

Growing up between two worlds: Portuguese as a heritage language in Spain

Crecer entre dos mundos: el portugués como lengua de herencia en España

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Abstract

Language and culture are part of the identity construction of individuals. When a child grows up in a different country of his parents, his identity will be more complex, since there's an alive language and culture in his familiar environment, nevertheless, different from the majority language and culture of the country he lives.

This paper addresses to recognize the strategies of 11 Brazilian relatives immigrated to Spain to transmit the Portuguese as a heritage language to their children who live in Spain. The results point to an awareness about their primordial role in the heritage language transmission. Moreover, they recognize the support of an institution in order to minimize the communication restriction contexts in this language.

Keywords

Immigration, heritage language, heritage speaker, POLH, PLH.

Resumen

Lengua y cultura son elementos determinantes en la construcción de la identidad de los individuos. Cuando un niño crece en un país distinto al de sus padres, esta identidad será más compleja, puesto que la lengua y cultura familiar serán distintas a la lengua y cultura del país donde vive. Este estudio de caso único de corte cualitativo realizado con un grupo de once familiares brasileños buscó identificar las estrategias utilizadas para la transmisión del portugués como lengua de herencia a sus hijos que crecen en España. Los resultados demuestran que a pesar de reconocer su rol de principal transmisor, los familiares consideran fundamental el soporte de otras instituciones para minimizar la restricción de contextos de comunicación en esta lengua.

Palabras clave

Inmigración, lengua de herencia, hablante de herencia, POLH, PLH.

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Introduction

But what is language [*langue*] It is not to be confused with human speech [*langage*], of which it is only a definite part, though certainly an essential one. It is both a social product of the faculty of speech and a collection of necessary conventions that have been adopted by a social body to permit individuals to exercise that faculty.

For more than a century, anthropology and sociology have presented studies on culture and its relation to language. Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835, in Trujillo Saez, 2006), emphasizes that language allows the understanding of the world. “[...] the language mediates between us and the world and we perceive the latter through the categories of the first” (p.79). Hall (2003) states that language is one of the means of representation of a culture and it is through it that it is possible to communicate ideologies, values and feelings within a context. From the postmodern point of view, it is possible to understand culture as a space for the construction of meanings, where the subject is active in establishing relationships between language and culture. For Benedict (1997) “[...] culture is a lens through which man sees the world” (p.12). The lens in this case is the subjective component, fruit of the subject’s experiences within the context.

In the case of the transmission of a majority language, culture is transmitted in a natural way, the result of the fabric of social relationships that a subject will try to build throughout its biological and social development. For Hall (2003), national cultures are constituted of symbols and representations and are a discourse and a path for the construction of meaning. In the case of the transmission of a language and culture within the country of origin, signs and linguistic and cultural codes are transmitted at the same time, since “The senses are in the stories told about the nation, memories that connect their present with its past and images that are built from it” (Hall, 2003, p. 51).

However, this reality is re-signified when a language and culture are important in the family context but are different from the majority language and culture of the country of residence. As Thomas and Peterson (2015) affirm, when a culture is not familiar, developing a deep understanding of a new culture would be like trying to learn a new language with the same accent of the first language, that is, a challenge. This is the case two children of immigrants who grow up in a country different from the one of their relatives.

Although they know the language and culture of the family, they do not necessarily dominate this language, since have not emigrated as adults, like their parents did, but they were born or emigrated at a very early age to another country. As they do not have the opportunity to experience the family culture in other social contexts, they do not always identify with it. Likewise, they maintain a link full of meanings, related to the feeling of belonging to this family origin. This language and culture, different from the environment where these subjects reside, is transmitted especially in the family environment and among other definitions, we will call it language and heritage culture.

This study is part of a doctoral research and seeks to know the perception of Brazilian family members, which emigrated to Spain, about their role of transmission of the heritage language, the strategies they use and what kind of linguistic attitudes they perceive of their children, born in Spain.

Heritage language

The heritage language, also known as patrimonial language or ancestral language (He, 2010, Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003), colonial language (Carreira, 2004, Fishman and Peyton, 2001), or even minority language (Valdés, 2005), is the language of origin of the families that, for some reason, migrate to another country where the language is different from theirs. The term inheritance is related to its transmission to the descendants of immigrants who speak this language. The heritage language is a language of communication related to a familiar sociocultural context, which helps to structure thought, discourses and their meanings.

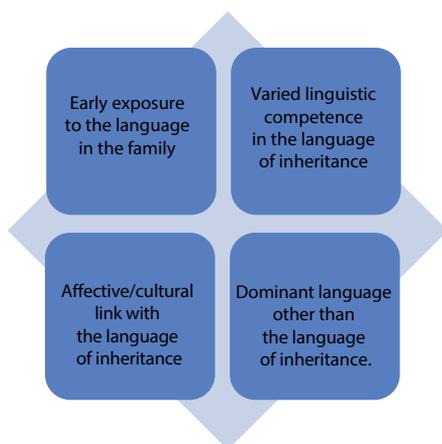
The heritage culture, as well as the language, if it is not transmitted by the family, will hardly be learned, since in most cases, the descendants of immigrants were born or arrived at a very early age to the country of residence and therefore experience a culture different from that of inheritance on a daily basis. These descendants are known as heritage speakers. This terminology was initially presented in Canada, a country with a high number of immigrants. After a few years, it was also adopted by the United States and other countries (Cummins 2005), to identify children who learned a language from birth, but have another dominant language related to the context where they live. According to Cummins (2005), “[...] as well as

children of immigrants, the speakers of heritage are refugees and indigenous groups [...]” (page 586) who must adapt in a new context, coexisting with another language and culture.

Van Deusen Scholl (2003) argues that heritage speakers do not necessarily speak the family language, nevertheless, they have a strong intergenerational affective bond with their origin. Montrul (2015) defines heritage language speakers as: “[...] individuals who have been exposed to an immigrant or minority language since childhood, who are also very competent in the majority language spoken in the more widespread linguistic community.” (p 168).

In addition, he also considers, together with the aforementioned authors, some characteristics common to the inheritance speakers proposed by Zyzik (2016):

Figure 1
Characteristics common to heritage speakers



Source: Adapted from Zyzik (2016).

With respect to the heritage culture, Fishman and Peyton (2001) ratify the interdependence relationship between language and culture, proposing that, in reality, heritage speakers are subjects of a language relevant to their family and, therefore, to a culture that will relate to the construction of their identity.

Regarding the transmission of the heritage language is relevant to know the tensions and relationships that emerge from these individuals: their perception of reality, the contact with the dominant culture and its culture, as perceived by the standardized language and the heritage language, and what are their attitudes towards this language and culture. Nesteruk (2010) asserts that while some language and culture are a source of pride, for others it can be something shameful. Therefore, the subjectivity that covers this topic situates this study in a sociolinguistic paradigm, since as He (2010) states “the very notion of the heritage language is sociocultural, given that it is defined in terms of the group of people who speak it.” (P 66)

In addition to language, cultural behaviors are also presented differently by children who live in a multicultural family and context. Cruz-Ferreira (2006) agrees with this idea saying that “the practice of differential behavior in cultural environments and the coherence of these in each of the children, reinforces the sense of community that is the hallmark of a cultural heritage” (p. 291).

In the case of the children of immigrants, the symbolic references related to the identity of the country of origin are constituted differently from those of their ascendants. The children of immigrants who emigrated at an early age or were born in the country of residence have a language and culture of origin by virtue of their relatives, however, they grow up in a different society. This means that the maintenance of the referents of origin is carried out by the family members and not by the environment, as Juliano (1994) points out, “the common experience with their compatriots is limited to a shared and learned discourse” (p.95).

Thus, in this situation there will be a linguistic and cultural lack of vital experiences. In this way, the construction of a collective identity related to the country of origin of the ancestors is not a natural process. While the subject forms its identity from the interaction with society and the children of immigrants grow up in a society different from that of their relatives, their identity will be, by default, hybrid and complex. Therefore, although the children of immigrants grow up establishing social networks of their ancestors, Maalouf (1999) states that “we are all infinitely closer to our contemporaries than to our ancestors” (p.123). This means that for the process of building collective cultural identity to happen with little or no experience in the society of family origin, it will be necessary to promote maximum contact with the system of representations related to the

language and culture of their parents and we consider that this system of representations is transmitted in the first place, by means of language.

Flores and Melo-Pfeifer (2014) confirm that the concept of heritage language (from this moment, LI) is still a recent field of research, of complex definition, especially if we consider the diversity of concepts to assign the relationship of the subjects with the language, sometimes approaching what by convention is called the mother tongue (MT) or foreign language (FL). On the transmission of the language and inheritance culture, Carreira (2016) argues that the language and heritage culture can be learned in three contexts: heritage language classes, mixed classes with foreign language speakers and some personalized options, such as independent studies and private tutoring. Likewise, the first and main contact will be given by the family environment.

One of the factors that influences the learning of the heritage language proposed by Montrul (2015) is the linguistic attitude and the motivation on the part of the heritage speaker. For Moreno Fernández (2005), “the linguistic attitude is a manifestation of the social attitude of individuals, distinguished by focusing and, specifically, referring both to the language and the use that it makes of society” (p.177). The linguistic option of a speaker for his discourses is linked to a cognitive and affective profiling that represents his subjective perceptions about a linguistic and cultural context. In addition, Pearson (2007) emphasizes that the motivation for learning and attitudes towards this language and culture are conditioned to the attitudes of the family, friends and society in general against the language and minority culture.

In the case of the children of immigrants born in the country of residence, that is, they are not immigrants, but have foreign ancestry, attitudes can have an affective and cognitive component, which can act in a symbiotic or conflictive way (Trafimow & Sheeran, 2005). In other words, it is possible that an inheritance speaker prefers to use a variation of the LH, or even another language with people of the same origin, depending on the prestige that the language has in its environment (cognitive attitude), but also prefer use the variety that is spoken at home with people from his/her family or close friends, because he/she considers it closer and more comfortable (affective attitude). These choices may be conscious and peaceful or cause for stress and bewilderment by speakers of more than one origin. These attitudes are not permanent and may vary according to the context and interlocutor. However, since this research is framed in sociolinguistics

and language didactics, we consider it essential to know the variables that surround and directly or indirectly affect the teaching and learning of the language and heritage culture. Respecting linguistic options, considering conflicts related to linguistic attitudes in an environment of languages in contact, is an essential requirement a didactic approach to the teaching of a language and heritage culture. Knowing how to evaluate the type of attitude and the level of motivation of the students leads to the possibility of offering learning situations concerning the needs of the learners.

Another aspect that influences linguistic attitudes is the social prestige of the language in the country of residence. Poersch (1995) in an investigation on the children who live in the linguistic border between Brazil and Uruguay and do not reach the communicative competence in both languages, defends that this reinforces the insecurity and consequently negative attitudes towards one language or another. Countries with more flexible language policies, which emphasize the importance of the local language and culture without subjecting their residents to acculturation, that is, assimilating local culture, collaborating with international entities and favoring an intercultural dialogue, is an environment that favors positive attitudes towards the learning of the language and inheritance culture.

Finally, the last aspect that affects the linguistic attitudes and the motivation of the heritage speakers is the motivation and the linguistic attitude of the family regarding the transmission of the language and heritage culture to their children. In the 70s and 80s, Fishman (1980) highlighted the lack of research about the interests and motivation of families, especially within the immigrant collective. According to De Houwer (1999), the fact that the relatives believe in their role of transmission, can influence the linguistic development of their children and has an impact on it, simply because this belief makes them act in one way or another.

According to Spolsky (2009), family language policies bring together beliefs and ideologies about language, linguistic practices and efforts to establish or modify these practices through interventions in the family. McCarty (2011) testifies that family language policies are not always explicit, but that, nevertheless, they stem from the practices and ideologies present in the family environment.

With regards to the practices of the heritage language, Döpke (1988, 1992) emphasizes as a prerogative function of the family to insist on the use of the minority language and to use some teaching techniques, acquired under

professional advice, to be applied with children in the family environment. The author highlights the strategy one parent, one language, to explain the family linguistic organization in which family members establish different communication languages with their children.

Brazilian immigration in Spain and Portuguese as a heritage language (POLH, PHL) in Catalonia

The Brazilians officially begin their migration journey in the last decades of the 20th century. Until the 1960s, Brazil was a host country to a large contingent of Europeans and Asians. However, from the eighties, begins to undergo a change of perspective. This decade is known by economists in Latin America as the lost decade. Solé, Cavalcanti and Parella (2011) point out the main causes of the successive economic crises, the omnipresent affective migrations and the loss of purchasing power of the middle classes as a decisive factor in Brazilian emigration. A worsening of social inequality, poverty, rampant inflation and increased unemployment, caused Brazilians to begin to look abroad, primarily to the United States, as an alternative to keep resources threatened by frequent economic crises in Brazil and then to the Asian and European continent. From this situation, Brazil begins to be an exporter of labor, in a current that has caused the emigration of more than three million Brazilians.

Póvoa Neto (2006), highlights as the main demographic areas of residence the United States, Japan, Portugal, the United Kingdom and Spain. The United States is still the country that receives the largest number of Brazilians. Immigration to Japan is also considerable, although in this case there is a very specific situation, since it is the descendants of Japanese who emigrate, under special legal conditions for this group. Emigration to the European continent occurs through other variables. One of the main advantages of emigrating to the European continent is that many Brazilians have dual citizenship, by virtue of relatives who emigrated to Brazil since the 19th century.

According to the Report *Brasileiros no Mundo*¹ (2016), Spain is the third main host country for Brazilians. According to the National Institute of

1 Retrieved from: <https://goo.gl/TM56eh>

Statistics of Spain² (2016), Brazilians are distributed through some specific regions. Catalonia concentrates the largest contingent, with 22% of the population. Madrid is the second, with 17%, followed by Andalucía (10%) and Galicia (9%).

The fact that many couples are mixed, that is, have different origins, removes the prominence of Portuguese even in the family since family members have to negotiate linguistic uses within the home. All this scenario constitutes a laborious challenge: How to make children know the Brazilian culture and learn the Portuguese language in a context considered exolingual? This linguistic modality is called Portuguese as a heritage language (also known as POLH or PLH) and is transmitted mostly in the family sphere, but also in associations that promote the POLH/PLH in different countries of the world. These initiatives usually offer Portuguese classes with a specific didactic, in addition to promoting parties and events consonant with the Brazilian calendar.

Method

The context chosen for the study is the *Associação de Pais of Brasileirinhos na Catalunha* (APBC). The APBC is a non-profit association, founded in 2010 by a group of Brazilian families living in Barcelona, with the aim of offering Portuguese classes and activities related to Brazilian culture to the descendants of Brazilians between two and twelve years of age who reside in this region. Being an Association, the classes are assigned to the non-formal modality.

This study is part of a doctoral research, with emphasis on the definition of didactic guidelines for the transmission of a heritage language in a non-formal context. The research presents a qualitative view from the single case study method (Stake, 2010), with its roots in the phenomenological current, seeking to participate in a social construction, interpreting and giving meaning to a phenomenon, in consonance with the meanings that the subjects participating in the study provide.

According to Van Manen (2003), this type of study seeks to discover and attribute pedagogical meaning and value to educational phenomena.

2 Retrieved from: <https://goo.gl/XP1FT7>

This educational research seeks to understand a reality from a holistic and interpretative perspective, in a process of reflection and elaboration of knowledge that arises from the research context. From the perspective of the hermeneutic phenomenology, “interpretation always begins with previous concepts of the researcher that will have to be progressively replaced by more adequate ones” (Gadamer, 2001, p.332).

The main interest of this section in the research is to identify family strategies for the transmission of the heritage language in a multicultural context such as that of Catalonia, as well as to analyze the perception they have about the linguistic attitudes that their children present towards Portuguese as heritage language. Analyzing the objectives of this research, this study is situated in a qualitative-interpretative paradigm, in which it is proposed to elaborate theoretical constructs for the observed phenomena (Sandín, 2003).

In order to conform the group of participants, the following were considered as criteria: being a family member (father or mother) of a child³:

- With Brazilian direct ancestry, coming from the father or the mother, which defines them as heritage speakers.
- Born or living in Catalonia (Spain) from a very early age.
- Participate in the weekly classes of Portuguese as a heritage language and cultural activities promoted by the *Associação de Pais of Brasileirinhos na Catalunha* (APBC).
- He has between 5 (five) and 7 (seven) years old, in the development phase of the literacy skills at the time of the field study.

Finally, the group of participants was composed of eleven people: six Brazilian parents with a foreign partner and five Brazilian mothers with a foreign partner.

The instrument chosen was the semi-structured interview. The interview guideline was built with an aim to understand the family members’ vision on some dimensions related to:

3 The masculine form is used to refer to boys or girls. This style was adopted only to avoid overload in the text.

- The conceptions they have about the transmission of the Brazilian language and culture and how this process was developed in the family environment.
- Family language policies related to the use of the language at home and the attitude of family members regarding POLH.
- The relationship with the *Associação de Pais of Brasileirinhos na Catalunha* and their expectations regarding their pedagogical work.
- The projections they have about the teaching of POLH for their children.

Chart 1

Script of questions for semi-structured interview with family

Dimensions	Questions
Conceptions	Since when are you interested in your child speaking Portuguese?
	Was this concern supported by your non-Brazilian partner?
	What are the biggest difficulties in the transmission of the Brazilian language and culture?
	What contact does your child have with the cultures or customs of both Brazil and your partner's country?
Family language policies	What languages are spoken in the family?
	How was your child's language development?
	Is there a preference for languages spoken at home?
	How do you promote Portuguese and the culture of Brazil to your child(ren)?
The Association of Relatives of <i>Brasileirinhos</i> in Catalonia (APBC)	What do you expect from the work of the APBC?
	Since your child attends classes, have you noticed any difference regarding the use of the Portuguese language?
	How do you think the pedagogical work of the APBC could be improved?

The interviews were personally conducted in the APBC, recorded in audio and transcribed in a text editor document. After completing the description and following the criteria of ethical rigor in qualitative research, the transcripts have been delivered to the interviewees for analysis and possible rectifications. At the end of this process, all the interviewees agreed

with the transcript of their interview and, thus, it was possible to proceed with the data analysis.

Analysis and results

The data analysis was carried out with the support of the Atlas Ti program, version 7.0 through the method of discourse analysis (Bardin, 1991). The fact of carrying out the interviews personally, with audio recording and subsequent transcription, made possible the analysis through this method, in function of being able to interrogate the explicit meanings verbally and non-verbally. In the interviews, some parents considered it necessary to present photos and videos of their children to illustrate their speech.

Because it is a qualitative single case study, the categories were born from the first data analysis, in a total inductive process (Stake, 2010).

After a first analysis of the interviews, three categories were defined:

- Family conceptions about the transmission of the POLH
- Family language policies related to the POLH
- Family perceptions about the work of the APBC

To present the data, the code system was used within the Atlas TI program.

INT, 1:12 where “I” means interview, 1 is the number of the primary document and 12 is the number of the quote. Although the interviews were originally done in Portuguese, it was considered appropriate to translate them into Spanish and then to English to facilitate their understanding.

Family conceptions about the transmission of the POLH

Regarding the transmission and maintenance of a language and heritage culture, the family is the one that holds the leading role in this work, since the existing connection between language, culture and individual is the result of the origin and the family bond (Spolsky, 2012). For this reason, any and all language inheritance teaching arises from the desire and expectation of the family of foreign origin that their descendants can understand and communicate in their mother tongue. The teaching of the heritage language

only makes sense when the family is fully involved in this process (Ada & Baker, 2001).

Naturally, the fact that families belong to an Association and participate in their activities every Saturday morning and that, in addition, have volunteered to collaborate with an investigation related to this topic, reveal the interest that their children can Learn Portuguese and Brazilian culture.

INT 11:1	<i>When we knew we were going to have a child, I thought, I'm Brazilian, I know how it will be, regardless of the heritage language and these things, the first thing that came to mind was... already in the first contact, when he was still in the belly... was in Portuguese, naturally.</i>
INT 12:1	<i>There is no specific moment, it just happens naturally, with them I speak my language, I do not speak another language and, obviously to speak my language, they must learn my language, so at home, I always spoke to them in Portuguese.</i>
INT 9:2	<i>It was an effort, not exactly an effort, but it was such a conscious work, to start using Portuguese with him, because it was not normal in my context, in my day to day, social relations, it was not my usual language anymore, at that time it was not natural to speak Portuguese.</i>

Family language policies related to the POLH

Although the relatives express different positions about the moment and the way of transmitting their language and culture to the children, for some as something natural, for others as an important effort on their part, all, in line with the studies of Oh and Au (2005), have shown to be aware that the success of the transmission of the heritage language is linked to their motivation to do so first in the family environment.

INT, 11:13	<i>If we are all three at the same table, having dinner, yes, Portuguese reigns, because somehow I always impose Portuguese among us.</i>
INT, 12:7	<i>Of course, I always speak Portuguese, my wife always speaks Spanish and they speak the language according to the person with whom they want to speak, so with me in Portuguese and Catalan with people on the street.</i>

In the case of a single family, Portuguese is not spoken at home, since the Brazilian relative reports losing a lot of the Portuguese language and currently speaks *Portuñol*, an interlanguage between Portuguese and Spanish:

INT 10:3	<i>It's that I automatically start to speak and a Portuguese mixed with Spanish comes out and when I realize this, I'm already speaking Spanish, so it's difficult for me to keep speaking Portuguese.</i>
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In this case, it denotes a conflict related to the belief of Impact cited by De Houwer (1999). For this situation, it would be necessary to offer guidance regarding alternative proposals for the use of Portuguese at some key moments to facilitate the mental organization of the child.

Regarding the family linguistic options, in the case of the participants it was noted that in all the families, father and mother speak or at least understand the language of each other, which favors communication in more than one language within the home:

INT, 9:8	<i>I think it's a value for the whole family, because I speak Spanish very well, now I also speak Catalan, my husband wanted to learn Portuguese and he learned so well that he trained as a translator, he also lived in Brazil for three years, he has friends there, so Portuguese for him also has a very different meaning from what he had when we met.</i>
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For this reason, the interviewees considered positive the support of the non-Brazilian partner in the transmission of the heritage language, affirming that the fact that the non-Brazilian relative at least understands Portuguese, allows the creation of a linguistic context in which communication is favored in more than one language within the home, creating a context of linguistic diversity that also provides the development of the heritage language.

Many of the families report having felt support from their non-Brazilian partner in the decision to opt for the Portuguese language to establish communication with their children:

INT 11:5	<i>His attitude has always been and still is spectacular in this sense. She also wants girls to learn, it's not just important for me, she as a mother also takes pride in knowing that her daughters share another culture and speak another language.</i>
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Regarding the preferences and linguistic uses of children in different contexts, while some families consider Catalan as the priority language of their children and attribute this to the fact that the public school prioritizes this language, there are relatives who have reported that their Children show preference for the Spanish language. In this case, it is denoted that there

are children who have Spanish parents, not Catalans, so that in the family environment Portuguese and Spanish are spoken, while Catalan will be spoken especially in the school environment.

INT, 12:5	<i>They naturally speak Spanish, it is their mother tongue... Portuguese... they are trilingual, in Catalan, Spanish and Portuguese, but Portuguese is a more difficult language. Since they know that they only speak Portuguese to me, I often see them asking for more things from their mother, because it is easier to speak in Spanish... so, they do not have to be thinking about how to speak in Portuguese.</i>
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However, in the case of this student, this relationship between domain and preference is denoted because the family member does not usually speak in Portuguese. The early acquisition was not carried out as in the case of the children of mother tongue, so that this student becomes bilingual passive, that is, he understands the language, but he does not express himself verbally in this language. Likewise, it is not only linguistic preference as mentioned by the family member, but the student does not have the basic tools to express himself orally in Portuguese.

Corroborating the studies of Broeder and Mijares (2003), other relatives reveal that the preferred languages of their children are different from Portuguese and this occurs depending on the difficulty that Portuguese represents in an exolingual context. One of the relatives also stated that his son prefers not to use Portuguese:

INT, 10:6	<i>Sometimes someone asks, for example, their grandmother asks... what are you learning in Portuguese? And she... she does not want to tell her.</i>
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According to Ortiz Álvarez (2016), linguistic attitudes are made up of three key elements: beliefs, valuation and behavior of individuals. In the case of heritage speakers, we have found that the assessment and beliefs of the participants are generally positive and intimately linked to the attitudes of their family members.

In general, the relatives highlight the trips to Brazil, the visits of Brazilian friends and the coexistence with the Brazilian family in general, both through visits and videoconferences as well, as the main supports in the construction and maintenance of affective ties with Brazil.

First, it is confirmed through the interviews that the participating children have been in Brazil, at least once. All the family members interviewed admitted that no transmission strategy is better than a trip to Brazil and human contact with relatives.

One of the relatives reports that it was the first trip to Brazil that really provoked the awareness of the children about the importance of knowing how to speak Portuguese in a context in which only this language is spoken:

INT, 12:8	<i>It is also true that they began to use Portuguese, in that way, after their first trip to Brazil... only then did they start to speak this language, with three years. I do not know if it would be like that if we had not been there.</i>
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According to the families, the visits of the Brazilian relatives are important for the increase in the quantity and quality of the use of this language, as seen in the following quote:

INT, 9:12	<i>My mother was here on vacation, from the middle of August to the middle of September, a month ago she left. With my mother here, at home, they used Portuguese a lot more, and although she has already left, her presence is still here in these uses in Portuguese.</i>
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Family perceptions about the work of the APBC

Regarding the expectations that family members have about the knowledge their children have about the Portuguese language and Brazilian culture, all parents mention as their main objective that their children have the ability to communicate in Portuguese, especially orally:

INT, 9:22	<i>I see that families have some expectations, not all, but I think that a lot of those who have older children, would like very much that children could learn to read and to write in Portuguese and do it well.</i>
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Another one of the expectations is that their children feel Brazilian and that, in addition, they know elements of the Brazilian culture in general:

INT, 12:17	<i>I hope that they are able to be Brazilian, it is (...), without... without fear, that they are complete Brazilians, that they understand Portuguese, that they read in Portuguese, that they know how to speak like a Brazilian, that they know how to go to Brazil and return without feeling foreign in Brazil. Although they will always be, because they will not have the detail, the culture in general.</i>
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With regards to the expectations related to the work of the Association of Parents of Brazilians in Catalonia (APBC), the totality of the relatives of the participants report that their purpose in taking the children to the Portuguese classes of the APBC is to offer another space in which the language and culture of Brazil will be discussed and, in particular, valued.

INT, 12:14	<i>More people, more people using the language... not having an island effect... this weird language that dad talks about... that is a normal language.</i>
INT, 13:22	<i>I think she really only started to really talk when she started attending the Association classes. I perceived a lot of difference. She liked the classes, she wanted to integrate, so that language, that she only knew from listening to me, literally started to come out * laughs.</i>

Discussion and conclusions

Most of the relatives interviewed are aware of their crucial role in the transmission of a language and culture other than the majority. Whether in a natural way, by transmitting the family language, or by learning a different language and a culture related to their origin, the relatives consider a treasure and a right for their children to learn their language and culture. In this study, in which couples were in their entirety mixed, that is, a Brazilian and a non-Brazilian, special attention was given to the positive attitude of the non-Brazilian relative as a support for transmission in the family.

The main difficulties detected by families are related to the restriction of linguistic uses, and the attitude of the heritage speakers to the heritage language. Regarding the restriction of contexts, families value the Association (APBC) as a complementary agent to their work in the transmission of language and culture. On the linguistic attitude, families recognize that children grow, study and play in the majority language, which is why they show greater interest in this language and not the family language.

The interviewees highlight the trips to Brazil and the visits of the Brazilian relatives as ratifying elements of the link with the language and culture. It is through human contact that children become aware of the importance of speaking Portuguese. In addition, they see the APBC as an important ally, since it is a space for interaction between equals, in which their children can play, talk, learn and coexist with other children in similar situations. For families, the APBC becomes an ally in the role of transmission of language and culture, in the construction of identity and the valorization of diversity.

Despite family efforts, parents consider that teaching a language and culture outside the school setting is not an easy task. Once they enter the local educational system, children begin to question or even reject the family language (Montrul, 2015). The challenge lies in transforming linguistic and cultural diversity in a source of pride. What is essential is to analyze if the context for the development of communicative competence in this language is favorable and if not, to think about strategies to raise awareness about the advantages of mastering more than one language and culture. In a micro sphere, analyzing children's discourse on language and family culture can also contribute to diagnose learning needs and reevaluate the strategies that are being used in this transmission. What is reflected in the results is that only communicating in this language is not enough for the acquisition and development of communicative competence and/or the establishment of affective bonds. What most strengthens these ties is the social interaction and the experiences made by the subject. For this, the family and all the existing support network must be aware and active in their transmitting role.

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