

# 1

## What is heritage language teaching (HLT) and what does it attempt to achieve?

### 1A

#### Background text

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#### 1. Introduction; the “HLT” concept

The concept of heritage language teaching programs (HLT in English, HSU in German) signifies optional supplementary instruction, which is offered in many immigration countries to students of migrant backgrounds in their heritage language or first language. Depending on the country or region of the German-speaking areas, the HLT is referred to as mother-tongue teaching (e.g. in Austria or in North Rhine – Westphalia) or instruction in the child’s native language and culture (Unterricht in Heimatlicher Sprache und Kultur – HSK, as in German-speaking Switzerland). In French-speaking regions, it is known as ELCO (enseignement de langue et culture d’origine), in English-speaking areas as supplementary schools.

“Heritage language” refers to the language of origin of the students or their parents and grand-parents, respectively, and signifies the language spoken in the family (i. e., with the parents) primarily or partially. “Supplementary education” means that the HLT is offered supplementarily or additionally to regular instruction.

The objectives and rationales for the HLT are discussed in greater detail below; summarily stated, they aim to strengthen the students’ native language ability, the acquisition of competence in the culture of origin, as well as to support the process of integration and orientation in the place of residence and in the country where the families live.

**The teachers in the HLT program are native speakers, i.e., they speak the target language as first language or mother tongue. They are for the most part trained teachers, the majority of them having been educated in the country of origin.**

HLT is mostly scheduled in blocks of two (rarely three or four) lessons per week and is taught in the regular public schools. Often there are students of different ages and two or three grade levels (kindergarten, primary levels and secondary level I) in the same HLT class.

Certain countries of origin (e. g. Kosova and Serbia) have developed an HLT-specific curriculum. Many immigration countries have developed HLT-specific curricula in collaboration with the HLT providers according to curriculum and legal requirements. In Switzerland, for example, it is the “framework curriculum for native language and culture”, developed by the Canton of Zurich, which is being used in many cantons of German-speaking Switzerland.

Specific teaching materials (textbooks, etc.) for HLT have been developed by only a few countries of provenance. The teachers of the other languages and nations mostly produce materials on their own in work-intensive labor with content from textbooks of the countries of origin, among others, which they simplify and adapt.

The availability of HLT depends first and foremost on the interest, the initiatives and the contributions of the parents, the linguistic communities and their countries of provenance. There is a broad spectrum of sponsorships. They range from small, local parents’ associations to strong, nationally active parent and teachers’ associations, more or less fully supporting and financing countries of provenance (i. e., their embassies and consulates), to the educational systems of the immigration countries, which offer HLT in cooperation or independently.

Many legal, organizational and administrative provisions differ not only from country to country, but also within the countries from state to state and canton to canton. This pertains to the question of permitting, among others, and who will be authorized among the providers of HLT within a linguistic group (e. g., a consulate and/or a private sponsor), the integration of HLT into the regular school system, the cooperation between HLT and mainstream schools, the hiring and compensation of HLT teachers and their opportunities for professional development. The present chapter addresses some of these questions. Other aspects will be discussed in the following chapters.

## 2. The goals of HLT

If one compares the actual documents pertaining to HLT (framework curricula, regulations, information and parental recommendations, etc., as referenced in the bibliography), the following justifications, tasks and goals for native language education are voiced repeatedly:

- **Furthering the students' competence in their native language**

For many students of immigrant background, the language of the host country (the one they speak in their surroundings and which is systematically taught and promoted in the regular curriculum) has become their strong language.

The language of origin is frequently mastered by the students of educationally disadvantaged families only in the oral register of everyday language and frequently just in a dialectal form. Without the education provided by HLT, most of the students would sooner or later become illiterate in their native language and lose the connection with the written culture. Other important aspects of the promotion of the first language are among others, the introduction to the specific graphemes or writing in the heritage language, vocabulary expansion, mastery of syntax and grammar and access to the literature of the country of origin.

- **Development and reinforcement of bilingualism and multilingualism**

This objective is closely linked to the one above. Multilingualism is a personal, social, cultural and jobmarket-related, societal resource that must be cultivated. HLT provides many opportunities in which the vocabulary in the learners' first language is built-up systematically, languages are compared to each other and connections between the native and second languages are pointed out.

- **Development and expansion of knowledge about the culture and the countries of origin**

Imparting knowledge about geography, history, culture (literature, painting, music, etc.) of the country or the countries of origin (e.g. in Arabic HLT) in an age-appropriate way is another important goal. The use of media, such as internet, Skype etc., is quite useful to this end, and enables students to conduct their own research. Since the students are frequently more familiar with their host country, it is imperative to establish links between the two countries which stimulate student curiosity, invite comparisons about similarities and differences.

- **Support for the process of integration and guidance about the school system in the host country.**

This refers to the fact that the students and parents of educationally disadvantaged families in particular benefit tremendously from an HLT instructor from their own culture of origin who imparts not only knowledge, but also learning strategies, motivation, tips and information. It further confirms the well founded assumption that "fully mastering one's mother tongue or first language [...] has not only value in itself, but also helps in the acquisition of any further language" (Landesinstitut Hamburg). It is highly probable that participation in HLT classes generally has a positive effect on the students' educational success in the host country. This fact is connected to the above referenced factors.

- **Support for the process of orientation and integration into the society of the host country.**

Pursuant to more recently added functions, HLT also facilitates and supports the process of the students' (and their parents') integration and orientation into the society of the immigration country.

This function replaces the original task of preparing students for the re-integration into the school system of their country of origin after re-migration. The reason for this change is the knowledge that the majority of the students will not or only rarely re-emigrate. For HLT teachers, supporting these young people not only involves teaching them about their country and language of origin, but also includes discussions about what life for a young person with a migration background in a multicultural environment in the host country might entail, including the chances and problems (discrimination, etc.) they might face. See also the explicit regulations issued by the City of Hamburg: "native language education instructors assume as of August 1, 2009 two areas of responsibility: they teach their language of origin and serve as linguistic and cultural mediators" (Landesinstitut Hamburg).

- **Promoting intercultural skills and competences**

This goal pertains not only to HLT, but to school and education in general. It can be promoted through HLT in a particularly authentic context, as the HLT students who grow up in and between two cultures (a specific secondary or tertiary culture) are existentially infused with interculturality in their daily lives.

Chapter 3 of the Zurich framework curriculum for native language and culture, which is accessible on the internet in 20 different languages (see bibliography) offers a good summary of the goals and central themes found in this chapter.

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### 3. Sponsorships; hiring and compensation of HLT instructors

(see also chapter 13 A)

Heritage language education classes are largely offered and organized through three types of sponsorships:

- 1) by the educational institutions of the host country (e. g., as in Sweden, Austria, or individual federal states within Germany),
- 2) by the consulates or embassies of the countries of origin (as is the case for HLT in Portuguese, Croatian and Turkish in Switzerland),
- 3) by non-governmental supporting entities (associations, foundations. Example: the Albanian HLT in Switzerland is organized by the Albanian Teacher and Parents' Association "Naim Frashëri", or the Kurdish HLT, which is sustained by a parents' association.

In the case of types 2 and 3, the approval of the appropriate national, cantonal, etc., educational authority is required in order to qualify as an official provider of HLT and be allowed access to public schools, entitled to classroom use, and entering students' earned grade in HLT into the official school report card. This approval is generally granted only if the HLT classes are politically and confessionally neutral, not for profit, and taught by qualified teaching staff.

Besides the officially accredited bodies, there are also unrecognized sponsorships (e. g., religious associations), which offer HLT classes in private localities without official accreditation.

In exceptional cases there may be a mixed form of all three types. In Switzerland, for example, there are school experiments (St. Johann in Basel, Limmat A in Zurich), in which HLT lessons are integrated into the regular school timetable and linked with regular classroom instruction. The schools in question would therefore correspond to type 1), although HLT classes in the rest of the canton are organized according to types 2) and 3).

It should be added that with type 2) (sponsorship by country of origin) HLT instructors are usually appointed to a maximum of four years, according to ro-

tation principles. This does not apply to teachers with non-governmental supporting bodies. It is assumed that a longer duration of stay in the host country would be advantageous for the teachers and enhance their function in the areas of cultural mediation and integration assistance.

The hiring and compensation of HLT teachers is generally the responsibility of the supporting body (according to the above referenced types 1–3) by the local Department of Education, by the country of origin or by the non-governmental sponsor. Certainly, the least advantageous variant is funding through non-governmental sponsors, especially if these lack sufficient money and the parents have to contribute financially (see also Calderon & Fibbi (2013) p. 9, 67 and 81). Consequently, many teachers who belong into this group are unable to live from their income and have to engage in another occupation. It must be said that owing to the financial crisis, some of the South European countries find it difficult to financially sustain HLT classes, and have begun to request financial contributions from the parents.

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### 4. Integration into the school system

(see also chapter 13 A)

The nature and the scope of HLT integration into the regular school system of the country (a federal state, canton or municipality, respectively) differ considerably. Placed at a better end of the spectrum are situations where HLT is part of the regular classroom instruction and curriculum, as is the case in Sweden, Vienna, Hamburg, or in North Rhine-Westphalia. The organization and administration of the classes, as well as the compensation of the teaching staff here is the responsibility of the state and the local education authorities respectively. Specific professional development opportunities are offered here as a matter of course. In Hamburg, for example, HLT instructors have a mandatory 30-hour continuing education requirement and they have the choice of one of five series of seminars per academic year. This model offers the best conditions for a coordinated, fruitful collaboration between HLT and traditional classroom instruction, which has demonstrably superior positive effects on student success. (see Codina (1999), quoted in Reich et al (2002), p. 38).

At the other, worse end, are situations where the integration of HLT, at best, allows for the use of classrooms at off hours and at the margin of the time table, but without any kind of collaboration with the regular curriculum classes. HLT instructors here justifiably feel that they and their work are little appreciated, and for the parents and their children, this marginalization is undoubtedly a poor motivator as well (referenced in chapter 1 B.3).

A middle position is occupied by federal states and cantons, which do not contribute to the remuneration of HLT, but offer institutional collaboration and an acknowledgement procedure for the inclusion of the earned grade into the regular grade report, education training courses, recommendations for pedagogical cooperation, and contribute to the appreciation and the functioning of HLT in the schools. In this model, the regular classroom teachers are encouraged to inform students of migration background and their parents of the HLT classes and/or to matriculate them for the programs.

**A major problem remains because HLT instructors often teach at unusual times and in different schools. This renders their integration and cooperation with regular curriculum teaching staff much more difficult. (see chapter 2 B.1).**

This problem can only be solved if HLT is fully integrated and part of the regular school system, so that HLT teachers are automatically part of the school team and receive compensation for their coordination and meeting times.

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## 5. HLT student body

The majority of HLT classes are characterized by their heterogeneous nature, relative to various aspects (see articles in chapters 1 B and 2 B):

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- **Age:**

Frequently there are students from different age groups and school levels in the same class or learning groups, and in egregious cases, ranging from preschool to students in the eighth or ninth grade.

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- **Migration background and identity:**

Some students have recently arrived, maybe with good school experiences in their country of origin, but are still very much occupied with orienting themselves linguistically and culturally in the new country. Others- and this refers to the majority of the students – were born here, have been living for a long time in the host country and have mastered the local language much better than their mother tongue. Quite a few belong to the third generation already. Many families have adopted the nationality of the immigration country and move culturally and linguistically quite easily between the first and second culture. For them, at least, the term migration background refers primarily to the biography of the parents and grandparents.

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- **Linguistic competences:**

Many students possess a good command of their first language, others only inadequately, exclusively in dialect and oral register. The degree of competence is independent of age, thus it is quite possible that a 9-year old student is more competent in the first language than a 13-year old.

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- **Family background:**

Many students hail from educated families with a keen interest in the schooling of their children and who can offer support. Others have parents who show no interest in the school and either offer no support, or are unable to offer support.

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Of special importance, particularly for newly-arrived HLT instructors, are the following:

**All HLT students have a multifaceted identity, comprised of elements, experiences and interests of the culture of origin, the culture of the immigration country, certain social settings and the specific secondary culture of their group, which blend in various different degrees.**

Thus, any kind of unilateral value judgement, such as (“as a Turkish woman, you surely ought to ...”) falls far too short and ignores the reality and the experiential world of the students.

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## 6. Specifics of HLT

Heritage language education differs from the classroom teaching in the country of origin (as well as from regular curriculum teaching in the immigration country!) in several points, which are referenced repeatedly in part B of chapters 1 and 2. Some have already been addressed, others are discussed in greater detail in chapter 2. Their main points in the overview below include:

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- Greater heterogeneity of the classes in various respects (see above), particular learning challenges in groups of mixed ages and (multiclass teaching) and individualizing,
  - As a rule, only 2–3 lessons per week: continuity severely disrupted.
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- Weak integration of the teachers into the local school system (few contacts with local teachers, uncertainties with orientation, etc.; see referenced tips in chapter 1 B.5).
- Often poor working conditions: teaching in various schools, often at unusual times with tired students; sometimes with only token payments.
- The instructors who trained in their country of origin are often poorly or insufficiently prepared for the specific situations of teaching in the immigration country.
- The new places of work often offer only few opportunities for professional development.
- Orientation for two or three school curricula: the HLT- curriculum of the country of origin (if it exists), the HLT-curriculum of the immigration country (if it exists), and the regular curriculum of the immigration country.
- The regular teaching materials of the country of origin are often just partially useful, e. g. they are linguistically too advanced or unsuitable in terms of content and culture, and fail to meet the specifics required for students who grow up in and between two cultures.
- Specific HLT teaching materials are only available for a few linguistic groups.
- Additional tasks for the teachers in the areas of collaborating with parents, support for integration, teaching of culture.
- For newly-arrived HLT instructors: problems of their own with orientation and integration in the new context, possible problems with the language of the new country; possibly financial problems.

## 7. The history of HLT

(see also chapter. 13 A.2)

Heritage language education has more or less existed since the beginning of the 20th century when many industrial nations recruited not only foreign workers, but also facilitated the subsequent immigration of their family members. In Switzerland (which in the 19th century was an emigration country), HLT Italian classes have existed since the 1930s, in France HLT has been around since 1925, (see below referenced sources: Giudici/Bühlmann; «Frankreich»). Pursuant to the hiatus during WWII and the new rise of the Western industrial nations, countries like Germany, Switzerland and Austria again recruited workers, this time predominantly from southern and southeastern Europe. Soon many of them brought along their families, although the intent was to only live in the migration country to earn money. It is precisely due to this reverse –orientation that the HLT was organized for them; the primary goal was to ensure the (re-)integration of the particular students into the school system of their country of origin. Political refugees have created HLT offerings in their own initiative, such as for example, Italian anti-fascists in Switzerland before and during WWII.

In addition to the labor migration came the migration of political and war refugees mostly since the 1990s, as with the Albanians from Kosova, the Tamils from Sri Lanka in the middle and late 1990s, or currently, the refugees from the Syrian conflict. HLT in the corresponding languages were often initiated, proposed and/or offered by parents' associations.

With globalization and the free movement of labor in Europe, the immigration of well qualified persons has increased. These "new" immigrants demonstrate an interest in HLT for their children, they form parents' associations in order to offer the classes, often with support from the countries of origin, yet not under their auspices. In Switzerland, this involves French, Dutch, Russian and Chinese HLT students.

Parallel with the influx of new groups and to broaden the range of course offerings with an ever increasing number of languages, the immigration countries (the individual federal states, cantons and communities, respectively) had to become involved with regulations, recommendations, etc. to regulate the nature and the extent of the integration of HLT into the public school system. The fact that this occurred and occurs in totally different ways was shown above; see also chapter 13. A good overview of the situation in Switzerland, Germany, France and Austria is presented by Giudici/Bühlmann (2014) pages 12–22.

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