

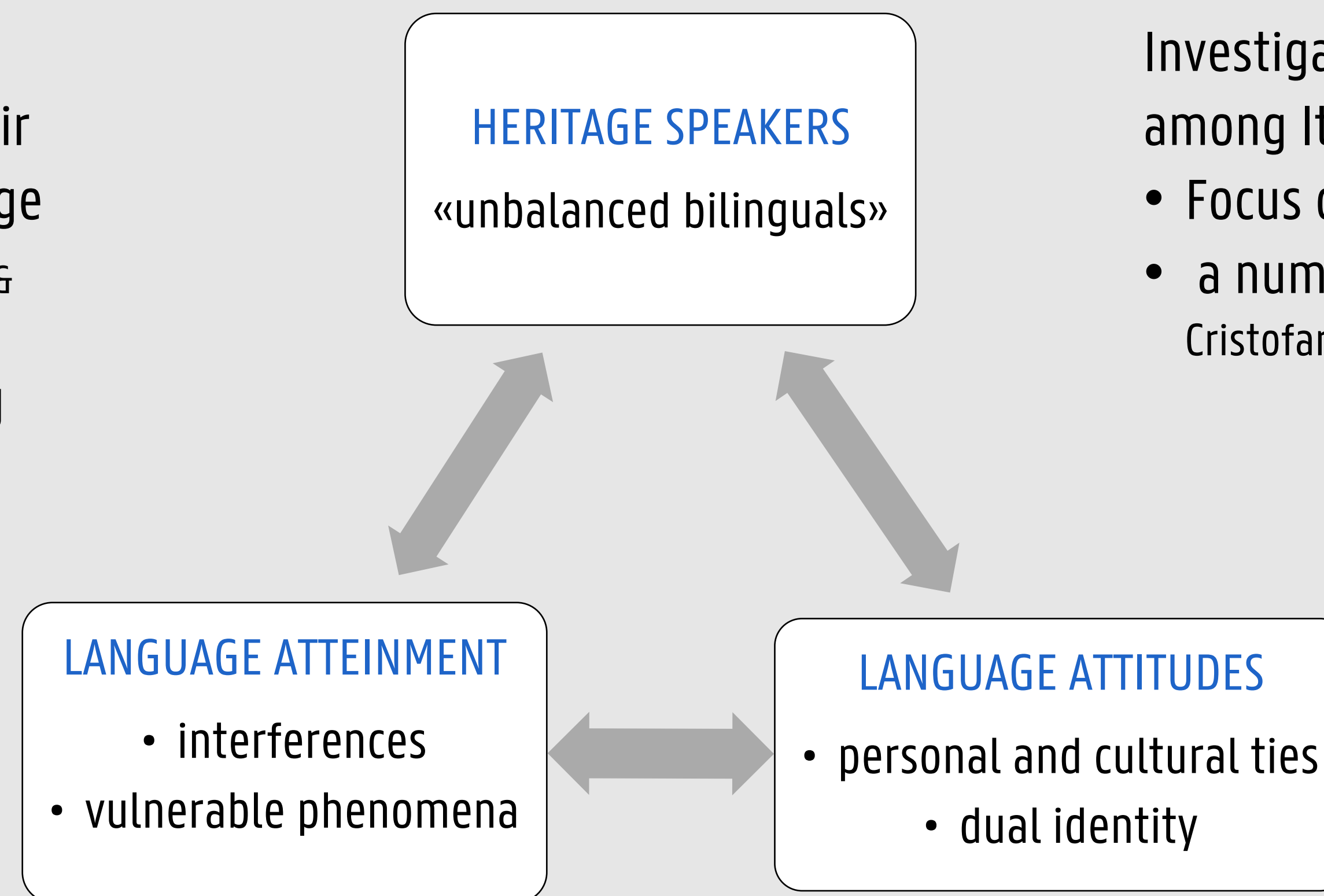
VAKGROEP VERTALEN, TOLKEN EN COMMUNICATIE

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INTERPRETING MULTI-CULTURAL AND MULTI-LINGUAL IDENTITIES: THE CASE OF HERITAGE SPEAKERS OF ITALIAN IN FLANDERS

Background

- Recent attention to the sociolinguistic factors that shape HL acquisition (Polinsky & Scontras 2020)
- Individual's emotional and cultural ties to their HL impact their willingness to use the language and their ability to maintain it over time (Caloi & Torregrossa, 2021; Dragojevic, 2017; Prada 2019)
- Italian HS around the world maintain a strong connection to their ancestral roots. Their immigrant background is often a source of pride (Balaska 2024; Benatti & Tarantini 2017; Dolci 2022)



The study

Investigating linguistic outcomes and language attitudes among Italian HS in Belgium:

- Focus on language attitudes and dual identity
- a numerous and understudied population (Marzo 2005, 2015; De Cristofaro 2022)

Timeline of Italian immigration in Belgium



Method

Participants

- 21 Italian heritage speakers with
- Belgian-Dutch as the dominant language
- Living in Flanders (Belgium)

Data collection

- In-depth open interviews (tot. ~ 5h)
- attitudes towards Italian and bilingualism
- experiences learning Italian and their motivations
- attitudes toward Italian language, people and culture
- contexts of use of Italian

Transcription and coding

- Semi-automatic transcription with Sonix
- Qualitative coding on Nvivo

Thematic Analysis

Qualitative Content Analysis

Linguistic Analysis

Language use

Results

Recurrent themes

Contexts of use/Usefulness of Italian
Enjoyment of speaking Italian
Difficulty of speaking Italian
Italian people: positive/negative
Description of the Italian language
Life in Italy
Cultural identity as Italian/Belgian
Pass on Italian to children
Dialect

Perché mi sento, mi sento a casa, mi sento a casa a parlare l'italiano.
Because I feel, I feel at home, I feel at home speaking Italian.

Io amo cucinare, io amo cantare, io amo Vasco. Quindi io proprio ne vado fiera
I love to cook, I love to sing, I love Vasco. So I am just really proud of it

La lingua italiana rispetto all'altre lingue dà più emozione, di ispirazione.
the Italian language compared to other languages gives more excitement, inspiration

Perché c'è questo orgoglio, questo orgoglio italiano, no? E poi ho la mamma terrona e il papà polentone. Dunque ho un po' dei due
Because there is this pride, this Italian pride, right? And then I have the terrona mamma and the polentone papa. So I have a little bit of both.

Linguistic traits: transfer



Siccome fuori casa usavamo sempre neerlandese. E piano piano l'italiano si spostava un po' indietro.
NL: ging mijn Italiaans achteruit
Since we always spoke Dutch, little by little my Italian went backwards.

Quando c'è un match, una gara di calcio, tifo sempre l'Italia. Tifo sempre l'Italia.
NL: voetbalwedstrijd
When there is a match, a soccer competition, I always cheer Italy. I always root for Italy.

Cioè, non tutti gli italiani sono, fanno parte della mafia come non tutti i belgi mangiano le fritte.
NL: frietjes
That is, just as not all Italians are part of the mafia just as not all Belgians eat fries

Conclusions

- The heritage speakers in our study generally express pride and a strong sense of belonging to the Italian community
- HS maintain their dual identity, a shift likely facilitated by the European context, where multiculturalism and multilingualism are actively promoted.
- In line with overseas research that demonstrates how Italian heritage speakers often maintain a strong connection to their roots, with the Italian language serving as a key means of preserving this bond (Benatti & Tarantini, 2017; Dolci, 2022)
- More attention is needed to the socio-affective dimensions of language acquisition (Aalberse et al. 2021)

References

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