Fossilization—A classic concern of SLA research*

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Introduction

A frequently noted fact out of a spectrum observed of second language acquisition (SLA) is that in almost all post-pubescent learners, learning stagnates, in spite of all or any favorable conditions that would otherwise propel it (Gass and Selinker, 2008; Sharwood Smith, 1994; Towell and Hawkins, 1994; VanPatten and Williams, 2007). Whereas this fact itself has largely remained a conundrum— notwithstanding abundant speculations that exist, it is further complicated by two additional facets, selectivity and variability. That is, learners do not seem to stabilize prematurely within and across each and every linguistic domain (e.g., phonology, semantics, morphology, syntax), hence selectivity; nor do they all stall on the same linguistic elements, hence variability, even though noticeable overlap does exist, particularly in learners of the same first language background.

The phenomenon of truncated learning was first brought into sharp focus by Selinker (1972). Nearly 40 years have since elapsed. Where are we in terms of identifying the relevant data and theorizing about the lack of learning phenomenon metaphorically known as “fossilization”? In this chapter, I will trace the history of research, focusing, in particular, on the evolution of conceptual changes and the trajectory of empirical research, starting with a brief discussion of the theoretical status of the construct. Along the way, core issues will be highlighted. I will end the chapter with a sketch of future directions as well as a brief discussion of the implications of fossilization research for second language (L2) instruction.

Historical discussion

The centrality of fossilization to SLA theory construction

The conception of “fossilization” (Selinker, 1972) as a central phenomenon of SLA stems first from a generic, impressionistic observation, as encapsulated in an oft-cited quote from Bley-Vroman (1989):

Few adults are completely successful; many fail miserably, many achieve very high levels of proficiency, given enough time, input, and effort, and given the right attitude, motivation, and learning environment. (p. 49)

This observation was corroborated by findings of empirical research, notably through data from a large-scale longitudinal study by the European Science Foundation of un instructed L2 learners (Pekue, 1993). The observation on the general lack of success in post-pubescent L2 learning was readily affirmed by research on other critical issues, such as the role of biological maturation (e.g., Hylenstam and Abrahamsson, 2003; Long, 1990, 2005; cf. Byrnes, Chapter 31, this volume; DeKeyser, Chapter 27, this volume).

Researchers have reckoned that the percentage of L2 learners able to achieve native-speaker competence is nil to 5 percent (Bley-Vroman, 1989; Long, 1990; Selinker, 1972; see, however, Birdsong, 1999; Montrul and Slabakova, 2003; White and Genesee, 1996), meaning that the vast majority, that is, 95 percent or more, of L2 learners stop short of that level of attainment. Given the stark asymmetry between the success and the failure rate, it only stands to reason that it is the vast majority of L2 learners, not the small number of “outliers” like a learner named Julie reported in Ioup et al. (1994), that should be the source of relevant data for SLA theory construction. Selinker (1972, p. 212) argues that the 5 percent successful learners “may be safely ignored—in a counterfactual sense—for the purposes of establishing the constructs which point to the psychologically-relevant data pertinent to most second-language learners” (see, however, Birdsong, 2004, 2006).

In the earliest conception, the term “interlanguage,” referring to an imperfect yet autonomous linguistic system created in the course of L2 learning, was almost synonymous with “fossilization” (Selinker, 1972); many have even claimed that the latter is really what had spurred the field of SLA into existence (Han and Selinker, 2005; Long, 2003). However, the general perception of fossilization has evolved over the years: In the contemporary view, fossilization remains a central characteristic of interlanguage (Bley-Vroman, 1989) and continues to serve as a touchstone for the adequacy of theories of SLA. In Laven-Freeman’s (2006) words, “fossilization provides the stage where issues central to SLA play out . . . In order to account for learning, the presence of SLA, we should be able to say not only what it is, but also when and why it cannot or does not occur” (p. 193).

By the fossilization “yardstick,” then, adequate theories must explain both learning and lack of learning (Gass and Selinker, 2008; VanPatten and Williams, 2007). As Bley-Vroman (2009) points out, “the theory must permit everything from the so-called near-native cases like Julie (Ioup et al., 1994) to cases in which the acquired grammar is dramatically different from that of the input, like Scovel’s (1983) Wies or Schumann’s (1978) All-orno” (p. 178). Updating his Fundamental Difference Hypothesis, Bley-Vroman underscores that “addressing the logical problem of foreign language learning” requires, in short, postulating an acquisition system that does not work reliably and does not [lead to convergent grammars]” (p. 178).

The sine qua non of fossilization

Given the theoretical import of fossilization, it would seem necessary to attain some uniformity in defining the construct among researchers and across studies. However, doing so has proven quite daunting.

In its inception (Selinker, 1972), the construct of fossilization was both phenomenological and epistemological, thus referring, on the one hand, to observable linguistic units that appear to have stalled short of the aspired target and, on the other hand, to a cognitive mechanism.

Fossilization, a mechanism . . . underlies surface linguistic material which speakers tend to keep in their interlanguage productive performance, no matter what the age of the learner or the amount of instruction he receives in the target language. (Selinker, 1972, p. 229)

The terminological duality has, over the years, led to a proliferation of uses of the term, with its denotations running the gamut from low proficiency (e.g., Thep-Aekrapong, 1990), to typical
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have failed to cogitate a fundamental premise on which fossilization was initially predicated. Selinker, from his earliest definition up until his more recent ones, has consistently emphasized the need for a number of learning conditions to be met as a preliminary to any discussion of fossilization. Thus, for determining fossilization, Selinker and Lamedella (1979) have stressed such conditions as the “ability, opportunity, and motivation to learn the target language and accelerate into the target society” (p. 375), which Han (2004a) later reformulates into “three preconditions”: (a) abundant exposure to input, (b) adequate motivation to learn, and (c) plentiful opportunity for communicative practice. Upholding these conditions is crucial, as it helps to ensure that the fossilization phenomenon is sufficiently circumscribed to be theoretically, empirically, and practically interesting and productive.

Han (1998, 2004a) offers a two-tier definition:

**COGNITIVE LEVEL:** Fossilization involves those cognitive processes or underlying mechanisms that produce permanently stabilized interlanguage forms.

**EMPIRICAL LEVEL:** Fossilization involves those stabilized interlanguage forms that remain in learner speech or writing over time, no matter what the input or what the learner does. (2004a, p. 20)

The purpose of the two-tier definition is to differentiate a theoretical and an empirical level at which fossilization can be described and theorized. Neither endeavor, as will be discussed in the sections that follow, has been quite adequate—notwithstanding that fossilization has been one of the few SLA constructs that have made its popularity, beyond SLA circles, with L2 practitioners.

### Core Issues

The study of fossilization faces a number of conceptual and empirical challenges. Some of these challenges have been systematically discussed in Long (2003), Lardiere (2007), and Han (2006b). Han (2004b) deals at length with what she sees as five central issues: (a) fossilization global or local? (b) is L2 ultimate attainment isomorphic with fossilization? (c) is fossilization a product or process? (d) Is stabilization synonymous with fossilization? And (e) should empirical studies of fossilization span five years or more? Long (2003) poignantly addresses four empirical issues, among others: (a) assuming, not demonstrating, fossilization; (b) selecting inappropriate learners for study; (c) basing findings on insufficient data; and (d) using inadequate analyses. Similarly, Lardiere (2007) takes on several, including validity.

In this section, I discuss two more. The first issue pertains to the nature of fossilization research, which, to some, shows a practice of what Bley-Vroman (1983) has referred to as the “comparative fallacy.” Fossilization studies are allegedly parasitic on comparison of interlanguage with target language, and more specifically, of L2 learners with monolingual native speakers. A problem with such comparative practice is, as Lansen-Freeman (2006) aptly points out, that it oversimplifies surface deviance while overlooking other, deeper levels of interlanguage such as semantics and usage patterns that do not appear to involve errors of form. Han (2008) concurs and subsequently demonstrates (Han, 2010) that meaning can be a greater source of learning difficulty than form (cf. Barlow-Haag, Chapter 9, this volume; Slabakova, Chapter 8, this volume), lending support to Lansen-Freeman’s (2006) claim that “because using a language requires using its elements accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately (Lansen-Freeman, 2001), surely inaccurate forms are not the only evidence of fossilization.” (p. 194). Indeed, a growing number of studies of very advanced learners, including the oft-cited Loor et al. (1994) study, have offered the insight that meaning and function or, rather, discourse syntax and semantics are the hardest to acquire, suggesting that those should be proper domains for fossilization research.
A paramount concern with the comparative approach, as Larsen-Freeman (2004) further notes, is its predication on "a particular view of language—a view of monolithic, homogenous, idealized, static end-state competence, where language acquisition is seen to be a process of learning, an inner, dynamic environment which is always evolving" (p. 194). This approach, in contrast, views language as a dynamic and continuously evolving system. The concept of fossilization is inherently complex and requires a deep understanding of the underlying mechanisms and processes. Fossilization research should therefore be approached with caution and careful consideration of the research questions and methods.

In a completely different vein, Cook (1992, 1999, 2002) also raises doubts about the comparative approach. He argues that the purpose of fossilization research is to understand the nature of the processes that lead to fossilization, not to classify them. Cook suggests that the term "fossilization" should be used carefully and that the research should be guided by a more integrated approach that considers both the linguistic and psychological factors involved.

Hypothesis testing, which involves collecting data and testing hypotheses, is a common method in fossilization research. However, Cook argues that hypothesis testing is not sufficient to understand the complex processes involved in fossilization. He suggests that the focus should be on understanding the underlying mechanisms and processes that lead to fossilization, rather than simply testing hypotheses.

Cook's arguments highlight the need for a more integrated approach to fossilization research that considers both linguistic and psychological factors. This approach would require a more nuanced understanding of the processes involved in fossilization, as well as a more careful consideration of the research questions and methods used in fossilization research.

Data and common elicitation measures

To date, empirical research on fossilization has primarily focused on statistical analyses, relying heavily on statistical data. The data are often analyzed using statistical techniques such as ANOVA and regression analysis. However, this approach may not capture the complex processes involved in fossilization.

Cook (1992, 1999, 2002) suggests that fossilization research should focus on understanding the underlying mechanisms and processes involved in fossilization. This approach would require a more integrated approach that considers both linguistic and psychological factors. In this way, the research would be more likely to capture the complex processes involved in fossilization.
Schumann's Acculturation Hypothesis (1978, 1986), for example, precisely claims that social and psychological distance from the target culture and language constrains exposure to input. Hence, it would not be an unreasonable contention that if those learners had had enough exposure and so forth, they might have progressed beyond the observed plateau.

Another major question that can be raised with the early studies is whether or not the observed stabilization equates to acquisitional stabilization. Han (1996e; c.f., Han, 2004a; Schachter and Han, 2001) distinguishes three underlying forces of surface stabilization. First, stabilization can result from a natural slowdown in the learning process. According to skill acquisition theory, learning (language learning included) is subject to the power of practice; that is, learning begins as a result of practice but gradually declines and plateaus, with further, repeated practice (Dekeyser, 2007; Verpoort, et al., 2008). Second, stabilization can stem from the initiation of mental activity, as can occur, for instance, in stage two of the well-documented U-shaped learning whereby learning behavior (a) starts out being target-like as a function of mechanical immersion of stimuli, (b) then turns non-target-like as a result of experiencing a chain of analytic processes, and (c) eventually becomes target-like again as a result of successful restructuring of mental representations. Finally, a third scenario of surface stabilization is that it can be a result of fossilization, in which case learning has ceased permanently. Detection and differentiation of these different types of surface-sibilizations can be challenging but not impossible. For example, applying multivariate statistical analysis to the data can determine whether learning has indeed come to a halt, as Bernd (1996) has demonstrated. In his reanalysis of Schumann's data using a statistical procedure called logistic regression, Bernd showed that “Alberto is in the process of acquiring negation” (p. 206), one of the structures that Schumann had adjudicated as fossilized. The change was non-dramatic, for sure, but “incontrovertible” (p. 237). It thus seems that what All-etto experienced was not fossilization, but rather, slow learning (see, however, Verpoort, et al., 2008). Clearly, how to accurately determine fossilization remains a methodological challenge.

The stabilization/fossilization intracity is complicated by another phenomenon which Long (2003) has referred to as “volatility,” Lang’s concern is counter-evidence: What constitutes counter-evidence to claims of fossilization? He argues that stabilization and variation are mutually exclusive (c.f., Bernd, 1999). Other researchers, such as Schachter (1996), Lardiere (2007), and Han (2004a, 2006), have argued and demonstrated that there can be fossilized variation.

Unlike the studies conducted in the 1970s and the early 1980s which focused on early-stage, untutored learners, fossilization research conducted in the mid-1980s through the mid-1990s turned its attention to instructed learners. In most cases, researchers would employ corrective feedback as a strategy to gauge fossilization, reasoning that if the efficacy is nil for low to the perceptually persistent interlanguage forms, then those forms may have fossilized (see, e.g., Lin, 1995; Mukattash, 1986; Schachter, 1996; The-Ackroyd, 1990; Walsheim, 1991). Studies of this nature were highly on the same criticism leveled at the earlier studies in that they, too, did not ensure that the subjects had been learning under cognitively and endogenously favorable conditions. Furthermore, they operated on premises about corrective feedback that current research has proven false. For example, it was tacitly assumed that corrective feedback is a one-way process involving transactions from a giver to a receiver, and/or that corrective feedback should be equally effective for every linguistic feature.

Since the mid-1990s, researchers have gradually moved away from early-stage learners to so-called endstage learners, that is, learners who, as defined by White (2003a), have completed their L2 acquisition and who are no longer L2 learners but, rather, bilingual (or multilingual) speakers or users of the L2 (p. 241). Two types of endstage learners have been examined thus far: those who have reached a high level of proficiency and subsequently had extended immersion, and those who have been long-term residents (five-ten years), in the target language society but who
nevertheless have not reached a high level of proficiency. Because the three preconditions (i.e., input, motivation, and opportunity for practice) can be quite safely assumed with either type of endstate learner, they, arguably, offer the best testing ground for fossilization. Whatever device can be found in them is most likely to have persisted for a long time and least likely to change (cf., Sorace, 2003).

Studies focusing on vocabulary learners are generally either longitudinal or non-longitudinal. The longitudinal studies tend to last longer (ten years) than their counterparts in the early days (two years). One such study can be found in Lardiere (1998), a single case study lasting nearly ten years focusing on a subject named Patty. A native speaker of American English, Patty had resided in the USA for 18 years and was married to a native speaker of American English, the target language. Interview data were collected at three points over time, and the analytical focus was on Patty's use of phonological case marking and past-tense inflection morphology. Obligatory analysis with frequency counts over time provided indisputable evidence of fossilization, importantly, as a local phonological process. Patty's past-tense marking in an eight-year period. However, her pronoun marking was fully target-like. (For analysis of other aspects of Patty's grammar and similar findings, see Lardiere, 2007.)

Unlike the studies undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s, a marked methodological development in the more recent longitudinal studies is the variationization of data. Instead of relying on one type of data, researchers employ a combination of multiple data types, including, but not limited to, natural and clinically elicited samples of learner production (Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2005). For instance, in Han (2000, 2006, 2010) naturalistic writings were sampled from the case subject(s) over time and, concurrently, data were elicited via translation and acceptability judgment tasks. Thus, multiple perspectives were staged for co-constructing and/or co-verifying evidence of fossilization and for elucidating its nature and etiology.

The majority of the contemporary studies on endstate learners are, distinctly, non-longitudinal (see, e.g., Coppieri, 1987; Franceschina, 2005; Hopp, 2004; Liu, 2007; Montrul, 2002; Papp, 2000; Sorace, 1993) and controlled. They typically focus on very advanced learners or so-called "near-native speakers," that is, L2 learners who "have reached a level of oral equivalence with native speakers in language use and proficiency" (Coppieri, 1987, p. 547), using nonlinguistic data such as acceptability judgments and reaction times (Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2005). Sorace (1993), for example, explored near-natives' intuitions regarding constructions associated with Italian intransitives, using a methodological procedure called magnitude estimation whereby groups of native speakers of French and English who were near-native speakers of Italian were asked to assign numerical ratings to 48 sentences presented to them one by one, based on their perception of the relative acceptability of each sentence to a previous sentence. The results, similar to those reported from the longitudinal studies, indicated differential attainment, with fossilization being local rather than global.

Overall, research on endstate learners to date has seen an expansion of its scope from morphosyntactic features to phonological features and from mental representations to processing. Liu (2007), for instance, examined phonological reencoding in Chinese character recognition by near-native speakers/readers of Chinese. The study had an experimental design that allowed comparisons of native speakers and near-natives via-`-via the lexical processing procedure (i.e., how and what types of information are activated during word processing and semantic integration), in particular, the activation of total information in perceiving Chinese characters. Lexical decision and semantic judgment tasks were administered to both the native and the near-native speakers of Chinese. Results showed similarities as well as qualitative and quantitative differences. For example, while both groups activated phonetic information to assist their decoding of Chinese characters and semantic integration of characters at the sentence level, the natives outperformed the near-natives both in terms of efficiency and accuracy, and where qualitative difference is concerned, the natives activated tonal (phonological) information but the near-natives either did not activate it or activated it later. This study was the first to document fossilization in lexical processing.

In summary, research on fossilization has undergone steady and substantive changes over the last four decades. The changes are most visible in the population chosen for study and in the types of data sampled. Importantly, over the years there has been increasing effort to ensure that the selected subjects meet the preconditions of input, motivation, and practice opportunity. The studies so far have collectively shown that fossilization is local and selective, affecting certain domains and/or subsystems only.

**Applications**

Research on fossilization, though seemingly accentuating a negative aspect of SLA, nevertheless has unique and critical contributions to make to L2 pedagogy. First and foremost, it dispels a long-held assumption that instruction is necessary and helpful, regardless, suggesting, instead, that instruction is helpful sometimes, under certain conditions, and in relation to certain linguistic elements (see, e.g., Han, 2001). Importantly, research on fossilization has pointed to a need to differentiate in SLA study between learning and acquisition (Krashen, 1981); while everything may be learnable, not everything can be acquired. In this case, acquisition or success is defined as the ability to use language accurately, fluently, and appropriately (cf., Bailey and Tarone, Chapter 3, this volume). Instruction, and explicit instruction, in particular, are delineated by understandings drawn from fossilization research, "should subsequently target those that are amenable to it and ignoring those that are not. More specifically, it should focus on those that are explicable via question, it would seem from extant research that the efficacy of instruction may improve if done implicitly via-`-via features bearing complex form-meaning-function relations (see, however, Holstijn and de Graaff, 1994). In brief, effective instruction should be differential, varying according to the nature of learner difficulty in relation to different features of the target language.

Findings from existing research on fossilization highlight two sets of morphosyntactic features as hard to acquire and to which instruction is not or only partially useful: (1) interface features (Sorace, 2003) closely interacting with semantics and pragmatics, for example, verbs of causative alternation in English or the topic-comment construction in Chinese and (2) grammatical morphemes and functions, such as nominal declensions, verbal inflections, and articles, which encode abstract concepts such as definiteness, tense, and aspect. These features are largely immune to instruction, even though, ironically, they tend to receive most attention in the classroom. The learning of these features requires rich and consistent exposure to contextualized, naturalistic input, something that classroom instruction typically falls short of.

Instruction can sometimes promote or induce fossilization, as demonstrated in fossilization research (see, e.g., Han, 2001). Inadequacies in input quality and quantity, pedagogical procedures, and/or opportunities for communicative practice can singly or in combination engender premature stabilization of interlanguage features (cf., Han, 2004a), in which case stabilization may become a harbinger of fossilization. SLA research on classroom learning over the past four decades has produced and re-revisited a clear message for teachers, namely that instructional capacity is limited for stimulating acquisition, due largely to the inherent limitations of the classroom, and yet it can be boosted when combined with experience-based learning in naturalistic environments (see, e.g., DeKeyser, 2007; Riklin, 2005).

Teachers in the past have manifested two polarizing attitudes toward fossilization. While some have embraced it wholeheartedly and thereby have been overgenerous in applying the term to an
Future directions

Even though fossilization has garnered considerable attention from researchers over the past four decades and a general understanding has been formed about its nature and scope, much of it remains to be explored and substantiated, both empirically and theoretically. As is clear from the discussion in this chapter and elsewhere, the L2 literature on fossilization, though substantially accelerated in the last 15 years, has for long exhibited an insufficiency between data and explanations, with explanations outstripping the empirical data. So, which Han and Odden (2006) have depicted as the "fossilization flip-flop," i.e., explanation before description (cf. Byrum, Chapter 6, this volume). Therefore, it is necessary that future empirical research continue to build evidence to support the hypothesis, abiding by the three conditions for subject sampling, namely, exposure to input, motivation, and opportunity for communicative practice. A longitudinal approach should serve as the primary methodology, for Long (2003; cf., Selinker and Han, 2011) has compellingly argued, there is no substitute for it when it comes to empirically determining fossilization (for discussion on duration of longitudinal research, see Han, 2004b). In the meantime, multiple types of data must be sought for greater validity and reliability of the research findings. Only when an appropriate database is in place can any theoretical work become meaningful and useful.

On the theoretical front, in spite of the abundance of explanations available in the literature, there have been few attempts to systematically explain fossilization (see, e.g., Selinker and Libben, 1992), and virtually none for both fossilization and acquisition. The overgeneralization majority of the existing accounts are random, post hoc, ad hoc, and non-generalizable. In Han (2004b), about 50 percent of the explanations were found to be empty or weak and not to account for language acquisition. However, with insights on fossilization permeating the entire SLA literature, and more importantly, with substantially increased amount of robust descriptive evidence, the time is now ripe for performing theoretical analysis of existing findings relating to fossilization as well as acquisition and to construct hypotheses that can guide further empirical research. Future research must strive to substantiate the current understanding of fossilization, among them (a) the relationship between instruction and fossilization and (b) the idiosyncratic nature of fossilization. Coexisting instruction and fossilization, it would be difficult to refute, among others, for fossilization results in not only identify features that do not seem amenable to any kind of instruction, but also build evidence for the fossilizable features. Such types of information would prove invaluable to teachers and materials writers, as they can use the research-based information to help organize teaching and select implementation strategies. With respect to the idiosyncratic nature of fossilization, while much has been said about fossilization being intralearned, which gradually has led to the assumption of fossilization as an individual difference phenomenon, the fact is often overlooked that where fossilizable features are concerned, there is a great deal of commonality across learners. For example, where L2 acquisition of English articles is concerned, learners from non-mandarin L1 backgrounds tend to exhibit omission of articles in the following linguistic environments: when a noun is (modified by an adjective, (b) topic position, (c) representing a subsequence, (as opposed to tense) mention, referents, and (d) when the referent object is in the immediate environment (for detailed discussion, see Treiman, 2005). Apart what is idiosyncratic from what is universal is important to achieving a finer-grained understanding of fossilization and its underlying mechanisms.

Finally, future research must break new ground. This avoid fatigue, on the one hand, going beyond the customary demarcation and units of investigation, such as surface forms, and on the other hand, examining fossilization alongside other major phenomena such as acquisition and attrition. Doing so would not only be theoretically compelling, if unvoicing a unitary cognitive mechanism is a goal for SLA research, but also practically beneficial for understanding fossilization itself. As a Chinese saying goes, 勉強方通 (read as jiai yang) pong2 tong1), which can be glossed for this context as: the following: A better understanding can be achieved of the issues at hand by looking beyond it and into other seemingly remote contexts.

Notes
1. I thank the editors and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on an earlier version of this chapter. Any errors are exclusively my own.
2. The logical problem in foreign language learning is referred to a general lack of success in L2 learning, which, in Byrum-Yoom's recent formulation, is manifested across the board as (a) lack of reliability (up the interlanguage grammar and the grammar underlying the target language input) and (b) lack of convergence (incongruence between individuals' interlanguage grammars).
3. A reanalysis of Comrie et al. (1978) by Veposlor et al. (2006) indicates no change in Albert's use of negation strategies. This raises an interesting question: Could the reported changes or lack thereof have been artefacts of statistical analysis?

References

Heritage languages and L2 learning

Olga Kagan and Kathleen Dillon

Historical discussion

The heritage language field began developing in the late 1990s, and "the recognition of heritage language learners as a variable in second language research is recent" (Gass & Selinker, 2008, p. 23). A coherent, commonly held theory of Heritage Language Acquisition (HLA) has yet to be formulated. Scholars in countries where immigrant populations have sought formal study of their home language continue to define the term and the field itself. Since our expertise is largely limited to L2 issues, we will refer to heritage languages in the USA, but we think that many of the principles are also applicable to home/community language learners in the growing number of other countries with large immigrant populations. In this chapter we focus on heritage language learners (HLLs), that is, those speakers of heritage languages who choose to study their home language in a K-10 setting. (In the USA K-16 refers to the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education.) We discuss the most common definitions of HLLs, and situate heritage language instruction in a historical context, within the framework of research on bilingualism and second language acquisition (SLA) as well as instructional practices. We then examine how heritage language (HL) teaching over the past 10-15 years has been tied to an increase in immigration and changing immigration patterns, which have presented the challenge of offering instruction in a "foreign" language to students who already speak that language at home. We describe how these learners are, how they are different from other language learners, and what kind of research has been done to determine their key characteristics. Finally, we recommend some research-based approaches to HL instruction.

The term

The term "heritage language" originated in Canada (Campanile, 2005, p. 585), where it has since been replaced by the term "home-background" language. Australians use the term "community language" (see Bianco, 2008), and in Portugal "heritage languages" are referred to as "immigrant," "host," "regional," and "minority" languages (Regional and minority languages may not be considered to be heritage languages in the USA. This is an example of the varying uses and understandings of the term "heritage." In many countries the term "community languages" is the equivalent of "heritage languages" in the USA. (European Commission: Multilingualism, available at http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/languages-europe/docs139_en.htm)

In Scandinavian countries, dramatic changes in immigration patterns from distant parts of the world have greatly increased their populations' ethnic diversity. Legislation related to