

Theme development workshop on
Future-oriented Heritage Language Teaching in Europe:
Professional and Enrollment Strategies for Plurilingual Education

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University of Duisburg-Essen, 23.01.2026, 14-19h

Compared to majority-language didactics, heritage language education (HLE) has received little research attention in Europe. HLE is a marginalized field taught by educators in schools who often work under precarious conditions. At the same time, many HL teachers create transnational networks, share experiences and materials, and develop resources that respond to their learners' needs—while also expressing frustration about the challenges they face (see YLC Report¹). This workshop takes these conditions as a starting point. It aims to explore ideas and principles for a didactics of heritage languages in Europe by bringing together insights from different research perspectives. Importantly, the workshop includes the perspectives of HL teachers and views them as central actors and agents of change. The goal is not to standardize or “take over” HLE, but to engage critically with its persistent marginalization across Europe. By connecting research with the lived realities of teachers, the workshop seeks to strengthen the didactic foundations of HLE. This is especially important because HL teachers increasingly emphasize the need to think about HLE with future generations in mind—a need closely tied to questions of language transmission and maintenance.

Initially focused on returning migrant children, HLT has later on increasingly addressed the integration of second-generation learners. Nowadays, third- to fifth-generation learners attend HLT. In light of these developments, the workshop explores how HLT can bridge heritage and the future of language learning and maintenance. The goals are to examine HLT-related questions from an international and interdisciplinary perspective, recognizing the societal responsibility to both past and future generations, and to develop innovative strategies for the professionalization of HLT educators.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- What kinds of language classes are needed in the future and what are the challenges of maintaining heritage languages in the coming decades?
- How can the European 1+2 language recommendation (learning one mother tongue and two additional languages) be realized?
- How can language policies (concerning the provision of languages in schools) be improved?
- How can teacher education incorporate these linguistic challenges?

¹ Schroedler, T., Diekmann, C., Atanasoska, T., & Gürsoy, E. (2025). An Evaluation Report of the Your Language Counts Project: Findings and Implications. <https://doi.org/10.17185/dupublico/84630>

PROGRAM:

23.01.2026

14h **Welcome and brief introduction**

14:10-14:30h **Kick-off: Ice-breaker activity** (with prepared questions)

14:30-15:45h **Market Place:** Current Status of Heritage Language Education in Europe (Austria, Finland, Germany, Greece, Netherlands, Sweden) and the U.S.

15:45-16:15h **Coffee break**

16:15-18h **Parallel Workshops**

A) *Language Policy, Social Justice, and Participation (Erkan Gürsoy)*

General goal: developing a European line of heritage language planning and policy.

Discussing arguments for permanent heritage language classes, including e.g. equal access to linguistic resources and the promotion of social justice.

B) *Language Maintenance (Katja Cantone)*

General goal: importance of researching different outcomes in heritage language acquisition.

Discussing arguments for language maintenance, including e.g. a critical consideration of language norms and a revision of the role of schools.

C) *Teaching and School Organization: Future Education Goals (Tanya Kaya)*

General goal: give HLT a permanent and significant role in schools. Discussing arguments in favor, including e.g. inclusive education models or language learning with other disciplines.

D) *Teacher Education: Professionalization and Qualification (Tobias Schroedler)*

General goal: provide a good preparation for future teachers of plurilingual students.

Discussing innovative approaches in teacher education.

18:00-18:45h **Discussion:** Main Questions and Challenges in Reconceptualizing HLT

18:45-19h **Exit cards:** take-away-messages and open questions