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7 Intergenerational challenges: Of handing down languages, passing on practices, and bringing multilingual speakers into being

1 Introduction

There are few topics that are as cross-sectional as intergenerational challenges in language practices. Research in multilingual contexts often has a strong focus on specific age groups while others are treated as “background”. Children and parents are the focus in family language policy research, language documentation and revitalization has traditionally focused on elders and has only recently also found an interest in children as emergent speakers. In educational settings, teachers’ attitudes can be in the spotlight while children are mainly talked about, or vice-versa, and in most cases teachers and students belong to connected social worlds but have divergent social experiences. The aim of this chapter is to give an overview of studies dealing with more than one generation, but also to question the notion of generations in frameworks of language maintenance.

Within the view on languages as social processes is the understanding of them not being objects that simply emerge or can be handed down (or up for that matter) from generation to generation, but are interactively appropriated, negotiated and changed over time. When talking about languages being passed on or using terms like language transmission or maintenance, languages are not seen as objects to be handled but as processes requiring active participation from all generations involved. Explicitly, intergenerational language transmission refers to a process through which language(s) are taught and learned formally or informally (Borland 2006: 24) and make their way from one generation to the next, in rare cases also bypassing one generation, if the grandparent generation passes a language to the grandchildren generation directly.

In section 2 of this chapter, the notion of “generation” as a concept and how it is relevant for multilingualism research is in focus. Section 3 then presents studies *through a generational lens*, starting with research on language acquisition and in the family context that highlight intergenerational challenges, i.e. multilingual upbringing in transnational contexts or family language policies with multilingual speakers as primary caregivers. This is followed by research on language maintenance in traditional minority contexts and in migration and diaspora, among others in traditionally multilingual rural areas where three to four generations negotiate changes in local language use. Section 3 also deals with multilingualism in institutional language education, and how generational transmission through schooling practices is relevant for children with multilingual repertoires. The final section 4

highlights biographical research and how speakers navigate their multilingual language biographies across the lifespan and through different generations. This section also addresses some methodological challenges that relate to intergenerational research and thus adds to the discussion in Juvonen et al. (this vol.). The concluding discussion in section 5 summarises the chapter and proposes future directions for research. Throughout the chapter, I will use notions like home language, family language and minoritized language, and while these terms are largely used as synonymous, they highlight different social qualities (e.g. of being used in the home or else being in a relatively minoritarian status vis-à-vis a majority language, that is just as well used in the home). For an extended discussion, the reader is referred to Eisenclas and Schalley (this vol.).

2 Intergenerational challenges

2.1 The problem of generations

Generations can be looked at from a biological as well as social perspective. While the lifecycle orientation in biology draws on the succession of individuals as they are born, grow up and produce offspring of their own, the social understanding of generations refers to shared cultural and social experiences that unite individuals born at about the same time.

Generations and their relationships are discussed among the early problems in philosophy and the emerging field of sociology at the end of the 19th century. Dilthey ([1875] 1924), a German empiricist and philosopher, highlighted that the distance between (biological) generations was not to be measured in exact time but rather “internally experienced”, while at the same time stressing the simultaneousness of (social) generations. He was interested in the phenomenon of members of the same social generations living through the same important influences, both culturally and socio-politically, which would result in them forming a somewhat coherent group. Mannheim ([1923/1952] 1998: 170) extended Dilthey’s thoughts and in his work *The problem of generations* suggested five important characteristics defining the succession of generations:

- (a) New participants in the cultural process are emerging, whilst
- (b) former participants in that process are continually disappearing.
- (c) Members of any one generation can participate only in a temporally limited section of the historical process, and
- (d) it is therefore necessary continually to transmit the accumulated cultural heritage.
- (e) The transition from generation to generation is a continuous process.

The ongoing change that is inherent in the image of generations means that members of generations have to interact continuously (e), in order to welcome new (a)

or see off former participants (b, c) or keep up the knowledge that was collected by members of earlier generations (d). Researching any interaction can thus be seen as (only) one moment in the continued sequence of intergenerational interactions. Past, present and future have to be taken into account to understand how transmission and transition are taking place.

However, the understanding of generations is not universal, and researchers in social psychology as well as in communications have researched relevant notions in different countries and regions (Giles et al. 2003; Giles, Makoni, and Dailey 2005; Giles, Khajavy, and Choi 2012). Intergenerational communication has been in focus in publications across cultural contexts (e.g. Nussbaum and Coupland 2004). An interesting finding is the cultural notion of generation and age-group (Giles, Makoni, and Dailey 2005: 196): As the authors have shown for comparable North American, South African and Ghanaian respondents of different age groups, their perception of young adulthood, middle and elderly age differ considerably, seeing a wider span in the North American respondent (young adulthood starting earlier and middle age ending later) than in the other countries. While this does not explain the earlier onset of young adulthood, the regional difference in life expectancy can account for the onset of elderly age around 50 years in both African data sets whereas it was over 60 years for North American respondents. At the same time, findings in this line of research have shown that respondents in different geographical locations perceive intragenerational communication as easier and less problematic (i.e. less risky or face threatening) than intergenerational communication. In all researched geographical contexts, communication with (older) relatives was viewed favourably in comparison to (older) non-family members (Giles et al. 2003).

2.2 The sociolinguistic problem of generations

Frameworks of language revitalization and language classification have used the notion of generation as an important tool to assess the status of languages or their degree of endangerment. Suslak (2009) shows how static notions of generations, as they have been present in sociolinguistic literature, fail to recognise the inherent dynamics and even the options to move between generations. He calls this, in reference to Mannheim's work, the *sociolinguistic problem of generations*.

In Fishman's (1991) scheme of intergenerational disruption of language transmission, four of eight steps are defined by generational relations:¹

¹ Steps 1 to 4, not cited here, make no mention of generations, they apply to languages of little vulnerability.

- 5: The language is used orally *by all generations* and is effectively used in written form throughout the community;
- 6: The language is used orally *by all generations* and is being learned by children as their first language;
- 7: The *child-bearing generation* knows the language well enough to use it *with their elders* but is not transmitting it to their children;
- 8: The only remaining speakers of the language are *members of the grandparent generation*. (Fishman 1991, adapted by Lewis and Simons 2010:105, emphasis added by the author)

All of these steps rely on members of older generations to transmit their language(s) to the younger generations – while they need not be biologically related, they are addressed as members of their age-groups, and shared responsibility in the community is constructed.

The UNESCO (2009) Framework of the degree of endangerment of languages builds on similar factors, and intergenerational transmission is seen as the safeguard to keep languages alive. It distinguishes six stages of degree of endangerment:

- Safe: The language is spoken *by all generations*; intergenerational transmission is uninterrupted.
- Vulnerable: *Most children* speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains (e.g., the home).
- Definitely endangered: *Children* no longer learn the language as mother tongue in the home.
- Severely endangered: The language is spoken *by grandparents and older generations*; while the *parent generation* may understand it, they do not speak it to children or among themselves.
- Critically endangered: The youngest speakers are *grandparents and older*, and they speak the language partially and infrequently.
- Extinct: There are no speakers left. (italics added by the author)

In both of these frameworks, and others that follow similar patterns (e.g. Schmidt 1990; Krauss 1998), it is understood that each person can be classified as a member of a generation and may grow up to become a member of different generations. However, the speaker's own position is not taken into account when assessing languages with the presented grids, and the prevailing image is that of older speakers talking to younger ones. Repertoires that might overlap and diverse resources that speakers draw on are not mentioned in the frameworks and there is little agency foreseen for younger generations to react to elders.

Meek (2007), researching generational discontinuity among Kaska speakers in Canada, found another possible interpretation of the generational grids discussed above: She reports children perceiving themselves as not being old enough to speak the minority language yet, as it was seen as special knowledge and thus reserved for the elders. In work on Slovene speakers in Austria (Purkarthofer 2016), parents voiced that once their children had learned enough Slovene in school, they would feel confident switching “back” from the majority language, German, and speaking Slovene with their children. While parents and teachers are members of the same generation, parents felt that their own command of the minority language

was not sufficient to act as role models for their children and thus, in generational terms, it seemed that they were placing themselves as the (co-)children generation, learning from the adult teachers.

In research dealing with multilingualism, we necessarily encounter issues of intergenerational communication and both biological and social generations can offer a lens to understand relationships and patterns of language use. But generational behaviour is not essentially the same all the time, it is instead made relevant in interactions in different ways, along with other social factors like age, status, power and language competences. In the next section, I will discuss the family, the intergenerational lieu par excellence, and studies on family language policy to point to the intergenerational lens in research on multilingualism and home languages.

3 Challenges seen through a generational lens

3.1 Language acquisition in the family and family language policy

Families are seen as the main site of generational contact, and even if this is not exclusively so, studies on intergenerational transmission usually take families as a starting point. Earlier chapters have already dealt with emotional needs and family relations (e.g. De Houwer; Sevinç, both this vol.), while strategies of home language maintenance (Schwartz this vol.) and the issue of child agency will be discussed later in the handbook (Smith-Christmas this vol.).

Families are seen as dynamic systems, consisting of members of different generations each having their own perspectives on, agency in and ideas about languages and life. One important aspect in research is the experience of multilingual linguistic repertoires of family members developing over time. Definitions about what constitutes a family differ across times and contexts, and do generally transcend the image of (just) two parents and their biological children (Cutas and Chan 2012; Palvainen this vol.). Research on family language policy has gone through four (Fogle and King 2017) or even five phases in the last two decades (Lanza and Lomeu Gomes this vol.), from a focus on language acquisition of children to a more sociolinguistic focus on conditions of language socialisation. In order to study language socialisation, attention should be paid to the linkages between micro and macro levels of analysis: A study design that takes developmental changes over time into account is needed, encompassing an ethnographic perspective, along with field-based naturalistic data collection (Garrett 2017).

Intergenerational challenges in family language policy research can be described as either linked to policies and practices, and divergence between them, or as linked to differences in expectations and perspectives. Other challenges in interpersonal communication do of course also occur in family settings but will not be the focus of this chapter.

Divergence between the policy and practices of a family has been repeatedly reported and this has made it very obvious that research is needed on the models of language distribution (with the most famous being the one-person, one-language model) and plans for exposure and input. But research is also needed on interactions in families, involving different generations, and taking language use and multilingual meaning-making into account. Studies focusing on the emergence of new multilingual speakers have been conducted globally, but with a focus on bilingual families in Europe and North America (for an overview see De Houwer 2017). From the wide body of research, only some examples are given here, dealing with bilingual first-language acquisition in young children (Lanza 2004), multilingual interactions in daily routines (Van Mensel 2018) and interactions around the dinner table (Tannen 2006). Languages come into the families by grandparents (Curdt-Christiansen 2009), adopted children (Fogle 2012), and in and through transnational networks (Zhu and Li 2016). Most studies report the importance of different generations being present in the family, and identify specific strategies of parents and caretakers that might differ from those of grandparents and other members of the extended family. In contrast to the models of language maintenance, the transfer of knowledge happens not only from older to younger generations but is rather negotiated between all interlocutors. Studies from other parts of the world, Africa in particular, are less common, but do emerge and present interesting data, e.g. one study by Coetzee on adolescent parents (2018), raising their children in two extended family settings.

Recently, a focus on child agency is visible (Smith Christmas 2018, this vol.) that has led to more studies on language transmission and learning in families (Said and Zhu 2019), but also to a larger number of studies on older children, among them school-aged children of Rwandan parents in Brussels (Gafaranga 2010) and teenagers of Polish descent in Norway (Obojska 2017, 2018). In Gafaranga's study, the management of family languages is contrasted with face-to-face interactions, and the importance of the children being complicit or resisting intended adult language behaviour is highlighted. In Obojska's studies, the teenagers talk about their language biographies, but their language practices are also observed in relation to their social media activity (see also Little this vol.). The participants in her research reported making conscious choices with regards to the use of Polish outside of the home, mainly targeting an online audience in Poland that followed their Norwegian adventures with great interest.

Among the recent discussions of multilingual intergenerational exchanges is a growing focus on digital interaction and also digital intergenerational interaction

(for an overview, see Lanza and Lexander in press). Members of transnational families communicate not only face-to-face, but their linguistic repertoires are widened through diverse digital and mediated practices, from talking on the phone to texting and using social media platforms. The interactions serve as occasions of language use but of course they mainly strengthen the family ties (Szecsi and Szilagyí 2012). Kenner et al. (2008) show how intergenerational learning is happening around a computer and how Bangladeshi grandparents and their grandchildren in the UK mutually use a cultural tool to encourage interactivity and exploration. Akther (2016) analysed a young boy's use of two different scripts (English and Arabic) for literacy and language practices with his grandmother, conveying meaning through hybrid language use in English and Bengali, and found that this intergenerational interaction negotiated the diverging and not congruent repertoires of both participants.

Adult children are rarely the focus of research, with the exception of Soehl (2016) who interprets French data from questionnaires about language behaviour. His study is atypical in the sense that it deals with large data sets that were acquired through telephone interviews as part of a nationwide survey, and that his approach is quantitative in nature. Yet another approach is taken by Leglisé (2019), who traces the trajectories of Brazilian families between French Guyane and Brazil, using commented family genealogies in addition to biographical interviews. Her research offers insights into continued transnational experiences and language choices of women of the grandparent generation, using Portuguese and French along with other resources with their spouses, children and grandchildren.

Challenges in intergenerational relations are also linked to parental expectations, motivations for language use and ideas of transmission. Expectations exist about which languages should be kept in the family's repertoire, which functions need to be filled and which roles each speaker should inhabit, also in relation to genealogies and traditional or modern images of society (Purkarthofer and Steien 2019). How explicit these expectations are is largely dependent on the sociopolitical context and the personal characteristics of the speakers. Parental aspirations and ideologies have been studied and the connection between language choices and good parenting has been pointed out by King and Fogle (2006) in interviews and by Piller and Gerber (2018) in online forums. Van Mensel and Deconinck (2017) focused on desire in the language learning motivations of adults for their children. Purkarthofer (2019b) looked at ideas and conceptions of parents as they were expecting their first child. The research participants were addressed as future parents, but they were relying on their own upbringing and thus their own generational alignment when they offered reasons and evaluations on what success in being a multilingual speaker meant for them. It is thus visible that borders between generations are not clear-cut and that speakers draw on different experiences and changed generational roles as they grow older.

Future research is needed that covers social and geographical contexts that have rarely been in focus. As grandparents, parents and children move along transnational trajectories, their language repertoires differ considerably and conceptions of (only) one family language across generations seem no longer fitting. Expectations regarding languages in family settings are of course also important in relation to these changing repertoires, and questions of communicative functions, symbolic value and the meaning of transmission or language change need to be addressed. The extended family can be seen as a nexus in language policy research, and it is of great interest how it relates to other possible contexts. This will be the topic of the following sections, where I will first focus on minority settings in section 3.2 and then move on to settings of migration and diaspora, while acknowledging that these lines are not clearly drawn.

3.2 A generational effort – language maintenance in minority settings

Multilingual families play an important role in transmitting regional minority languages, or reviving dormant languages. This section focuses on the situation of language users in minority and diasporic settings, where the home language is usually not the majority language (see also Mayer et al. this vol.). Power relations, the ability to participate in societal discourses and to contribute to one's own representation in a majority language setting are part of the specific contexts in which generations are called to action. I will thus discuss studies on efforts to transmit languages that transcend the borders of the family, and I will distinguish traditional regional minority language contexts (this section) from those of speakers in migration and diaspora (next section). Attempting to present a geographical spread, I am aware that European and Northern American researchers and languages are still overrepresented in the studies that I will highlight.

Intergenerational transmission is considered an important predictor of language survival and researchers dealing with minoritised languages have taken efforts to research and highlight successful stories of transmission and revival (e.g. Hinton 2013). While families have been the focus of research, many communities world-wide have developed approaches to support the language acquisition of children. New Zealand's Ministry of Māori Development provides booklets, newsletter and a website with what is considered relevant information for parents who want to raise their children bilingually (Chrisp 2005). In this way, family efforts are met with community or in this case state initiatives. Wales has started the distribution of information material on early bilingual development via midwives taking care of new-born children and their parents (Edwards and Pritchard Newcombe 2006). However, a follow-up study (Tranter et al. 2010) showed that midwives were not perceived as language professionals by parents and did not see themselves in this role. Bilingual child-rearing would be brought up mostly in families that were already

quite outspoken about it and met with midwives who were speakers of Welsh. It can be assumed that there is a supportive effect of this kind of marketing material, but given the experiences of midwives, it seemed less successful than has been expected. While in the Welsh case parents no longer feared disadvantages for their children, in other contexts these initiatives still compete with societal pressure, i.e. parents who are afraid that their minority language would put their children at risk, as Lane (2010) has shown for speakers of Kven in 20th century Norway.

Throughout the world, schools have been an important place for language transmission, and chapters in this volume discuss formal education and home language maintenance in more detail, focusing on models of formal education (Yağmur this vol.), teacher attitudes (Mary and Young this vol.) and the mainstream classroom (Paulsrud this vol.). Māori speakers in New Zealand have developed the concept of language nests (*kōhanga reo*), pre-school childcare that immerses children into the desired minority language (Lourie 2011). Hinton (2011: 312) reminds us that “it is also a sweet irony to use schools for language revitalization since they have played such a large role in language death.” For teachers and students, as they are also members of their respective generations, educational institutions provide a meeting ground and, especially in smaller communities, might be among the limited places where children and adults are exposed to a minoritised language. Teachers are inscribed in complex social schemes, meandering between grading and standardizing, acting as role models for minority or majority languages and as encouraging advocates of language learning. Their training, however, often does not prepare them for these roles in an appropriate way (Valdés 2017). De Korne (2017) presents two teachers, one in her 20s and the other in his 60s, who each adopt a collaborative way of working towards achieving communicative competence in Isthmus Zapotec, thus practising language reclamation as self-definition. Both are taking the inner dialect variation and the multilingual realities of the region into account when welcoming new members into the Zapotec speech community, but they are doing so by using their different generational positions and personalities. Apart from the personality of the teachers (as highlighted in De Korne’s study 2017), the wider policy plays its role in the relations between generations of language users and learners: Lourie (2011) demonstrates how changes in the curriculum for language education influence perceived responsibility of non-Māori and Māori learners, leaving the latter with the task to keep up biculturalism and keep using the lesser-used language.

Generational expectations about who should learn in which way and to which goal need to be answered in all contexts of learning. Todal (2006) describes a project in Eastern Norway, which makes use of the Southern Saami language in school. He highlights the positive effects on the children’s competences that were possible by being able to hire a qualified speaker – but at the same time the difficulties to find such a speaker in the area. Still, he also makes an interesting observation for our topic: The children learned to speak Saami, but they would only ever use it with adults and stick to Norwegian for peer interactions. This example also brings

another immanent problem to the fore: A few years after the project ended, the whole school was closed down due to lack of students. Across the world, it seems to be a shared experience that adults and elders complain about the perceived loss or infrequent use of minoritised languages by children. As Purkarthofer and De Korne (2019) have shown for Slovene speakers in Austria and Zapotec speakers in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, this might not be the view of the children who see themselves as speakers of the minority language. In other contexts, children are even seen to be the driving force behind language differentiation and thus the emergence of “new” indigenous languages (e.g. in the case of Light Warlpiri in Australia, O’Shannessy 2012, 2015). In this case, after having had input in a baby talk register of Warlpiri and Australian-English/Kriol from the adults in the community, the language was used in the peer-group of children and developed into a new paradigm distinct from the input languages.

Yet another strategy of intergenerational learning is used in Mentor-Apprentice programs, mostly employed in the revitalisation of Indigenous languages with adult learners. Canadian researchers found well-being effects in participants of a said program (Jenni et al. 2017), among them a sense of reconnection after experienced trauma through forced attendance at boarding schools, healing effects of becoming a language mentor in elders, as well as a strengthening of the apprentices through a more positive outlook and by taking on a leading role in the community. Basham and Fathman (2008), in an earlier study about latent speakers that despite growing up in a multilingual household never acquired the minoritised language, come to comparable conclusions as they highlight how the fear of being ridiculed and not having a trusting relationship to proficient speakers can keep latent speakers from using their language, even if they have a certain intuitive knowledge of it. But they also describe how even for successful learners, communication and the use of languages outside of formal domains is an issue well into advanced stages of learning. While children are “naturally” perceived as language learners, adults have to be more explicit about their will to learn (Chrisp 2005), which might be facilitated through explicit programs (Basham and Fathman 2008). Terms like “new speakers” (Smith-Christmas et al. 2018) can address some of the assumptions about who is supposed to know what and how speakers of a minority language can re-connect with the language well after having reached adult age.

In all of the described settings, generational roles mix with other social roles. Singer (2018) illustrates with her data from an anniversary ceremony on Australia’s Northern coast how complex generational and societal patterns can lead to speakers being identified with right or wrong T-shirts, used as an expression of belonging and of alignment with clans, heritage, and language groups. Languages are in her context not completely congruent with clans, but through a set of identification processes, mostly along the lines of belonging to the coast or the inland people, families do arrive at a shared understanding of which distinctions should be made relevant in a given performance.

3.3 Multilingual connections – languages across generations in migration and diaspora

Languages of migration and languages of diasporic communities are subject to change and may eventually move to the periphery of their speakers' linguistic repertoires. In the example of the Maltese community in Melbourne, Australia, Borland (2006) describes facilitating and motivating factors that work together to enable language maintenance and intergenerational transmission. While the facilitating factors are a favourable environment and opportunities for interaction (both in the diaspora and with the homeland), she strongly links the motivating factors to intergenerational exchange, in the form of upholding family communications and fostering familial ties. A third factor, not necessarily linked to generational lineage, is the perceived benefit of bilingualism. Borland identifies a crucial moment when the children generation reaches adulthood and leaves the family home: Only in some of her participants' families, the practice of speaking Maltese (or a mix of Maltese and English) was upheld past this point. In cases where the parents expressed a feeling of their language being stigmatized, and at times a preference for English themselves, the children were more likely to switch to English or to speak less and less Maltese.

Seviç and Backus (2017; also Seviç this vol.) present an interesting approach by analysing interviews with members of three generations of Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands, talking about their feelings of anxiety in relation to their heritage language but also the majority language in their country of residence. The authors highlight how anxiety leads to less language use and thus no improvements in language knowledge which in turn contributes to a further increase of language anxiety.

In the case of Bangladeshi families in the London, the grandparents are crucial in providing environments for their grandchildren to use Bangla in different ways (Gregory, Ruby, and Kenner 2010): They model language behaviour, including literacy and religious practices, and they shape spaces of observation and learning for children of all ages. Ruby (2012) discusses in detail how one pair of grandmother and granddaughter uses strategies of teaching and learning, and successfully engages in Bangla literacy, and she concludes with the remark that those instances of learning are rarely acknowledged in formal schooling, and that grandparents and their resources are not sufficiently recognised.

This remark already points to intergenerational challenges that are present in contexts where speakers encounter institutions or are met with official language policy (e.g. Hornberger 2014). Schools and formal environments for languages are in focus in part 4.2 of this volume, and thus, only some aspects will be highlighted in this section. Putjata (2017) analyses policy changes in Israeli schools, aiming at establishing a multilingualism friendly climate, and discusses how Russian speakers experienced both the former, monolingual, and the more recent, multilingual, policy. Her findings show a reduction in overtly negative feedback on the use of Russian and thus success in the

policy goals. The reports from her participants, however, also indicate that change was not that apparent in all schools or not perceived as a major change in practice.

Research on students and schools dealing with different languages should be aware of the challenges that arise from intergenerational contact. Reath Warren (2017) analyses curricula for mother tongue instruction in Sweden and Australia and shows how aims and values are contradicted or constrained in some cases. Monoglossic expectations hinder multilingual students to develop literacies in several of their languages. Bigelow (2010) demonstrates with a careful study on Somali youth in Minnesota how language use and literacy practices in Somali and English are negotiated in the peer group but also with adult teachers and the researcher. While Somali is used with family and peers, it is rarely used as a written language and only a few of the teenagers have had schooling experience in Somali, not usually offered in the area.

Yet another case is described by Rienzner (2010) in her paper on Somali mother tongue education entering the Austrian school system: A health professional drew attention to the fact that intergenerational problems were encountered by Somali mothers and their teenage daughters when it came to discussing bodily changes and health prevention activities during puberty. While the mothers had acquired German to some extent, they had not necessarily discussed health topics in their German language classes, even less as they are surrounded by taboo and hardly spoken about in mixed classrooms. The daughters (and sons, obviously) had had their health education in the Austrian school system and were thus more proficient in these topics in German. Their Somali, while being adequate for family interactions, did reportedly not cover technical terms like specific body parts and biological functions. In conjunction with a research project at the university, the Somali community with a women's association as the driving force, initiated Somali mother tongue education in Austrian mainstream schools and the expectation is that this helps to prevent the interruption of communication in a period where health issues and personal development call for personal exchange (Purkarthofer 2019a). If the mainstream school system is not open for such proposals, grassroots initiatives that take on schooling and education in migrant languages can offer relief (see Nordstrom this vol.).

The case of Somali/German exchanges around puberty highlights interruptions in transmission – but it also demonstrates the failure to recognise intergenerational challenges that parents and their children face at times. In the above mentioned situation, both sides were able to address each other in two languages and if using the frameworks of language maintenance (as cited in section 2), transmission would be regarded as successful. However, the communicative needs of the teenagers and of the parents could not be fulfilled in any of the languages at hand. I would thus consider this an example that accounts for language transmission that is not either happening or not happening (in a binary opposition) but is instead partially successful. Such complex, partial or combined transmission practices, inherently multilingual, are not represented in frameworks of language maintenance, and revisions might be needed.

4 Becoming different generations – biographical research, intergenerational understanding and methodological challenges

The multilingual speaker can be seen from very different angles, as a rather solitary individual through the lens of competence and testing, in relation to one or more groups as a user of certain linguistic resources, and as a bearer of identities, affectively linked to languages and speech styles. Furthermore, she is also linked to other speakers through generational links. While early publications on language transmission and shift focused on certain, relatively delimited languages, more recent publications have problematised the notion of language as an abstract construct and instead focus on the speaker as a whole person.

Speaker-centred approaches focus on multilingual speakers and their developing language biographies (Busch 2017; Purkarthofer 2019b). Such approaches take the multilingual subject (Kramsch 2009), and its identity and language learning (Norton 2013) as a focal point and highlight the importance of the diversity of resources that speakers employ, transcending binary categories such as majority and minority or home language. Over time, multilingual speakers form their communicative or linguistic repertoire (Gumperz 1964; Busch 2012), consisting of language competence; the individual's biography including the history of language learning and use; metalinguistic knowledge; speech styles, registers and the contexts of use, and the ability to understand the social meaning of those; as well as aspirations, ideologies and attitudes about languages. As speakers experience changes in their lives, i.e. moving between speech communities, entering school or having children, their repertoire is often changing as well. Changes in the linguistic repertoire can be perceived as positive and liberating, opening new communicative worlds, but they can also be frightening as in the case of forced language shifts.

Busch (2012) presents an example of a teacher living in the borderlands of Germany and France, as the child of a French-German couple, moving repeatedly between the countries. He describes his two main languages as they put him in an exposed position in either language community, he sees himself “as belonging to two language worlds but never entirely. Something always remains foreign and, as such, suspect” (Busch 2012: 514). He expresses positive feelings towards both his languages, emotions shared by many multilingual speakers, but also ambivalent feelings about the social evaluations of one's languages. As a child, his experiences were different from the one's he is having as an adult, and his generational position influences the subject positions that he can inhabit as a multilingual speaker.

Speakers are perceived as members of different generations as they participate in research projects, but in biographical research the aim is to understand how speakers become different generations and how they make sense of their experiences across the lifespan. Dilthey ([1905–1910] 1990: 307) has called for recognising

the importance of the interdependency or “Wirkungszusammenhang” in autobiographies and the retrospective evaluation of experiences as they are linked to different roles, ages and social positions. In a speaker-centred approach, the speaking subject is conceptualized as one that uses a wide range of communicative resources and draws on different meaning making systems, not necessarily attributable to one or the other “language”. However, as Blackledge and Creese (2008: 535) note, it is necessary to highlight the very real effects of languages as social constructs:

If languages are invented, and languages and identities are socially constructed, we nevertheless need to account for the fact that at least some language users, at least some of the time, hold passionate beliefs about the importance and significance of a particular language to their sense of ‘identity’.

Researchers in speaker-centred approaches tend to explicitly take their positioning into account and the role of the researcher, who is also situated along the generational continuum, is thought to have an influence on the topics and the interactions more broadly. Being a researcher comes with being a daughter, a father or an elder (Giampapa 2011), it is linked to being a professional and sometimes a professional stranger (Agar 1980), and the cultural and societal expectations of research, age, gender, religion, ethnicity, positioning, language(s) and professional status cannot be ignored. Relations to the research participants are influenced by power relations, questions of authority and previous experiences with research (Singer 2018; Maquire 2005). As knowledge and use of languages come with social hierarchies, these will also play a role in the choice of medium of data collection or in the multilingual set-up of encounters. Securing understanding and integrating strategies to ensure that participants and researchers are on the same page seems necessary in the research process.

As most researchers enter the field as adults, working with children becomes another important point in intergenerational research: Clark (2011) calls for methods that take children’s voices into account, while Mayall (2002) highlights the need for a sociology of childhood that thinks of children’s worlds using their relevant categories. Researchers in different fields have called for and developed methods to collect data with children, using creative methods involving speech and drawing (Prasad 2018), photographs and video formats, storytelling techniques and identity texts (Cummins and Early 2011).

5 Conclusions

Intergenerational challenges need to be addressed not so much as a research field on its own but rather as a necessity in research that involves speakers. I argue that we need to be more explicit about the generational positions of research participants, but also mention their *sense of generations*, that is, their understanding of social

relationships linked to biological and social generations. An explicit focus on inter-generational relations, as in a workshop at the 20th International Congress for Linguists in Cape Town in 2018,² can be a good starting point to review one's own categories and re-examine assumptions about roles and competences linked to members of generations. Being able to describe social relations and using terminology that has meaning in a given context can be steps to enhanced awareness of generational challenges. It will be important to take speakers' own categories (i.e. kinship terms, heritage and alignment with languages) into account, but at the same time be open for non-traditional family structures and relationships between generations.

In multilingualism research and with a focus on home languages, generational transmission needs to be seen as the meeting of repertoires – not one language that is passed on but instead speakers meeting with and in several of their linguistic resources. King (2016) makes a passionate case for looking both at learners of minoritised or endangered languages, and mostly at those who are eager to learn despite being outside of institutional contexts, and at migrant learners who are on the verge of passing the age of schooling. From the point of view of intergenerational challenges, I find these learners to be of particular interest: While they might have been considered learners “on the margins”, they are central actors in a generational line. They are parents, aunts and uncles, teachers and educators – or in the case of just-out-of-school youths, they will be soon. Their interactions are likely to reach those younger as well as those older than them and thus their language use is likely to influence other speakers. Research on their experiences, their circumstances and motivations for learning, and how they are linked to expectations for other generations, is needed.

Attention to the generational set-up of learning opportunities can help to work along cultural or social expectations that might facilitate the integration of emergent speakers, adult learners or speakers who perceive themselves as peripheral members of a speech community. Breaching expectations can on the other hand open non-traditional learning opportunities, i.e. for minoritised languages in urban centres.

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² Several of the authors mentioned in this chapter presented their research at this workshop.

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