the students did not feel an identity-based connection to Mandarin, they nonetheless saw the acquisition of Mandarin as a way to construct desirable international or cosmopolitan identities.

Studies such as these are significant in that they focus on aspects of motivation and identity that within HL contexts had previously remained unexplored. Their conclusions in terms of the complex relationship between the two constructs suggest that while issues related to ethnocultural identity might indeed play a role in personal motivational dynamics, learners might be motivated by more than a desire to inherit or maintain some more or less essentialized version of their cultural identity, and that they might view HL learning as a means to reconstruct aspect of one's own self-concept and complex social identity in accordance to ever-developing understandings of their place in the world and of that of the HL. Within the field of HL education, this idea represents a step towards more refined understandings of who HL learners are and how to develop pedagogies that meet their needs, and as such deserves to be thoroughly explored in relation to different individuals, populations, learning settings, and contexts, ideally through multiple research frameworks that may contribute insights from a range of different perspectives.

Social Constructivist Perspectives on Language Learning Motivation

Over the last 20 years, SLA theory has shifted away from definitions of motivation as a unitary psychological construct affected by individual differences, towards social constructivist models able to capture the motivational role of complex interactions of internal and external factors pertaining to learners' specific learning settings and contexts (Dörnyei 2005; Ushioda and Dörnyei 2009). In turn, this shift has led to a number of reformulations of L2 motivation that emphasize the role of learners' interactions with their sociocultural and learning environments and their agency in "constructing the terms and conditions of their learning" (Lantolf and Pavlenko 2001, p. 145).

Particularly relevant among these, Ushioda (2003) offered a view of L2 motivation as a "socially mediated process" (p. 90) by suggesting that if learning is about "mediated participation" (Lantolf and Pavlenko 2001, p. 148), the motivation to learn must also socially and culturally mediated, emerging from the fluid and complex system of social relations, activities, experiences, and multiple micro- and macrocontexts in which each learner is inherently embedded. In the latest theoretical revision of her work, Ushioda (2009) proposes a relational *person-in-context* approach to L2 motivation that aims to provide insights into learners' motivational dynamics through a holistic focus on the complex, personal and moment-to-moment relationships between the learner and a specific setting. Such approach represents a break from previous linear models of motivation, which "reduce learning behavior to general commonalities cannot do justice to the idiosyncrasies of personal meaning-making in social context" (Ushioda 2009, p. 219), with a view of motivation as an organic socially mediated process which is instead aligned with contemporary research trends in applied linguistics, which since the "social turn in SLA" (Block 2003) have been increasingly upholding relational and emergent perspectives to learning and on learners as agentive beings with unique sociocultural, historical backgrounds and identities.

Also in line with such perspectives is William and Burden's (1997) constructivist model of motivation, which aims to capture the temporal dimension of construct by defining it not as a stable psycho-emotional state observable at one particular point in time, but as a dynamic entity that changes and evolves throughout the participants' learning experiences. This model, which unlike Ushioda's (2009) approach is designed to offer more than just a broad theoretical perspective, provides a comprehensive analytical framework for in-depth explorations of L2 motivation by conceptualizing it as a three-stage process where the first stage is associated with motivational *arousal*, the second with the making of a conscious *decision* to act, and the third with *sustaining the effort* required to achieve a specific goal or goals. Throughout these three stages, L2 motivation is influenced by a number of factors or motivational influences. Differently from other temporal models of motivation, this model does not prescribe the influence of particular factors onto particular stages of the process; instead, L2 motivation is viewed as the result of the complex synergy of

factors that depend on the experiences and personal characteristics that each individual brings to each situation, making the learner a co-constructor of motivation through his or her interactions with the external world.

The model's social constructivist perspective brings it in close alignment with Ushioda's person-in-context approach, as they both hinge on the premise that each individual is motivated differently, and that people make their own sense of the various external influences that surround them in personal ways, acting on their internal dispositions and using their personal attributes in unique ways. One of the advantages of combining the two approaches in a unified theoretical framework is the potential for microlevel explorations of individual learners' motivational trajectories with a focus on how motivation is constructed moment by moment and over time within a complex system of ongoing interactions and relationships with significant others. Above all, because of its focus on "the interaction between the self-reflecting intentional agent and the fluid and complex system of social relations activities and experiences" a leaner is inherently part of (Ushioda 2009, p. 220), this framework can provide the means to investigate the ways in which a learner's ongoing constructions of their own identity might be implicated in the arousal and management of language learning motivation, and so facilitate or constrain their engagement with activities and practices conducive to HL learning.

The Sociolinguistic Context: Languages in New Zealand

As the last habitable land mass in the world to be discovered, New Zealand as a nation was literally built on immigration, which in fact was already in full swing by 1840, when the nation's founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi, was signed. Since then, the New Zealand population has continued to grow and to diversify, with the last 40 years marking its transition from an assimilationist to a multicultural society.

During the assimilationist phase of the 1950s and 1960s, migrants to New Zealand were expected to abandon their own languages in favor of English as a necessary step to becoming fully integrated members of New Zealand society. During this period, New Zealand's national identity centered around the existing population of British origin and most arrivals were from England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. Eventually, the nationality-based immigration policies of the 1960s yielded a population overwhelmingly European in origin (Beaglehole 2007). By the mid-1960s, the need for cheap unskilled labor led to arrivals from the Pacific region, starting some degree of ethnic diversification, but it was only after the waves of Māori unrest of the 1980s and the establishment of a national bicultural framework in the late 1980s that the national ethos began to shift toward an increased acceptance of other cultures. The process was accelerated in the mid-1990s by changes in immigration policy that opened the way for a large influx of settlers from nontraditional sources.

Today New Zealand is one of a small number of culturally and linguistically superdiverse nations in the world (Spoonley and Bedford 2012), rating third on the

list of most ethnically diverse country in the OECD (OECD). Among the total of 213 ethnic groups encompassed by the population, the largest after New Zealanders of European descent (74%) and the indigenous Māori (14.9%) are Asian (11.8%), Pacific (7.4%), and Middle-Eastern, Latin American, and African (1.2% overall), all of which are rapidly growing, particularly in the region around the city of Auckland (Statistics New Zealand 2013), which is now one of the most ethnically superdiverse cities in the world (The Royal Society of New Zealand 2013).

Naturally, this rapidly increasing ethnic diversity is causing changes in the country's linguistic ecology, and while English and te reo Māori are still the most widely used languages (respectively spoken by 96.1% and 3.7% of the population), the number of speakers of other languages is considerable and rapidly increasing. Samoan, for example, is spoken by 2.2% of the population, Hindi by 1.7%, and Chinese by 1.3%. Between 2001 and 2013, the number of Northern Chinese speakers (including Mandarin) almost doubled, and the number of Hindi speakers tripled. As at 2013, New Zealand residents reported speaking more than 160 different languages, including Middle Eastern, South American, and African languages (Statistics New Zealand 2013).

While overall New Zealand is responding positively to the growing cultural diversity, with signs of the emergence of a multicultural ideology becoming increasingly evident (Ward and Liu 2012), widespread acceptance and legitimation of minority languages seems to be developing at a much slower pace, as reflected in the scarcity and disjointed nature of legislative and institutional support available for nonofficial minority languages, multilingualism, and linguistic diversity in general. Currently, te reo Māori and New Zealand Sign Language are New Zealand's two de jure official languages, while English is a de facto official language by virtue of its widespread use. As might be expected, the New Zealand government has a range of legislative obligations to further the protection and promotion of these official languages. As for all the other languages spoken across the national territory, language-related policies, where they exist, tend to be dependent on discrete government departments' right to decide whether and how languages might be incorporated into areas such as education, health, housing, and business, leading to an overall approach to managing the country's linguistic diversity which is necessarily partial and disparate (Harvey 2013).

The lack of coherent national-level language education provisions for nonofficial languages has long been a cause for concern for local language and ethnic relations experts, who in recent years have renewed long-standing calls for a unified national languages policy (Harvey 2013; New Zealand Human Rights Commission 2008; The Royal Society of New Zealand 2013), and yet to date, multiple endeavors to create such a document (Peddie 1991; Waite 1992; Kaplan 1994) have failed to produce the desired outcome. Holding particular significance among the many political, ideological, and practical obstacles to the development of such a policy is the low levels of support for community language promotion among representatives of other minority language communities. A recent study by de Bres (2015) presents a case for the existence of a hierarchy of minority languages in New Zealand, where arguments in favor of minority language promotion are most

widely accepted for the Māori language, followed by New Zealand Sign Language, then Pacific languages, with all other migrant community/HLs placed at the bottom of the hierarchy. In New Zealand, the study concludes, “recognition of connections between the language communities is scarce, with the group representatives tending to present themselves as operating in isolation from one another, rather than working towards common interests” (p. 677).

Given this state of affairs, it is not surprising to find that in New Zealand the teaching of HLs continues to be largely the responsibility of individual ethnic communities, which therefore play a crucial role in HL maintenance, mainly through community-based language and literacy classes offered during weekends and after school hours. Within some migrant communities, religious institutions such as Samoan and Greek Orthodox churches and mosques have also been found to work in support of ethnic languages (Holmes et al. 1993); however, most community-based initiatives tend to be dependent on limited and/or unreliable resources and to be targeted at supporting intergenerational transmission of mother tongues rather than catering for the needs of adult HLLs (Narayan 2012), leaving the latter with limited opportunities to approach the learning of their HL other than enrolling in foreign language courses.

Italian Language in New Zealand

Among the migrant communities that contribute to New Zealand’s growing ethnic diversity, the Italians are a highly visible and popular group, despite the fact that numerically they represents one of the smallest Italian communities in the world, with fewer than 4000 individuals in a population of over four millions (Hill 2011). A steady number of Italian migrants enter New Zealand every year, but only half of the 3,795 New Zealand residents who declared themselves “Italian” in the latest census were born in Italy (Statistics New Zealand 2013). The remaining half is comprised of the descendants of the Italian migrants who reached New Zealand in the last 130 years, mostly through multiple migratory chains as a result of which the Italians in New Zealand today are not a unified or homogeneous group, and instead tend to belong to small communities that originated in different places, reached New Zealand at different times, and settled in different areas, with significant consequences for the linguistic repertoire of individual migrants and communities, as well as for the overall maintenance of the language in New Zealand.

Although the little information available on the linguistic development of the early generations of Italian migrants New Zealand comes from genealogical studies and anecdotal sources rather than sociolinguistic research, it does seem to point to the same processes observed in the early Australian and Canadian Italian communities, whose linguistic repertoires were often limited to a spoken knowledge of a local variety (or “dialect”) of Italian (Bettoni 1985; Tosi 1991). Often in these cases, the dialect survived within the family domain, while English spread to all other domains, becoming the dominant language for the second and following generations.

Today, Italian as a community language in New Zealand appears to be undergoing typical patterns of maintenance and shift. Plimmer's (1994) sociolinguistic survey of the Italian community in Wellington found that despite the community's very positive and distinctive self-image and strong social networks, language use data pointed to a very pronounced level of shift to English for both standard Italian and Italian dialects, especially among members of the second and following generations, with English being the dominant language in all domains, standard Italian used within the community in public situations, and dialects only used at home or with close friends and relatives.

Overall, despite the dearth of additional research data, it is reasonable to assume that what is true for the Italians in Wellington is also true for other urban Italian communities in New Zealand, namely, that in the absence of structural support for HLs within the country's English-dominant society, the maintenance of Italian largely depends on intergenerational transmission within the family, although local Italian communities, when present, may also play a role in preserving cultural vitality and enhancing the public profile of the communities by organizing cultural festivals and events that often combine food, wine, and cultural elements (Hill 2011).

Overview of the Study

The participants to the study were five adult learners enrolled in FL courses of Italian offered by either the local university or the local Italian social club in Wellington, New Zealand's capital city and home of the largest and most prominent Italian community in the country. All participants were second- or third-generation descendants of Italian migrants to New Zealand with varying degrees of HL competency prior to beginning their studies.

Qualitative data were collected through a series of in-depth narrative interviews with each of the learners, semistructured interviews with their teachers, and detailed observations of learning sites, lessons, and teaching materials. Data from the participant interviews, which overall spanned over a period of 18 months, were analyzed inductively by putting to practice the principles of a grounded theory approach (Glaser 1998; Strauss and Corbin 1998) as "flexible heuristic strategies" (Charmaz 2003, p. 259) to form a system of longitudinal cyclic analysis, where each interview was coded independently and emerging codes were then used to analyze all other data. Through this system, each interview literally shaped the next, simultaneously extending and deepening the overall pool of data and continually revealing new interpretative keys and fresh paths of enquiry.

From a total pool of thirty interviews with the five main participants, we here focus on data from four of the learners: Marianne, Francesco, Giulia, and Esther (pseudonyms). Given the emphasis on heritage, the analysis focuses on the participants' sense of their own Italian identity, or *Italianità* (lit. "Italian-ness") in relation to their motivation to learn Italian. The following discussion, based on a selection of the study's findings organized according to the three stages of motivation identified

by Williams and Burden (1997), is not meant as an exhaustive portrayal of any of the cases, but rather as an illustration, through specific examples, of how personal constructions of ethnocultural identity can be implicated in HL learners' motivation as a result of their own understanding and appraisal of critical factors inside and outside the classroom, aiming to highlight some aspects of the interplay of cultural and linguistic heritage and identity that were found to be significant in the arousal, decision-making, and maintenance stages of the learners' motivation.

Discussion of Findings

Stage 1: Italianità and Reasons for Studying the HL

In the context of Williams and Burden's (1997) definition of L2 learning motivation as a state of cognitive and emotional arousal, the beginning of the L2 motivation process coincides with the emergence of a learner's thoughts and feelings reflecting curiosity and/or interest towards the L2. The nature of these initial thoughts and feelings is crucial in terms of the evolution of motivation, as it may lead to the formation of desires, wishes, and goals that represent the direct antecedents of the decision to engage in language learning, ultimately influencing the direction and intensity of motivation throughout the learning process.

Examples of the role that the learners' Italianità plays in this first motivational phase were found in all of the participants' stories, where the development of a personal interest in the HL was always rooted in their sense of belonging to Italian families and communities, which always emerged before – sometimes *years* before – any definitive decision to pursue language learning. Marianne, for example, spoke of her curiosity for Italian language as something that had been with her since childhood:

> I always wanted to learn Italian. I always had this thing, this desire. Dad also wanted to learn and we tested each other on words and things like that, and play games or talk Italian, we just had an interest in the language. (Marianne, excerpt 1)

Marianne saw her interest in the HL as rooted in the Italian influences on her upbringings and as developing through her relationship with her father, with whom she shared a passion for their common cultural and linguistic heritage.

Francesco's interest in the language of his Italian ancestors also originated in his early years and in particular in his memories of speaking Italian to his Italian grandparents. As we will see, this sense of connection with his Italian heritage assumed a significant role in motivating Francesco throughout his learning, but it is something that in essence had always existed in his mind:

> It has always been in my mind. I have some connection with it. If I hadn't felt that, I don't think I would have started. I grew up speaking Italian at home, so that switches my button. (Francesco, excerpt 1)

As the data suggest, these learners' sense of their own Italianità was clearly implicated in their motivational arousal, with the source of their interest rooted in their socialization as members of Italian groups and in their early memories of key Italian figures in their lives. In this sense, we can say that the seed of their motivation to learn the HL had existed within these learners for as long as they had been aware of their Italian ancestry, co-developing with their sense of Italianità from its very beginning.

Stage 2: Italianità and Deciding to Study the HL

While each individual's construction of their personal connection with the HL seems crucial to motivational arousal, and so in turn to the decision to learn the language, the participants stories' also show that even high degrees of interest and emotional appeal for the HL are not the only antecedents to the decision to commit to a language course, supporting the idea that "an individual might have strong reasons for doing something, but not actually decide to do it" (Williams and Burden 1997, p. 121). In fact, in all cases, the decision to study Italian came as the result of particular circumstances that originated in the interplay of the learners' personal drives (e.g., attitudes, wishes and desires) and their construction of external factors such as specific events, people, and situations. Among the latter, common to all of the learners' decision to pursue the HL was the incidence of a critical event, which ultimately triggered it by modifying and/or enhancing their previous construction of Italianità, bringing about an increased desire and/or a sense of urgency about learning their HL.

For both Marianne and Francesco, such a trigger was the death of their closest Italian relative:

> I think that with every person in my family who I lose that had a strong connection via the language or the culture, it makes me want to learn it more because it's an important connection to them, to my dad, to my nonna [lit. 'grandma'] and to my own past, and I think if I don't make an effort to embrace it somehow, then it's just going to dwindle out, and there is less of a chance that my children will have an appreciation of it. (Marianne, excerpt 2)

> My grandmother died and mom doesn't have that many people to speak Italian so... But I mean I am not doing it just as a personal favor to her. I have a connection that takes me back, something to do with my own childhood and a culture that I guess is diminishing. (Francesco, excerpt 2)

In Marianne's case, while she already had a long-standing interest in learning Italian, her father's passing brought her to face the intergenerational depletion of her family's Italian identity and intensified the sense duty that comes from being one of the last two living descendants of her Italian ancestors. This added some compelling dimensions to Marianne's construction of her Italianità and of the role of the HL in it, which in turn shaped and strengthened her motivation. Similarly, for Francesco, his grandmother's death had the effect of intensifying the emotional connection to his ancestry and HL, ultimately bringing to a head his desire to recover the feeling of

connection to his family and to his Italian roots that had characterized the first years of his life, when he could speak Italian fluently.

For Giulia and Esther, the decision to pursue their HL was triggered by their experiences of traveling to Italy and experiencing Italian life first-hand. For Giulia, the emotional response was a feeling of "finally fitting in somewhere," which she understood as a direct consequence of the latent Italianità she believed to be part of her by virtue of her Italian ancestry:

> That feeling, at nineteen, of being on the streets of Rome and feeling that I had never been there before but that I had always been there. I felt completely accepted and I felt like I was home, really. (Giulia, excerpt 1)

Esther's first trip to Italy was also crucial to her decision to study Italian in that it transformed her awareness of her own Italian ancestry into a powerful sense of belonging, as a result of which she began to think of her Italianità as an important part of herself that demanded to be explored, developed, and embraced:

> My trip to Italy was really my turning point because it awakened everything in me, my family ties and just the love of it. That's when everything was decided for me, what I wanted to do—what I *needed* to do—was to explore that side of my life. That was the first time that I thought "right, when I get back home I am going to do something about this". (Esther, excerpt 1)

Independently from the individual manifestation of the trigger-event and the specific circumstances leading to action, findings related to the process of deciding to pursue the HL show the constructive nature of both Italianità and of motivation, offering a good illustration of the dynamic interplay between a learner's internal world, their social context, their identity, and their motivation.

An even deeper level of interpretation is revealed by the specific ways in which the learners' imagined themselves once in possession of the HL competence they sought. For each of the participants, the attainment of this achievement took a slightly different form:

> Talking to my mother is the primary thing. She's not old, you know she's not seventy and so I hope there will be a few good years of conversation between us there, so that's the primary motive. (Francesco, excerpt 3)
>
> In my dream I am working and living and I have a great job in Italy and I have perfect comprehension and I can express myself perfectly, not just adequately, in the way that I have control over the English language, I can do that in Italy with Italian. So I see myself doing that and interacting with people, in a restaurant or in the street, going up the apartment stairs and "ciao signora!" [lit. 'hello ma'am!'] (Giulia, excerpt 2)
>
> I want to speak fluently to the Italian ambassador. Because now when I speak with the ambassador I speak in English and I feel a little bit embarrassed because I really feel that certainly in my position, I should be able to speak Italian. And so that is my ambition, the ambassador is really my focus. (Esther, excerpt 2)

Considering these goal-representations, it is easy to see how they reflect elements of the learners' construction of their own Italian identity, as they often include people, places, and objects from the learners' own histories and backgrounds as symbols or clues to the types and aspects of Italianità to which they aspire through the learning of their HL. Interestingly, in spite of similarities in some of the learners' backgrounds and experiences, HL learning goals ultimately tend to take very diverse and highly personal forms, highlighting how the idiosyncratic nature of personal intention is closely tied to personal constructions of HL identity and how this connection is already present in the early stages of motivation.

In reviewing the role that identity ambitions came to play in the participants' initial decision to learn their HL, two major trends are clearly recognizable. The first is illustrated by the stories of Francesco and Marianne, where the initial drive to learn the HL was accompanied by limited identity ambitions and language learning was not expected to bring about dramatic changes to the participants' identity. In general, these learners approached HL learning with already well-defined personal and social identities and a clear sense of their own Italianità, but without the hope or the expectation that competence in their HL would dramatically change who they were:

> I don't live in that community all of the time so I am not seeing a lot of Italian people all of the time... It would be nice to feel like an insider but I don't think so, it would be difficult. (Marianne, excerpt 3)

> It [Becoming more Italian] is not a goal. And it's not likelihood. I mean if something happened and I went there to live for a year... But even then I think it would be more likely that I'd feel like somebody that comes from the outside. (Francesco, excerpt 4)

For these learners, HL learning was oriented towards an version of themselves which they imagined would be more in touch with their Italian heritage and which was partly defined by their relationships with Italian speakers around them, but the identity developments they pursued through the learning of their HL were not aimed at the construction of an outwardly recognizable Italian identity to be tested or performed in exchanges with Italian speakers. In other words, they wished to learn the HL mainly because of its symbolic and personal meaning, rather than for the social advantages that it would entail.

The stories of Giulia and Esther exemplify another trend: for Giulia, learning Italian was also inspired by its symbolic value and a desire to deepen her sense of connection to her ancestral culture, but also and above all by a very specific intention to relocate her whole life to Italy. For her, the HL held not only personal and emotional value, but was also associated with a degree of a social capital, which she saw as the key to a brand new life in Italy.

The construction of one's HL as a source of capital is also found at the root of Esther's goal to speak with the Italian ambassador. As in Giulia's case, Esther's effort in learning the language reflected more than just a desire to personally connect with her ancestral culture, as it was principally fuelled by her desire to optimize her social standing within a particular community of Italian speakers.

Independently of whether the participants' goals involved elements of observable identity reconstruction or as a mere deepening of the Italianità that was already part of their self-concept, their origins were always rooted in their emotional attachment to elements of their Italian ancestry associated with speakers of the HL. This social element of the origin of language learning goals was evident in all of the participants' goals, strongly supporting the notion that, like other aspects of motivation, the process of goal-setting is both internally driven and socially constructed.

Stage 3: Italianità and Sustaining Motivation

Individual differences in how Italianità influenced the learners' motivation became even more apparent once the courses began, as at that point their motivational trajectories began to be shaped by the learners' ongoing interactions with elements of the learning setting. Some interesting observations can be made by focusing, for instance, on the portions of the participants' narratives that contain examples of dramatic changes in the intensity and/or quality of their motivation as reflected in changes in their levels of enthusiasm or interest, or by more or less sudden changes in their learning goals, desires, or plans of actions to do with their learning. In reviewing examples of such occurrences, one finds that oftentimes changes in motivation corresponded with critical events, experiences, or realizations that were somehow related to the learners' own sense of their Italianità and/or to the identity ambitions associated with the learning of their HL. Among these, particularly interesting are occurrences of drops in motivation related to elements of the learners' context that came to negatively affect motivational states not only because they represented cognitive and/or affective obstacles to HL learning, but also because they were perceived as threats or hindrances to specific identity ambitions.

By far the greatest challenge some of the participants faced in maintaining their motivation throughout their learning was the realization that the ultimate objectives of the courses to which they had committed were at odds with the specific learning and identity goals they had set for themselves. A good illustration of this is found in the experiences of Marianne, whose motivation was challenged on the very first lesson, when her teacher declared that she would not teach any grammar. This constituted a problem for Marianne because she did not believe that such an approach could lead to the kind of language competence she had envisaged for herself. Having approached the study of Italian to gain a deeper understanding of the language and culture of her ancestors, rather than to "deal with Italian shop assistants," she perceived this as a mismatch between her personal goals and the course objectives. The biggest challenge for Marianne's motivation was that she saw the non-grammar approach as linked to the teacher's assumption that most of the students would be prospective tourists to Italy and that as such they would share the desire to build a simple repertoire of "basic Italian words and expressions" to use while on holiday in Italy. Marianne saw this assumption reflected in the way the teacher conducted her lessons, seemingly focusing on the needs of one specific type of learner that Marianne did not identify with:

> I just think that she [the teacher] speaks as though people are going overseas, and she has all these funny little jokes about it and I find that really annoying because not everyone is learning Italian to go on holiday and I actually have other reasons.... I find that annoying. I am not going to spend a year not enjoying it, I am not going to learn if I am not enjoying it. (Marianne, excerpt 4)

Ultimately for Marianne it was her perceived positioning as a FL learner as opposed to a HL learner (i.e., someone with historical, emotional, and motivational links to the language to be learned) that influenced the way she felt about the learning setting, negatively impacting her motivation, and leading her to consider abandoning her studies. What emerges from Marianne's comment above is that the cause of her drop in motivation was not limited to issues to do with purely linguistic goals or learning needs, as what she experienced derived from the mismatch between her identity and identity ambitions and what was afforded by the learning setting, making this a good illustration of lack of motivation as the lack of a "happy fusion between internal and external forces, but a negative tension where the latter dominate, at the expense of the former" and where "individual motivation becomes controlled, suppressed, and distorted by external forces" (Ushioda 2003, p. 94).

Motivational challenges linked to identity-related issues were also evident in Francesco's case, where motivational changes were triggered by difficulties associated with specific learning tasks and activities that came to be perceived as incongruent with his personal identity ambitions:

> The kind of society that the teacher describes is quite alien to the one that I was made to be aware of. I have Italian, which is my family, but Italian is not this big homogeneous thing to me, my family was poor, they emigrated in the thirties... So when I look at Italian TV, Italian football, Italian politics, Italian society I don't really feel like I belong to that. (Francesco, excerpt 5)
>
> So I think I would probably focus it more on strictly language. Like, we have a lot of discussion about the culture, but if I could add more language content and have more language discussions at the expense of the cultural side I would. (Francesco, excerpt 6)

This case offers a good example of the personal nature of HL learners' constructions of their sociocultural identity and the influence it has on their engagement with specific language learning tasks. At first sight Francesco's preferences might seem surprising, as HL learners are often assumed to be particularly interested in learning about their heritage culture as a way to reconnect with their roots. Nonetheless, at a close examination, Francesco's preference appears to be completely in line with his own personal goals and his construction of his own Italianità, which was deeply linked to that of his immigrant ancestors, rendering contemporary cultural examples largely irrelevant to his personal identity ambitions. The example suggests that while FL courses tailored to the needs of specific types of FL learners (i.e., prospective tourists) might be not be in line with the needs of some HL learners (as in the case of Marianne), a learner's reaction to specific elements of a course, and whether these

represent a motivational help or a hindrance, largely depends on their personal construction of their goals and of the identity ambitions they represent.

Turning to a consideration of processes through which learners' motivation is intensified, data evidence suggests that these were often triggered by critical events involving interactions with speakers of the HL. In Esther's case, a significant renewal of her commitment to learn Italian came as the result of her acceptance of a prestigious decoration from the Italian government for services to Italian language and culture:

> The most important thing for me was getting the Cavaliere [lit. 'the knighthood'] because it actually meant that officially I have been accepted. So now I feel like I should match that with my own knowledge. The desire to be able to speak it properly will always be there until I master it. (Esther, excerpt 3)

Receiving the award was motivating in that Esther needed to deliver an acceptance speech in Italian in front of many high-ranking Italian officials, which impelled her to spend hours writing and rehearsing it, but also because it strengthened her resolve to master the language, as the award conferred on her the role of official spokesperson of the local Italian community, which in Esther's mind came with the duty of improving her Italian to match such a position.

A final point about motivational maintenance throughout the learning process is revealed by the participants' descriptions of the ongoing motivational support they received from their personal sense of connection with the HL. In essence, this involved the same affective response to one's sense of Italianità that was observed in the predecisional phase of motivation, where it was found to be a source of motivational arousal even before the learners set specific goals. The interesting point here is that the same affective element was also identified by the respondents as the main factor sustaining their motivation throughout their learning. For Francesco, for example, the key to motivational maintenance lays in the HL association with his family ties, which gave it a strong emotional and personal value:

> I think it does sustain me and it has sustained me through difficult times. It's not just a nice thing that you decide to do, it's actually something you grew up with. (Francesco, excerpt 7)

The motivational value of the affective connection to one's heritage culture was also stressed by Esther, for whom the central theme was one of Italianità as "Italian blood":

> The other people [in the course] don't have Italian blood, and I just get the feeling that they are not quite as passionate as I am. It's an advantage, because you've got the passion and you really want to do it. (Esther, excerpt 4)

Essentially for Esther, having Italian blood meant having an underlying connection to the HL, which was responsible for a special "affinity to everything Italian" which translated in a passion that sustains language learning. This type of "bond" is in a way similar to the "special connection" felt by Francesco, as in both cases the

learners' awareness of their own Italianità created an emotional attachment to the HL which sustained motivation throughout the learning process.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Differently from the collective connotations of the term *community language,* which until recently had framed the vast majority of sociolinguistics and applied linguistics research into migrant minority languages in New Zealand, term *heritage language* is commonly perceived as relating to history, ancestry, and cultural and familial ties. Recent trends in HL education research reflect a growing awareness that while the desire to learn one's HL might hinge on any one or all of these elements, their interpretation and thus their motivation role are necessarily tied to one's own personal experiences and complex identities, opening the way for investigations of the part that learner subjectivity plays in the desires, drives, and overall learning trajectories of individual HL learners.

Drawing on a qualitative study of adult HL learners of Italian in New Zealand, the chapter has discussed some of the motivational implications of the learners' personal constructions of their own ethnocultural identity. By adopting a longitudinal approach to the investigation of the participants' experiences and a social constructivist perspective on both identity and motivation, the study has afforded insights into the identity ambitions lying at the basis of motivation seen as reasons or goals for pursuing one's HL, but also and above all into the identity-related processes that support and/or challenge the maintenance of motivational states throughout the language learning process. The study has showed that these processes are complex and strictly personal, emerging from each learner's interactions with the world around them and in accordance with their own understanding of their place in it, ultimately suggesting the existence of a close, if always idiosyncratic, relationship between a learner's fluid and socially constructed understanding of their own identity and all of the motivational stages associated with the process of learning the HL.

Last but not least, despite its focus on ethnocultural identity as a specific facet of the learners complex identity, the study illustrates that the participants themselves seldom understood this as a discrete factor and that in its motivational implications, ethnocultural identity was often found to intersect and interact with many other aspects of the learners' identities. Looking forward to future research avenues, therefore, one of the main recommendations is towards further investigations of how "other" aspects of identity might interact with one's self-perceived ethnicity or culture to shape individual learning trajectories, ideally through ethnographic studies that might illustrate how HL learners' translingual abilities and practices in different contexts and learning settings might be implicated in the identity processes at the basis of complex motivational dynamics. In the years to come, such research could play a crucial role in expanding our knowledge of the full horizon of HL learning journeys and experiences and in establishing learner diversity as a rightful key element in future theoretical and pedagogical developments within the field.

Cross-References

- ▶ Russian Heritage Learners' Goals and Motivation
- ▶ Language and Ethnicity
- ▶ Plurilingualism: Vision, Conceptualization, and Practices
- ▶ Transnational Hispanic Identity and Heritage Language Learning: A Canadian Perspective

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