



# Bilingual education and the linguistic heritage of Italian students in the United Kingdom: a case study exploring identity

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MSc Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition, 2024

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## **ABSTRACT:**

This thesis aims to explore family and learner perceptions of bilingualism and the impact of bilingual education on adolescent heritage language learners' (HLLs) identities. The focus demographics are Italian HLLs, living in the United Kingdom. The segmented Italian national identity, characterised by the lack of inter-regional mutual intelligibility, poses an interesting and unique context to this study. Therefore, it also explores the interaction of this context on the bilingual identities of heritage learner children. The theoretical framework for this study will be Norton Pierce's theory of identity (1995) which represented learner identity with three characteristics central to Second Language Acquisition (SLA): multiple, a site of struggle, and subject to change (Norton and McKinney, 2011; Norton and Toohey, 2011). The research procedures followed a qualitative design using a multi-case study approach involving three adolescent participants and their parents. The students' Italian education was extra-curricular, provided by complementary schools, self-taught online programmes and taught by parents. It reports language learning experiences to extract themes about identity formation in bilingual education. The data collection was split into two main steps and answered two research questions. Firstly, parents were asked to complete a questionnaire which was used to select participants and understand the student's background and previous language learning experiences. Secondly Students were asked to complete a questionnaire to self-rate their Italian proficiency and to complete linguistic portraits which constituted the primary research tool for providing visual insight into their association between language and identity. These portraits were then used as stimuli during semi-structured interviews which were coded and analysed through NVivo. The data revealed that positive perceptions of bilingualism were associated with social and linguistic capital, however students were aware of the hierarchy of languages and public opinions led to negative views of their heritage language (HL). Generally, bilingual education seemed to support their national identity formation by creating a safe environment where they could express their bilingual identities. Finally, the study also documented aspects of the fragmentation of the Italian community living abroad and the influence of regional identities within this context.

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# **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1. STUDY AIMS:**

This thesis aims to explore family and student perceptions of bilingualism and the impact of bilingual education on heritage language learners' (HLLs) identities. The research focuses on and hopes to provide insight into the identities of adolescent students of Italian heritage (as defined by their family lineage) living in the UK, a demographic which has been understudied in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) literature. While research on students' identity formation and attention to bilingual programmes is growing, it has mainly focused on the Spanish-speaking community in the United States. Hence, this creates a gap in the literature for a European-based study. Most bilingual education takes the form of heritage language (HL) learning in extra-curricular contexts such as complementary schools, self-taught online courses, or parents teaching the language at home (Conteh et al., 2013; Henshaw, 2016). Furthermore, the fragmented national-regional identity in Italy, emphasised by the lack of inter-regional mutual intelligibility of language varieties, poses an interesting and unique context to this study.

Norton Pierce is the leading researcher in identity and SLA: she introduced learner identities as multiple and subject to change, demonstrating that learners can choose more desirable identities based on the Target Language community (Norton, 2014). This construct is used as a theoretical framework for this study as it provides a structure within which to capture multiple and interacting identities, in this case, Italian national, regional, and British. (Block, 2007).

Overall, the growing relevance of identities in HLL in SLA, and the understudied context of the Italian communities abroad, show the need to investigate the impact of bilingual education on Italian heritage learner identities.

## **1.2. DISSERTATION OUTLINE:**

This dissertation contains six main chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the aims of the study and dissertation structure, followed by a detailed literature review in Chapter 2. This chapter defines HLLs, the theoretical framework, and describes the Italian context considering Italy's sociolinguistic and political background as well as the history and demographics of the Italian community in the UK. Chapter 3 covers the methodological

approaches, participant recruitment and data analysis; ethical considerations for qualitative research and researcher perspective are also discussed. Chapter 4 provides case study overviews, and Chapter 5 discusses themes emerging from data and relates these findings to other research in the field of SLA.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter analyses the existing literature on HL and identity in SLA and Italian sociolinguistics. It defines HLLs and outlines ways in which Italian can be maintained in the United Kingdom. It also considers the sociolinguistic situation in Italy, which is divided by a lack of mutual intelligibility due to the dialectal diglossia within individual regions, how this fragmentation is reflected in the Italian community in the UK, and the role of HL education in increasing Italian national identity. This places the research into a wider context of the heritage country. The last section analyses the theoretical background for identity in SLA, focusing on Norton Pierce's concept of identity, concluding with how the study can fill gaps in the literature and the research questions identified.

### **2.1. HERITAGE LANGUAGE AND MAINTENANCE:**

This study focuses on the impact of HL bilingual education on identity. Determining an appropriate definition of the term HLL can help shape the status of learners and place them in an educational context. This section therefore focuses on establishing this definition and discusses the context for HL learning in the UK.

#### **2.1.1. Defining heritage:**

Definitions of HL learning vary in SLA literature depending on the type of community (Carreira, 2004). Fishman (2018) groups HLLs into three main categories: *indigenous*, *colonial* and *immigrant*. However, these cannot be transferred to the UK as his considerations concerned US history and sociolinguistics. Another interpretation of HL learning places definitions of HLLs into three main categories: *linguistic proficiency*, *community membership* and *lineage* (Carreira, 2004; Flores and Rosa, 2015). Valdés (2001) believes that to be considered an HLL through linguistic proficiency, an individual must be: raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, speak or understand the HL, and be to some degree bilingual. This definition is problematic as it assumes that English is the majority language (Valdés, 2001) and it excludes individuals who are not proficient in the HL yet have strong family or personal connections to the heritage culture (Carreira, 2004).

*Community membership* provides a more inclusive definition, incorporating learners who have a personal connection to the language through their belonging to the community

(Flores and Rosa, 2015). These might refer to members of a community with linguistic roots in a language other than English and who strive to reverse a language shift (Carreira, 2004). For example, Native American communities with insufficient exposure to the HL due to reduced numbers of speakers in society (Carreira, 2004) but exhibit strong affiliations to a linguistic, ethnic, and cultural community. This description encompasses different types of learners regardless of proficiency, whilst still grouping them based on their affiliation to a community and its associated language. However, this definition is not appropriate for the current study as the Italian community is one of the largest living in the UK (Cacciatore and Pepe, 2019) and is not aiming for a language shift, but to maintain the HL. Furthermore, it encompasses a broad range of proficiencies, affiliations, and motivations, capturing individuals who may be a part of a community but lack interest in the language.

*Lineage* is when the individual is studying the HL due to a connection with their family or ethnic background (Carreira, 2004). It does not limit individuals to the level of proficiency but establishes that they must have a link to the HL and culture through heredity. Valdés (2001) expands on this aspect, highlighting that HLLs are those individuals interested in strengthening or maintaining immigrant languages that are not normally taught in school. Heritage languages are spoken in bilingual communities such as Italian-American and acquired by immigrant bilinguals to reflect the origins of the first-generation speakers (Valdés, 2001). This definition differs from *community membership*, as the historical and personal connection is salient. It intertwines with noticing the importance of maintaining the HL and links with the ancestry (Valdés, 2001). This project uses this final definition, characterising HLLs through *lineage*, as it provides a framework within which learner identity, language and lineage are explored as being central to the HL learning process (Carreira, 2004).

### **2.1.2. Heritage languages in mainstream education in the UK:**

Multilingualism is promoted by migratory movements due to political, religious, social, and economic reasons such as seeking better labour (Juan-Garau, 2014; Romaine, 2006). Within the European continent, the free movement of people has contributed to increased linguistic and cultural diversity, as migration also leads to the spread of HL and cultures (Juan-Garau, 2014). However, the first step towards integration is to learn the language of the host country therefore policies have been implemented to teach immigrant communities the local language, often at the expense of the protection of heritage

languages (Juan-Garau, 2014). The UK experiences high rates of linguistic diversity, combined with pronounced English monolingualism (Lanvers, 2017). This situation is clear through the percentage of the UK population for whom English is a second language: 8.9% of the population in the UK speaks a language other than English (CENSUS, 2021).

Discourse led by the media criticising households that do not speak English could lead to negative connotations associated with HL speakers and a need to assimilate within the host country (Blackledge, 2005). In addition, according to Weekly (2020) and Conteh et al. (2013), there is a lack of provisions for heritage languages in mainstream schools. Researchers in the field of sociolinguistics, through the analysis of existing literature, have argued that in England, government policy towards the education provision of bilingual learners has been inconsistent (Blackledge and Creese, 2010; Weekly, 2020). Bilingual strategies are employed at times to support students only until they are proficient in English (Blackledge and Creese, 2010; Weekly, 2020). For example, according to Anderson (2008), language strategy documents merely acknowledge the importance of supporting children's home languages and fail to show how these can become a linguistic resource to promote language learning.

Conteh et al. (2013) analysed case studies of twelve children from five families who all attended HL classes in the UK. The interviews demonstrated that tensions in mainstream schools, concerning the support and maintenance of heritage languages, were due to reduced understanding in the system about bilingual students' backgrounds (Conteh et al., 2013). Teachers lacked the personal experience and theoretical knowledge about language diversity (Conteh et al., 2013). Cummins (2005) summarises these issues in language maintenance in mainstream education arguing that teaching heritage languages is marginalised in the UK due to a lack of funding, resources for provision, the number of languages involved and the number of students who want to participate. In the UK, the Modern Languages curriculum and the compulsory state examination, the General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE), assume that bilingual and monolingual learners have the same neutrality when learning a foreign language, ergo, they do not consider that bilingual learners come to the classroom with previous language learning experiences (Anderson, 2008). The National Languages strategy stated: "Any language may be taught at the discretion of the school taking into account parental preference and teacher ability" (Blackledge and Creese, 2010, p. 45). This provided students from a bilingual background with the opportunity to have their HL introduced to the curriculum. However, the most popular languages taught in the Secondary Curriculum time remained French and Spanish (Conteh et al., 2013). This could be due to the limited resources such

as teachers and material for community languages, however, these can be found within the communities themselves (Lanvers, 2017). According to Conteh et al. (2013), primary schools have not taken advantage of resources within their communities to introduce more heritage languages. Therefore, there has been a general failure to engage properly with the communities to meet bilingual learners' needs and develop appropriate pedagogies.

Schools in Australia have undergone successful changes in language education policies that support HL teaching and learning since the 1980s (Ozolins, 1993). Willoughby (2014) explored how education policies in Victoria affected students' decisions to study their HL in secondary school. The school drastically edited the approach to HL learning over ten years, shifting demographics and curricula to build interest among students. Firstly, these studies demonstrated that sharing resources from diaspora communities where the languages taught were established, improved HL education quality as resources were already tested and established, teachers spent less time creating materials and increased the number of languages taught. (Willoughby, 2014; Clyne et al., 2004). Secondly, to improve the relevance of the course, the school in Victoria emphasized skills that are relevant to immigrant students' daily lives such as interpreting (Willoughby, 2014). Literacy and standard grammar were still covered but had less weight in the curriculum. Thirdly, HL programmes in Australia targeted students who have limited access to the HL at home, and those with good pre-school development but limited further development (Clyne et al., 1997). This is to provide these students with resources to practice and highlight the utility of their HL. Providing separate courses for heritage students allowed languages such as Italian to grow into more widely studied vernaculars (Willoughby, 2014). Finally, when resources were low, the school partnered with complementary schools to maintain the support (Willoughby, 2014). This Australian case study shows how adapting programmes to meet the needs of students and creating more attractive curricula can increase the maintenance of an HL in mainstream schools.

### **2.1.3. Provisions to maintain Italian as a HL:**

The lack of attention to heritage languages in mainstream education means that the responsibility of maintaining the languages falls on the communities themselves (Conteh et al., 2013; Weekly, 2020; Blackledge and Creese, 2010). In recent years, a shift was documented in immigrants' attitudes towards language maintenance: communities view the importance of learning their heritage languages to maintain links with family and cultural identity for fear of cultural and linguistic loss (Weekly, 2020). This linguistic and

political context led members of the minority communities in England to set up provisions, to maintain and promote their HL cultures (Conteh et al., 2013).

One way to maintain a HL amongst younger generations is through after-school provisions. In the literature, these are often referred to as complementary, community, supplementary or HL schools (Conteh et al., 2013). In this thesis, these are used interchangeably. Complementary education provides supplementary teaching and learning to mainstream subject curriculum, as well as opportunities for young members of the community to explore their culture and use their HL (Creese et al., 2006). Schools tend to receive little or no funding from local government but support themselves through parental or community contributions. This means that they have the freedom to develop their curriculum and exams but may also make use of national exams to enter students for higher qualifications (Creese et al., 2006). Schools are created by the community, for the community: they represent voluntary attempts to organise themselves to prioritise their history, languages and cultures which would not be easily available to them in mainstream education (Creese et al., 2006). However, this means that there could be a lack of resources and qualified teachers due to limited funding, moreover, often they are not known outside the communities themselves, which leads to a lack of research carried out in complementary schools for minority communities in England (Conteh et al., 2013).

Research on bilingual families suggested approaches to language maintenance and parental perspectives, creating a complex context for negotiating language policies within the home (Kheirkhah and Cekaite, 2015). When access to complementary schools is limited, families can teach the HL at home using alternative resources. The use of online self-taught classes is also a prominent method used among younger learners and by the participants in this study. The literature suggests a potential impact of decreasing the number of contact hours on oral proficiency development (Henshaw, 2016) however, this can be complemented by the input created by the parents. Caloi and Torregrossa (2021) consider that the notions of consistency and continuity in a child's language experience are crucial in shaping HL acquisition outcomes, suggesting that these elements are just as important as the method of language acquisition. By creating opportunities for the children to learn Italian through formal classes held at home and self-taught online, the family can create a bilingual educational context. These efforts stemming from within the family with an element of education, allow them to acquire and maintain the HL where there are limited external resources from the community.

This study focuses on those HLLs who have learnt or are currently maintaining their HL through an online medium within the context of complementary education. This shift in teaching practices predominantly occurred during COVID-19, and many schools maintained them following the pandemic (Xie et al., 2020). This is due to the advantages online education can bring such as flexibility, as it removes restrictions of time and space, accessibility of resources, and wider catchment area, as the classes are accessible to students across the country (Xie et al., 2020). According to Henshaw (2016), the role of technology in courses can range from a supplementary component to serving as the sole means of instruction in a fully online course. Few research studies have researched the role of technology in HL education. However, Coryell et al. (2010), through a case study of Spanish HLL, have demonstrated that technology allows for faster and individualised feedback. In addition, the online environment appeals to HLL as it allows for a safe space for them to express their feelings of linguistic incompetence and meet individuals with similar multiple identities (Coryell et al., 2010). One of the obstacles in online education is the scarcity of published teaching materials tailored to HL students, which leads to limited resources that meet the needs of HLLs (Henshaw, 2016). A second issue is the increased engagement with the screen and decreased number of contact hours provided by the courses (Henshaw, 2016). This could lead to reduced socialisation with other children in the class, a useful resource to connect the heritage-speaking community (Norton, 2014), and difficulty in maintaining the attention of children during lessons. Regardless of these factors, research comparing traditional and online education has yielded no significant differences in performance, which means that online education can be as effective as traditional methods in terms of language development (Thoms, 2012; Young, 2008; Scida and Saury, 2006).

## **2.2. AN ITALIAN CONTEXT:**

According to Cacciatore and Pepe (2019), the history of Italian migration is significant and cannot be ignored when trying to understand the nature of Italian identity as it highlights the fragmentation within the community due to a language. To provide a context for this thesis, this subsection provides an overview of the timeline of Italian emigration to the United Kingdom as well as current demographics. It also discusses the topic of national identity, weakened by the diglossia found in individual Italian regions, and how this may impact identity formation for young Italian heritage learners.

### **2.2.1. Italy as a divided nation:**

Before the Unification of Italy in 1861, the peninsula was structured through separate nation-states, governmentally independent and linguistically varied. The geographical areas correspond to some of the current Italian regions such as the Venetian kingdom in Veneto. Nevertheless, the population was sceptical and the willingness to unite the country did not emerge from within (Conti, 2012). According to Conti (2012), there is a general feeling of distrust of Italians towards their state, institutions and governments which is still present today and visible through the recent regional independence referendums. These political aspects can contribute to a weak national identity, and stronger feelings of regional belonging which currently characterise the country (Conti, 2012). These political aspects demonstrate that the task of nation-building, which began 150 years ago, is still incomplete (Conti, 2012).

One of the main characteristics of a fragmented nation is the diglossia caused by Italian dialectology which continues to thrive within individual regions. According to Berruto (2005) Italian dialects are not the same as those found in other European countries, as there is a greater structural difference between dialects and standard Italian. Italo-Romance dialects are not variations of Italian but different languages and parallel developments from Latin (Cacciatore and Pepe, 2019; Parry, 2009). One of them, the Florentine dialect, later became the national language due to its role within literature and in the Renaissance (Berruto, 2005) The national education system in Italy was developed following the unification and guaranteed instruction to promote 'Italianness' and the national language (Carretta, 2022). However, the fragmented linguistic scenario has always hindered full interregional understanding, even after the spread of the national language (Cacciatore and Pepe, 2019). This means that there is a lack of mutual intelligibility of dialects between regions. Only in recent years has Italian come to replace the regional dialects as the home's main language. Monoglot dialect speakers are increasingly few in Italy, but there has been a notable increase in bilingualism (Parry, 2009).

The waves of immigrants to the UK coming from northern Italy believe they have little in common with the southern immigrants (Guzzo, 2014; Conti, 2012). Italian immigrants in the UK emphasise that communication can be hindered by a lack of a common language, especially among the older generations (Guzzo, 2014). The history of a divided nation-state, and lack of guaranteed inter-regional comprehension due to a situation of diglossia with standard Italian and regional dialects, all contribute to the existence of strong regional identities which could be reflected in the migrant communities abroad.

### **2.2.2. The Italian community in the UK:**

There are three phases of Italian emigration to the UK: the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the 1970s and the European Common Market brain drain (Cacciatore and Pepe, 2019). The two decades after World War II were significant for Italy's migration to the UK characterised by Italians coming from the meridian regions of Italy looking for work (Guzzo, 2014). From the 1970s there was migration from the northern regions of the peninsula. This mostly consisted of students, learning English (Guzzo, 2014). Italian graduates now represent the bulk of the current phase of Italian migration to the UK: in Italy, the emigration of graduates is often portrayed as a 'brain drain' (Guzzo, 2014), associated with the distrust in Italian institutions to provide opportunities for future generations. In areas where communities were formed by the first wave of immigration, such as London, there is very little interaction between the newer arrivals and the established community (Guzzo, 2014). Guzzo (2014) analysed the speech use of the Italian community in Bedford, to understand how language poses as an identity marker. She concluded that the use of code-mixing between dialect and standard Italian demonstrated a strong regional identity (Guzzo, 2014). Furthermore, those whose ancestors arrived with the first wave of immigrants from the north of Italy claim to have little in common with those who came from the south during the 50s (Guzzo, 2014; Conti, 2012). Conti (2012) concluded that this is due to the fragmentation of the Italian nation into a north-south divide, and a stronger regional identity, reflected among communities built in the UK.

Cacciatore and Pepe (2019) expand on this, stating that Italians living in UK cities can hardly be defined as a community due to the lack of networks and structures for new immigrants to rely upon. Education plays a major role in this context as Italian bilingual schools abroad were the start of creating links within the expatriate community (Carretta, 2022). In 1993, the Italian government cut funds for Italian education abroad, reducing the number of teachers and schools worldwide (Carretta, 2022). Currently, Italian schools abroad are funded mainly by migrants to maintain their linguistic and cultural backgrounds, an initiative driven by families who wanted the new generation to grow in a multilingual environment without losing their heritage (Carretta, 2022 pg. 15). Some examples would be the Dante Alighieri Society, prominent in the Midlands, whose aim is to promote Italian culture and language through events and offering Italian courses (Carretta, 2022). The SIAL school, the only bilingual Italian-English school in the UK, was founded by Italian nationals in London after the community expressed a need for formal HL maintenance (Carretta, 2022). Schools are faced with the dilemma of which variety of Italian to teach. Standard Italian would suggest that, prescribed by the literature, semi-standard Italian

mainly refers to spoken forms and includes phonetic regional variations and regional Italian (Caretta, 2022). Most schools allow the teachers to decide the semi-standard Italian based on their known variant, to expose students to a range of variations, without introducing dialects to avoid demotivation (Santipolo, 2003).

The new purpose of Italian schools set up by the community, for the community, is related to promoting the language and creating connections within cities, to create an awareness of their heritage. Consequently, they play a central role in connecting different generations of Italian immigrants and promoting a common HL. The Italian community living in the UK presents a context where there is little to no support from the Italian state to create and maintain connections with their heritage communities abroad. This lack of recognition for the expatriate community highlights the national fragmentation characterised by a strong regional identity. The Italian regional dialects are emblematic, as the immigrants merely have a common language to form networks. Finally, it mirrors the population's belief which considers the Italian state inadequate to provide a future and support for its younger generation of citizens abroad (Conti, 2012).

### **2.3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF IDENTITY:**

The context of Italian HLLs in the UK presents a unique area of exploration of identity development, particularly concerning the younger generation enrolled in extracurricular provision. To explore this aspect, a theoretical framework for identity must be established. According to Forbes and Rutgers (2021), language in SLA literature is a tool through which an individual can identify with their heritage and is in turn identified by others. Applied linguistics offers a diversity of theoretical and analytical approaches to conceptualise the relationship between language and identity (Baxter, 2016). For example, psychological theories posit that a core identity develops over time, whereas sociocultural approaches believe the individual is shaped by the role of social, historical, and cultural contexts (Forbes and Rutgers, 2021). To conceptualise the link between identity and language, two common approaches are structuralist and post-structuralist. This subsection summarises the theory behind the relationship between language and identity in SLA and describes the difference between structuralists and post-structuralists to establish the epistemological stance of this project. This is followed by a description of Norton Pierce's (1995) identity theory, the theoretical framework applied in this study, as well as its implications for data analysis.

### **2.3.1. Structuralist and Post-structuralist approaches:**

Structuralist ideology stemmed from de Saussure (1974) who believed that language learning is an ongoing process of internalising a set of rules, structures, and vocabulary (Norton, 2014). By emphasising the need for rules and structures for language, this approach assumes that the meaning behind the use of language is fixed (Baxter, 2016; Norton, 2014). Furthermore, identities were often described with binary terms such as motivated or unmotivated, without considering that these factors can change and be socially constructed over time and space (Norton and McKinney, 2011). Such binary structures would not be appropriate to describe bilingual or multilingual individuals, as a binary identity would wrongly suggest that two or more identities could not co-exist within an individual (Norton and McKinney, 2011). These aspects of structuralism led researchers to believe that it provides monolingual and monocultural biases. Blackledge and Pavlenko (2001), in a review of the literature, suggest that this approach supposes linguistically homogeneous communities and that the HL must be abandoned when learning the target language to be recognised and have a role within the target community. This is not appropriate in a contemporary globalised world where an increasing majority of the population is regularly exposed to more than one language, and members of multiple communities (Pavlenko, 2002).

As a result of the criticisms faced by structuralist theory in the 1990s, there was a drive to create a more inclusive and current approach which reflected the needs of a globalised society. This led to the creation of a post-structuralist approach used within the field of SLA (Pavlenko, 2002). Post-structuralist theorists believe that learner personality, perspectives, styles, and motivations are not fixed nor decontextualised (Norton and Toohey, 2011), and consider that language is a place where identity is constructed and performed (Baxter, 2016). It allows researchers to look at the language learner situated in the context of a larger social world and not in binary terms (Norton and Toohey, 2011). Thus, identities are mediated via language (Block, 2006). The learner is seen as a user of multiple linguistic resources and as a member of multiple communities, which avoids monolingual and monocultural biases and makes it suitable for capturing the complexities of HLL identities (Pavlenko, 2002; Blackledge and Pavlenko, 2001). According to Blackledge and Pavlenko (2001) and Norton and Mckinney (2011), with the increase of globalisation and ease of movement across borders, current investigations into the relationship between language and identity need to base themselves within a framework that facilitates the placing of learners in multilingual settings and accounts for the struggles of negotiating their identity amongst different communities. This study, in line with many

recent SLA investigations on identity, adopts a post-structural understanding of identities as dynamic, and context-dependent (Forbes and Rutgers, 2021; Norton and Toohey, 2011). In addition, it considers the individual's experiences (Forbes and Rutgers, 2021; Norton and Toohey, 2011). This is also reflected in the methodologies used to investigate the relationship between language and identity. According to Norton (2010), post-structuralist approaches favour qualitative methodologies such as case studies using interviews to yield rich data on the individual's perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences. This is also to investigate the complex relationship between social structure and language without resorting to reductionist analysis, inevitable through a quantitative investigation (Norton, 2010).

### **2.3.2. Norton Pierce's (1995) theory of identity:**

Norton Pierce is one of the foremost researchers in identity and language learning. She fits into the post-structuralist paradigm and employs this in her work. Norton Pierce (1995) carried out a longitudinal study based in Canada, an established bilingual country, from January to December 1991. In the first part of the study, and as part of the recruitment process, she helped to teach a 6-month English second language (ESL) course to a group of recent immigrants in Ontario, Canada. Following this course, the participants were invited to partake in a project investigating their language-learning experiences while living in Canada (Norton Pierce, 1995). Five women participated, all from different countries of origin and first languages (Norton Pierce, 1995). The research aim was twofold, specifically regarding language learning opportunities and social identity. Firstly, Norton analysed the opportunities for immigrant women to practice English as a second language outside the classroom, and their response (Norton Pierce, 1995). Secondly, the research looked at how an enhanced understanding of natural language learning and social identity inform SLA theory as ESL pedagogy (Norton Pierce, 1995). It is clear from the start of the investigation that Norton Pierce (1995) adopted a post-structuralist approach to the analysis, which is also reflected in the qualitative case study methodology implemented in her work. Participants were asked to keep track of their interactions with anglophone Canadians and to reflect upon their language learning experience in the home, work, and community with written diaries (Norton Pierce, 1995). The narratives gave in-depth information regarding students' resources availability, emotions, associations with heritage and host communities as well as perceived future opportunities associated with learning English. In addition to diary entries, Norton Pierce (1995) employed a pre- and post-study questionnaire as well as individual and focus group interviews and home visits

to further understand the participant's individual experiences and linguistic biographies (Norton Pierce, 1995).

When analysing the data collected, Norton Pierce (1995) highlighted that the results were not in line with the existing theories of identity, grounded on a structuralist approach. The students did not demonstrate a fixed personality but described how language was a tool to negotiate identity within situations of unequal power within society (Norton Pierce, 1995). During that time, there was a lack of theories to explain how different traits would coexist within the individual language student, and how the use of language reflected their identities (Norton, 1995). She therefore claimed that the understanding of the individual in SLA needs to be reconceptualised. Norton Pierce argued that SLA theorists up until this study have "struggled to conceptualise the relationship between language learners and the social world" (Norton Pierce, 1995 pg. 9). She continues to explain that this is due to "a lack of development of a comprehensive theory of social identity which integrates the learner in the learning context" (Norton Pierce, 1995 pg. 9). Previous theorists analysed identity through a structuralist lens, without considering how relations of power in the social world can affect social interaction between L2 learners and target language (TL) speakers, nor that factors are not fixed but can coexist in an individual (Norton Pierce, 1995). According to Block (2007), before the 1990s there was little research exploring identity from a post-structural perspective. Pavlenko (2002) supports the use of a post-structuralist approach as it allows for a more context-sensitive understanding of contemporary multilingual realities in which all language users have at their disposal means for expressing themselves. Finally, Forbes and Rutgers (2021) state that interest in work on identity in the field of SLA has increased exponentially since Norton Pierce's (1995) seminal work. Norton Pierce's research was pivotal and has been considered central in reframing debates on identity and establishing it as a research area (Norton and Toohey, 2011).

Norton Pierce (1995) published these criticisms of identity theories in SLA in the mid-1990s, supported by her study based in Canada. She introduced a new construct of identities through a post-structuralist lens (Norton and McKinney, 2011). This represented learner identity with three characteristics central to SLA: multiple, a site of struggle, and subject to change (Norton and Toohey, 2011). Therefore, her theory highlights diverse positions from which language learners can participate in social life and choose more desirable identities based on the TL community (Norton, 2014). Norton described identity as the way a person understands their relationship with the world, how it is constructed across time and space and how the person understands possibilities for the future (Norton,

2014). Pavlenko (2002) summarises these aspects, claiming that in the process of learning a second language, individuals are creating a distinct identity that has not previously existed. She continues to explain that the L2 resources available to the learners allow them to use language to self-represent and become members of multiple communities such as their HL and host language community (Pavlenko, 2002). This is particularly relevant to this project, as maintaining their HL could allow them to build a stronger identity with their heritage community. Norton Pierce's work also developed to include deeper themes within SLA such as imagined communities and power within societies. These are pertinent to the study as they can impact identity formation when learning a HL.

### **2.3.3. Imagined communities:**

Norton (2014) highlights how identity can be shaped by how a person views their possibilities for the future. This leads to the concept of imagined communities: Anderson (2008) used the term *imagined communities* by emphasising that in a nation, individuals will never know most of their members, yet in their minds each lives the image of their society. Thus, imagining ourselves unified with people we have not yet met, can create a sense of community. This term was considered when Norton created the concept of identity as it assumes a focus on the future. Students can visualise who they might be and the communities they may be part of when they acquire a new language, leading to a feeling of membership and nationhood (Norton and Toohey, 2011). Gao (2012) investigated ethnic Korean imagined cultural identities, through a longitudinal case study of two students, by employing qualitative methodologies including individual interviews, narratives, and observations. The study concluded that imagined communities are crucial to the process of identity formation, cultural identification, and language-cultural practices. Similarly, Djuraeva et al. (2022) used Norton's theory to explore the experiences of speakers of Spanish and English in bilingual programmes, through narratives collected on video recordings. One of the main findings of the study also showed that imagined identities were powerful mechanisms for the identity formation of the students (Djuraeva et al., 2022). The role of imagined communities in Norton Pierce's (1995) identity theory and the findings in the literature are relevant to this research project. Imagined communities suggest that learning an HL could create a stronger identity to their heritage, even if the students are physically removed from it, such as second or third-generation Italians living in the UK.

#### **2.3.4. Identity, power, and resources:**

Norton Pierce's (1995) identity theory has been predominantly employed in the context of research on teacher identity in bilingual education (Hamman-Ortiz and Palmer, 2023). However, existing literature on the effect of bilingual programmes on students' identities and feelings associated with their communities is comparatively sparse, particularly concerning younger learners whose identities are still developing (Hamman-Ortiz and Palmer, 2023). Due to the increased interest in identity and language immersion programmes, there has been some research carried out to confirm that there is a connection between language and identity also among adolescents (Martin, 2012).

Hamman-Ortiz (2020) drew upon Norton's identity theory to conceptualise learner identities as socially constructed. Her study assumed that learner identity is interlinked with the process of acquiring a new language (Hamman-Ortiz, 2020). The study was based in the United States and included a year-long ethnographic case study of second-grade students enrolled in a bilingual program for the Latinx community (Hamman-Ortiz, 2020). Students who did not have Spanish as a HL were also enrolled in the school. The study explored students' perceptions of bilingual identity among HL and non-HLLs: this was achieved through 127 hours of in-class observations, three semi-structured teacher interviews and focus groups with Latinx and non-Latinx students (Hamman-Ortiz, 2020). Overall, the findings showed that HLLs were aware of the existing hierarchical systems that privilege English as the dominant language and the opportunities that English can offer within society (Hamman-Ortiz, 2020). Furthermore, Latinx HLLs identified more strongly with a bilingual identity than non-heritage students and viewed bilingualism as a necessity to access both communities. However, non-Latinx students viewed bilingualism as an elite skill, without engaging in a bilingual identity (Hamman-Ortiz, 2020). Triangulating the data collection by interviewing teachers increased the validity of the study, yet, it would have been interesting to include parents of students to understand whether these perceptions of a bilingual identity are solely impacted by bilingual education, or also by family contexts (Potowski, 2007).

Djuraeva et al. (2022) came to the same conclusions as Hamman-Ortiz (2020) following their research investigating how alumni of immersion programmes perceive their bilingual identities. Participants included six alumni who had entered the school in kindergarten and spent at least seven consecutive years enrolled (Djuraeva, 2022). They wrote a narrative which was structured through answering open-ended questions. (Djuraeva, 2022). It was clear that non-Latinx students did not identify strongly with their bilingualism and regarded

the knowledge of both languages as elite, compared to the Hispanic alumni who perceived it as ordinary. The relationship between identities, language learning and power in the Latinx community in the US was also studied by Potowski (2007). The investigation explored how power relations contributed to the development of their heritage identity (Potowski, 2007). In line with a post-structuralist approach, Potowski employed qualitative methodologies including interviews with students, parents, teachers, and in-class observations. The results showed that the greater use of HL in the classroom also led to a greater feeling of identity with the HL community but contact alone did not guarantee this; it also depended on past experiences. These studies suggest that there may be further factors to consider when collecting data, such as previous language learning experience which, intertwined with bilingual education, may impact student identity formation.

The resources available to engage in linguistic practices help construct our identities: every time a learner interacts with the TL or the community associated with it, they are engaged in constructing and negotiating their identity (Norton, 2014). Therefore, another aspect which was prominent in Norton Pierce's (1995) theory was the impact of personal and linguistic experiences on students' identity. This was researched by Martin (2012). Throughout this study, language was regarded as instrumental in informing identity and the construction of self. Differently from Hamman-Ortiz (2020) and Potowski (2007), Martin's (2012) investigation was based in Berlin with early secondary school children enrolled in an immersion German-English programme, featuring support for students' HL within the curriculum. The approach used was still qualitative but different from other studies, the research employed the use of linguistic portraits (LP) instead of narratives, to tailor the tools to a younger demographic. LPs "involve colouring different languages in a silhouette as a way of representing the embodiment of one's language" (Tabar et al., 2020, pg.23). LPs are commonly applied when research involves children as they can express identities through colour rather than prose (Dressler, 2014). Similarly, results showed that there was a difference in perception of identity between children whose languages were supported and those who were unsupported (Martin, 2012). Furthermore, the students who had been in the programme for a longer amount of time demonstrated a stronger affiliation with a bilingual identity which suggests that bilingual education affects children's identity. Potowski (2007) and Hamman-Ortiz (2020), Martin (2012) found that students were aware of the linguistic hierarchy and power associated with the languages in their repertoire, which also impacted how they displayed their identities. Therefore, Martin (2012) concluded that during classes in bilingual programmes, it is important to show that all languages are seen as a resource to overcome this.

### **2.3.5. Gaps in Existing Literature and Rationale:**

Overall, the literature suggests that Norton Pierce's (1995) theory is a widely utilised framework in investigating identity as it reflects today's globalised society where heritage co-exists within individuals (Block, 2007). These studies suggest that there has been a specific focus in research on the Spanish-speaking community in the United States, creating a gap in the literature for a European context. Additionally, one of the key aspects of identity formation is the understanding of power relations and the role of their languages within society. Studies also confirm that language learning experiences through a bilingual programme can impact emerging identities by increasing closeness to the community and access to heritage language (HL) resources (Norton, 2014). However, further underlying factors, such as parental perceptions of bilingualism, have not been systematically explored which may explain the difference in data yielded between heritage and non-heritage students. For this reason, this research project aims to triangulate data collected from both parents and students to account for parents' views and consider the relationship between parents' views and the expression of learners' language identities.

The literature applies to the HL context considered in this study: they suggest that schools have a positive impact on HL maintenance which in turn supports identity formation (Potowski, 2007). Norton Pierce's (1995) identity construct will be used throughout this investigation as it accounts for individuals with multiple identities and changing over time. The literature also demonstrated that some of the key aspects of a student's identity development are understanding the role of their HL within society, resource availability, association of emotions with previous experiences as well as imagined communities and perceived future opportunities (Potowski, 2007; Hamman-Ortiz, 2020; Martin, 2012; Norton, 2014; Norton and Toohey, 2011; Pavlenko, 2002; Hamman-Ortiz and Palmer, 2023; Gao, 2012). The aims of this project address a gap in the literature, firstly by focusing on younger heritage learners whose identities are still in formation. Secondly, by researching the Italian population in the UK: an understudied demographic that poses a unique context due to the diglossia and strong regional identity in a country geographically positioned in the European Continent. The study is guided by two main research questions. The first analyses the perceptions of bilingualism among adolescent learners and their parents and considers parental perspectives to understand whether these influence children's capital and awareness of bilingualism. The second question seeks to explore the impact of bilingual education on student identities, demonstrated through ways in which students make sense of their own HL learning experiences as explored in interviews with the students.

#### **2.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

1. What are the perceptions of bilingualism amongst Italian heritage students and their parents within a bilingual education context?
2. What impact does bilingual education have on the identities of Italian-heritage students?

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. OVERVIEW:**

This chapter covers the methodological approaches, participant recruitment and data analysis used to carry out the study. The research procedures followed a qualitative design using a multi-case study approach. The participants were all of Italian lineage and students enrolled in bilingual education for at least a year. The first approach to data gathering was through a parent/guardian questionnaire to select participants and understand the student's background and previous language learning experiences. Then, students were asked to complete a questionnaire to self-rate their proficiency, and LPs, which is the primary research tool which can provide visual insight into their association between language and identity. Finally, the student questionnaire and LPs were used as stimuli in semi-structured interviews to gain more in-depth information about students' association with language and identity as well as their perceptions of learning their HL through bilingual education. These were recorded to maintain an accurate account of the responses. The data collection was solely carried out via Qualtrics and Teams, as the school selected was run online. The chapter concludes with ethical considerations and researcher positionality.

### **3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN:**

This research quality uses a qualitative multi-case study approach. It reports language learning experiences to extract themes about identity formation in bilingual education (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003). The research design uses Norton Pierce's (1995) pre-existing identity construct, to expose understudied areas in research, specifically concerning the demographic of the Italian community living in the United Kingdom. According to Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), qualitative research can consider the individual experiences of the participants: this is important to account when reviewing identities as they are diverse and complex due to the different language learning experiences (Norton Pierce, 1995). Students in primary school are in the process of forming their identities, therefore, this study is based on a constructivist philosophical approach to investigate how students interpret their experiences and perspectives, through interacting with the participants.

Participants in this study have similar HL backgrounds: a case study approach was chosen as "analysing a small number of concrete instances of a phenomenon, it is possible to

show complex dimensions of people's language-related social engagements" (Duff, 2019, pg.144). The school selected for this study is run remotely, therefore the methodology was adapted to be carried out solely online using Microsoft Teams and Qualtrics.

The main demographic investigated in this paper are teenagers, therefore it was important to choose instruments which are sensitive to their age range and levels of language used. For example, LPs were chosen to demonstrate their identities rather than narratives, as younger students may not recognise or express in written language their identities. However, this was also triangulated through gathering data from parents and children. Data triangulation provides multiple perspectives on the same topic thus incrementing the nature and amount of data generated for interpretation. Overall, this approach should improve the validity, strength, and interpretative potential of the study (Baralt, 2011).

### **3.3. PARTICIPANTS:**

#### **3.3.1. Recruitment and sampling:**

According to Duff (2019), a multi-case study approach necessitates between two and eight participants to yield useful data and provide a landscape that demonstrates similarities and differences in seemingly identical partakers. In addition, having more than two participants allows more options for sampling (Duff, 2019). Therefore, the participants for this study included four students and their respective parents or guardians. The students ranged in age from ten to sixteen, as teenagers are in the process of forming their identities. It is also assumed that students of this age could discuss and rationalise their responses during interviews with stimuli. Despite extensive recruitment efforts, responses from the school were limited, so, the scope of recruitment was expanded to other learning contexts to reach the number of participants needed to complete the study. Given the qualitative nature of the study, random sampling was not feasible (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003). Therefore, one participant was recruited through the school, and two from connections within an Italian cultural association in the Midlands. Students eligible to take part in the study were of Italian heritage defined by lineage: their family must be composed of at least one parent or grandparent of Italian nationality (Flores and Rosa, 2015). This criterion was selected as they would have existing links with the community both in the host country (UK) and home country (Italy), contributing to their identities. The students must have spent at least one academic year learning Italian, (starting September 2023) as they needed exposure to bilingual education to reflect on their learning

experience. Proficiency in the HL was not considered a factor, as students were currently in the process of learning it as an L2 (Flores and Rosa, 2015).

To recruit participants in the school, emails were sent to the parents of students in years five and six, via the Headteacher. Information sheets for parents/guardians informed them of the research aims and process: consent forms for parents and assent forms for students were embedded in a questionnaire link for parents/guardians. The parents who opted to take part in the study were provided with an initial background questionnaire. This information provided was then used to select the three student participants for the study and to triangulate the data.

### **3.4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH:**

#### **3.4.1. Instruments:**

##### **3.4.1.a. Parent questionnaires:**

The parent/guardian questionnaire focused on collecting attitudes and beliefs regarding bilingual education (Rose et al., 2019). The questionnaire also served to triangulate the data and to collect accurate information about the students' linguistic backgrounds. These could not be provided by the school due to needing parental consent, and the data from this stage was predominantly used for participant selection. It provided insights into the perceptions of bilingual education within the Italian community and the role of regional identity amongst the families of participants. No instrument served the purpose of investigating identity in a linguistically fragmented community: it was designed by the researcher and created using Qualtrics. Questions which investigated regional identity, perceptions of bilingualism, as well as the background information of the family, were designed from scratch and piloted to ensure they would yield accurate results. It consisted primarily of close-ended items followed by some free-response questions inviting respondents to expand on their responses to a previous item. Specifically, eleven Likert Scale items examined links to Italian heritage, language use in the home, perceptions of bilingual education and bilingualism (Appendix 8.2.3). Five response options were provided as they allowed parents to show if there was no change following the start of the child's enrolment at the bilingual school. A further six items were added to ask for further justifications regarding children's identification or perceptions of bilingualism.

#### **3.4.1.b. Student questionnaires:**

Student questionnaires were designed by the researcher due to a lack of existing appropriate questionnaires for the needs of the study. It was based on the themes emerging from Norton's identity construct and focused on self-rated ability and perceptions of bilingualism, as identity is explored through LPs. Furthermore, the questionnaire consisted of 5 Likert scale items, as most of the qualitative information is discovered through interviews. It was used alongside the LPs as a stimulus during interviews to prompt more finite responses from students. The tool was adapted to younger participants using simplified wording.

#### **3.4.1.c. Linguistic portraits:**

Linguistic portraits (LPs) "involve different languages in a silhouette as a way of representing the embodiment of one's language" (Tabaro et al., 2020, pg. 23). This research tool was chosen as it is age-appropriate to the participants: LPs are aimed at a younger demographic in comparison to narratives which are used to analyse identities in adults (Dressler, 2014). Drawings are used in research involving children as they can affect their perceptions and representations of themselves and their environment (Tabaro et al., 2020). Dressler (2014) confirms the efficacy of this tool as colour can be used to connect home and school language and confirm linguistic identities. The silhouette with the hand raised allows a distinction between right and left positioning (Appendix 8.2.1). Students need to have the opportunity to rationalise their choice of colour, language, semiotics, and positioning (Dressler, 2014) therefore explanations about the language portrait were carried out during semi-structured interviews. The participants completed the LPs on paper, while on a call with the researcher to allow them to ask questions, and then an image was sent to the researcher for analysis.

#### **3.4.1.d. Semi-structured interviews:**

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as they are used in tandem with document analysis methods to develop an in-depth understanding of phenomena through triangulations (Talmy, 2010). The LPs and student questionnaires were used as stimulus material to allow learners to provide an overview of their language identity formation and probe individual experiences. The interview plan was divided into six sections: LPs, language background, community, self-rated ability, and perceptions of bilingualism

(Appendix 8.2.2). Due to the strong presence of regional languages in Italy, a section which investigated regional identity was added to the interviews. The researcher crafted an interview protocol containing broad questions (Heigham et al., 2009), as semi-structured interviews allowed opportunities to react to unanticipated topics through flexible questions (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003). These were carried out online through Teams and recorded to have an accurate account of the conversation.

#### **3.4.1.e. Piloting:**

The study was piloted with one family who fit the inclusion criteria but did not attend the comprehensive school. The purpose of the pilot was to gain feedback regarding clarity, layout, timing, and the use of technology which is used during data collection. The student was within the same age range as the participants. A full run-through of the study was carried out: the family completed the parent/guardian questionnaire, and then a date was scheduled via Teams to test the technology. The student completed the questionnaire, LPs, and answered some of the interview questions. This was not recorded, however, the family provided feedback and suggestions for improvement, which were considered. Piloting the study resulted in gaining accurate timings for the data collection process (approximately one hour). Furthermore, the wording of some questions for the student interview was clarified. Finally, the students found it useful to see an example of a completed LP, instead of receiving verbal instructions at the start of the task.

### **3.5. DATA COLLECTION:**

The data collection took place over two days, in three stages. English was established as the main language of communication. Participants were allowed to code-switch or use Italian if they felt necessary. Italian was also used by the researcher when requested by the participant for clarification of instructions.

#### **3.5.1. Consent forms and parent/guardian questionnaire:**

Online consent and information forms were sent to parents: those who agreed to participate in the study continued with the online background questionnaire on Qualtrics. This took approximately 10 minutes to complete, and all questions were voluntary to abide by ethical considerations. From the background information provided by the families, three students were selected according to the pre-established criteria.

### **3.5.2. Questionnaire and linguistic portraits:**

These sessions combined lasted approximately 30 minutes per student. Students were asked to join a Teams call online after their lesson, to reduce the impact of the research on students' learning time. The researcher was present on the call throughout the completion of activities which means that participants were allowed to ask questions or clarifications. At the start of the call, the process was briefly explained to the students in simple terms, it was highlighted that all questions were voluntary, and they were allowed to take breaks. Both the questionnaires and LPs were sent to the families before the call and printed. Firstly, students were asked to complete the questionnaire (Appendix 8.2.3). Secondly, students were introduced to the LPs and shown an example, they were consequently asked to complete their version. Participants created a key of the colours and languages depicted for ease of analysis and recall. Parents were then asked to send the researcher a coloured photo or scan of both data collection tools, via email.

### **3.5.3. Semi-structured interviews:**

The semi-structured interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes per student and were conducted individually. The data was collected after lessons, to reduce the impact on students' learning. During the interviews, participants were recorded to gain an accurate account of the conversation: they were also informed when the recording started and ended. Before conducting the interviews, the researcher reviewed the previously planned questions, considering results provided by the other research tools, to include potential probing questions to elicit information and clarification as well as to provide further opportunities for participants' reflection (Rose et al., 2019). Throughout the interviews, the LPs and questionnaires were used as stimuli to prompt insightful responses from the participants. Once this stage of data collection was concluded, recordings were downloaded, transcribed, and deleted.

## **3.6. DATA ANALYSIS:**

The data gathered through the questionnaire was summarised through Qualtrics. It was not analysed quantitatively but solely to select participants to understand their background and previous language learning experiences which could impact their identities. The information was matched against the selection criteria and participants were chosen based on their responses.

The student questionnaire was transcribed into Excel and analysed alongside the LPs to notice patterns in perceived language identity. LPs are a visual representation of linguistic experiences and resources; therefore, they were analysed through visual analysis. This visual mode considers (a), the colour selected to represent the language, (b) the positioning and proportion of space occupied and (c) semiotics (Busch, 2012). According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020), visual expression can be affected by different uses of colour or compositional structure, a specific colour could relate to emotion allowing understanding of their association with the language. If any symbols were used in the image, semiotic analysis was applied as it can add additional insight into pupils' associations (de Saussure, 1974). As a multimodal method, it offers two sets of data that allow for inference about students' linguistic repertoire: visual and narrative (Busch, 2012). Therefore, the picture then served as a means of eliciting explanations regarding attitudes and resources, acting as a point of reference during the semi-structured interviews. Participants had the opportunity to rationalise and reflect on their choices, providing future insight into their identities (Busch, 2012).

### **3.6.1. Coding:**

Once the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed automatically using the software embedded in Teams, and then corrected using the audio to ensure accuracy. Any other language used by the participant during the interviews was not translated during transcription as the use of code-switching can demonstrate how students rely on their HL to communicate with another member of the community. At the start of the interview, the researcher spoke to students to ease them into the conversation as they could have been experiencing nervousness or anxiety (Baralt, 2011). For this reason, the warm-up time was excluded from the transcripts and the coding process (Baralt, 2011). The study adopted thematic analysis due to its flexibility when examining data from different interviewees and cross-comparing between case studies (Duff, 2019). The codes utilised were largely based on Norton's identity theory and drawn from the literature analysed in Chapter 2. These were concerned with imagined communities, recognition of HL's role in society, emotions connected to language and learning experiences, resources, and opportunities to strengthen and develop such as contact with the community and language outside of school. Next, the codes under each theme were reviewed to determine any readjustments. As part of inductive coding, this coding framework was applied to the data set, however, another layer of deductive coding was applied to allow new codes to emerge from the data (Elliott, 2018). Five new codes emerged from the data: family influence, the

Italian community in the UK, proficiency, regional identification, role of school, capital, and diglossia awareness. A code log was created, and analysis was carried out through NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, (Appendix 8.3) to produce more streamlined and visual data.

### **3.6.2. Inter-rating:**

Inter-rating is a core process in qualitative research to evaluate the research tools (Chaturvedi and Shweta, 2015), therefore it was applied in this study to ensure the reliability of the data analysis. An inter-rater was recruited for the coding process: the interviews were assigned a number from one to three and a number generator was used to randomly select a transcript. A further 10% of that case study transcript was also randomly chosen which is approximately the equivalent of a paragraph. The 10% only included participant speech and interviewer questions were not originally coded. The inter-rater was provided with a clear copy of the transcript, the list of codes and their definition to simulate the original process on NVivo, to ensure consistency in research analysis tools. The percentage of absolute agreement was selected as a calculation which analyses how often raters agree on the exact rating (Chaturvedi and Shweta, 2015). According to the literature it is easier to calculate a percentage when the number of raters and rating level is reduced such as the ones in this interview. The following formula was applied:

$$\% \text{ agreement} = \frac{\text{number of concordant responses}}{\text{total number of responses}} \times 100$$

The outcome can range between 0% and 100%: an absolute level of agreement closer to 75% is acceptable, however the exact and adjacent agreement should be closer to 90% (Lacke et al., 2022). Following calculations, a 90% level of agreement was reached which confirms the inter-rater reliability, therefore the codes and data from the interview could be used in the study.

### **3.7. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS:**

The ethics of this study were taken under careful consideration during planning and execution. The research and data collection were conducted according to the ethical guidelines for education research provided by the British Educational Research Association. The University of Oxford's Central Ethics Committee approved a CUREC

form (Appendix 8.1). This form detailed the ethical risks, mitigation plans and detailed procedure of the collection.

To carry out data collection with children under eighteen, ethical considerations had to be accounted for. Firstly, obtaining a Disclosure and Barring Service check was essential to working with children and carrying out one-on-one interviews. This was sent to the Headteacher of the school, before starting the research process. Secondly, to include the interviews, LPs, and questionnaire data in the thesis, parents and pupils had to provide their consent. Parents were informed of the study via the school Headteacher: this was to ensure the researcher did not collect their personal contact information. They also received an 'Information sheet' in PDF format and an online consent form, which was mandatory to complete before starting the parental questionnaire. The parent consent form was written neutrally, to avoid exposing them to pressure to participate. Students were also provided with language-adapted information and a consent form, which the parents scanned and emailed to the researcher before data collection started. The information provided in the consent form followed the template and included necessary information for research participants such as the aims of the study and the consequences of the research. It was also highlighted that participation was voluntary and they had the right to withdraw at any time by contacting the researcher or supervisor. Participants could contact the researcher for clarification or concerns. The consent and data received from participants and their parents were given freely and explicitly in written form.

According to the chronological order of the interview, participants were assigned a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. The recordings and transcripts were saved with the pseudonym on OneDrive. Their demographic information gained from the parental questionnaire was kept on an Excel file and saved on the secured OneDrive with pseudonyms as their solo identifier. The software was integrated into Microsoft Teams followed by a revision to ensure accuracy.

### **3.8. CRITERIA FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH:**

When carrying out a qualitative inquiry, the research must demonstrate that the study is valid and credible: Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlight that credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are the criteria to demonstrate trustworthiness. These are reflected in the constructivist approach, which is also employed in this study (Hannes, 2011).

Credibility evaluates whether the data is in line with the views of the participants in the study (Hannes, 2011). Quotes can be used to increase this, to show agreement with the views of the participants. Therefore, part of the data representation and analysis uses verbatim quotes from student interviews and parent questionnaires. Confirmability evaluates the extent to which findings are confirmed through grounding the data analysis (Hannes, 2011, p. 4), by demonstrating self-awareness of the impact of the researcher's positionality on research. This is achieved in this study by providing information on the researcher's background and perspective which is covered in section 3.8.1 below (Hannes, 2011).

Transferability assesses whether the research findings are transferable to other specific settings (Hannes, 2011). Thick and rich descriptions of settings, participants and themes within the study are a procedure to establish transferability as it allows readers to make decisions about the applicability of the findings to similar contexts (Creswell and Miller, 2000). This study uses a multi-case study approach which already provides in-depth contextual background and demographics of the participants (Hannes, 2011). Furthermore, the school, classes, data collection procedure and rationale for employing the research tools are discussed in the methodology. These descriptions should facilitate the transferability judgement to apply this study to other contexts.

Dependability evaluates whether the research is logical and documented, particularly concerning the approaches and methods used to carry out the study (Hannes, 2011 pg. 4). Triangulation was employed in this study to increase the validity of the findings produced (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This is a practice of substantiating evidence via multiple methods. In this study, triangulation refers to the inclusion of parents' and children's views. It also includes the set of data collection which combined questionnaires, LPs, and semi-structured interviews. Students could express themselves multimodally: the combination of data from different sources and tools, should improve the validity and ensure the quality of this research project since multiple forms of evidence are investigated rather than a single data point (Creswell and Miller, 2000, pg. 127). Finally, the conduct of the study was reviewed by an outside editor, the thesis supervisor, and Oxford's Central Ethics Committee.

### **3.8.1. Researcher positionality:**

It is reasonable to expect the researcher's positionality to affect the research process. As the researcher, I acknowledge my standpoint as an Italian citizen of the second generation living in the UK. My heritage locality is Veneto, Italy, which has a strong regional identity, being the Italian region to hold a referendum for autonomy in 2017. This is linguistically characterised by diglossia between the Venetian dialect and standard Italian, both of which are regularly used at home. My parents are bilingual Italian-Venetian, and my grandparents are L1 Venetian. As a family, we struggled to connect with the Italian community in the UK and Italian was solely maintained through use at home. This lack of opportunities led me to research the Italian community and how language maintenance can be supported. Students may find speaking to an adult involved with the community intimidating. Therefore, I gave participants some time at the start of the interview to ask any questions. This reduced anxiety and I could highlight that their information is anonymised. Participants at times assumed that I had had similar language learning experiences to them, and they would not relay as much information during interviews, so I asked more follow-up questions. However, my member resources proved to be useful tools as participants could code-switch between Italian and English to aid their explanations and provide richer responses.

## **CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDY OVERVIEWS**

### **4.1. OVERVIEW:**

This chapter is divided into three sections, detailing the findings concerning each participant, following the multi-case study approach. It provides an overview of the participants' data: all participant names have been pseudonymised and these are used throughout to ensure anonymity. It considers responses to questionnaires, LPs, and learners' responses to the interviews. Each section covers the educational background, lineage connection with HL, linguistic background, perceptions of bilingualism of parents and children, as well as their LP descriptions to provide a rich and full picture of student's case studies. Subsequently, Chapter 5, draws out themes from the case study data, to respond to the research questions.

### **4.2. CASE STUDIES:**

#### **4.2.1. Pria:**

The first participant is female, aged eleven and she has only lived in the UK, apart from visiting Italy twice a year, every year. Her father is English, therefore, her lineage connection with Italian heritage is from her mother, making her half-Italian (Table 1). The parents specified that her maternal grandparents are still living in the region of Emilia Romagna, in central Italy (Table 1). From a linguistic perspective, her Italian family members are all bilingual. As indicated on the parent/guardian questionnaire, her mother speaks the Romagnolo dialect as an additional language to Italian, however, both grandparents consider Romagnolo their L1 and Italian their L2. For this reason, the dialect has a role in home language politics: the languages spoken at home are Italian, English, and the occasional expression of the Romagnolo dialect however Pria tends to respond in English (Table 1). Finally, Pria's mother states that she relates very strongly to a regional identity, and strongly to an Italian identity, which could also explain the reason for the use of dialect in the home, even if only minimally.

Pria is currently in her third year of attending an Italian complementary school, which she initially started in person. During an informal conversation, the headteacher of the school explained that before its shift to online, the school was central to creating links within the local community by organising events to promote the Italian culture, allowing opportunities

for families of the students as well as non-heritage members to participate. Following COVID, their presence shifted solely online, which means that they could no longer plan events for the Italian community as they did before. Pria expressed her views on this in her interview: being online, she struggles to connect with other students, even if she enjoys the classes. Students attending the school are prepared to take UK mainstream exams such as GCSE and A-level Italian.

In the parental questionnaire, parents expressed their beliefs about going to an Italian school, stating that:

“increased proficiency in Italian has given my child the confidence to take part in activities in Italy such as attending a local primary school in my hometown.”

This is mirrored in the student questionnaire which investigated the participant’s self-rated proficiency and confidence in using Italian. Pria believed her use of Italian was “*good*” and her understanding was “*excellent*” with her confidence somewhere in the middle, rated a 4.5 out of 5 (Table 2). Furthermore, through the parent/guardian questionnaire, the mother was asked why she enrolled Pria in the school. She believes formal education in the HL allows her child “to see other families out there in the UK that have similar backgrounds”. These responses from the whole family suggest a positive response towards heritage language (HL) education (Carreira, 2004; Reyes and Vallone, 2007). Similarly, positive responses were provided when faced with the question regarding their perceptions of bilingualism, highlighting that they deem it as *important* as it

“helps with brain development, cultivating family relationships, creat[ing] a sense of belonging and offer[ing] better opportunities in life”.

These answers highlight that the family retains HL learning as a central part of the child’s education and upbringing. They cite reasons for encouraging HL learning which affect the child internally or psychologically such as brain development, as well as externally, mentioning financial, social and familial benefits. These suggest an introduction to the construct of capital. Darwin and Norton (2015) describe capital as the understanding that the learner acquires a wider range of symbols and material. This is central to the identity construct: Norton views language learning as a form of capital and highlights that those identities possess varying levels of this concept (Darvin and Norton, 2015), such as those described by the parents in the questionnaire.

“My grandparents are in Italy and even if my grandad can only speak a little bit of Italian, I think it is important I can speak to them”.

The quote, and her response to the questionnaire, suggest that Pria is aware of the social capital of learning the HL, as she also relates to the familial and social benefits of speaking it. Due to the connection with capital, this suggests she may relate to an Italian identity (Hamman-Ortiz, 2020). Furthermore, she demonstrates awareness of the difference between the language that is taught in school, and the one her grandparents use. However, she still notices the utility of learning Italian as the standard to maintain a connection with her family. Finally, Pria's responses mirror her family's views, which suggests that parental views of bilingualism and HL learning can impact a student's perceptions.

#### 4.2.2. Pria's linguistic portrait:

Pria's linguistic portrait (LP) showed the complex relationship between her dual nationalities and linguistic repertoires. Pria explained she did not represent dialect in her portrait due to a lack of proficiency : elements of the drawing suggest that English is her dominant language for communication and academia, which are expressed through colour, positioning and the personal interpretations of the drawing provided in her interviews. To represent English she chose black, blue, and purple. Italian was coded in light blue, red, pink and green. When asked about the colour choice she described:

“black is my favourite colour and I also like blues and purple...I am not so keen on the green, but I added it as it's part of the flag”.

The use of her favourite colour to represent English versus a practical choice for Italian, suggests an emotional connection with the former (Martin, 2012). The figure is split equally among the many colours as Pria states that she feels “*half and half but...patches here and there*”.

The word “*patches*” could suggest the difficulty she faces in separating and distinguishing



Figure 1: Pria's Linguistic Portrait

her dual identity. It also highlights how her affiliation with English or Italian identity takes on different roles, possibly based on usage, and can change through space (Darvin and Norton, 2015).

The right arm, coded with her favourite colour, black, suggests ease in expressing herself in English as *“my right hand is better for drawing and writing”*. The head of the silhouette is again divided between English and Italian: there is a particular emphasis at the top where she draws the brain divided into two sections, the biggest one labelled “English” and another “Italian”. During the interview, she was asked to provide a reason for this choice of representation:

“When I think, I think in English because I do most of my thinking at school for like learning, because I am not in Italy much, I usually think in English”.

She acknowledges the limited resources to learn Italian and suggests that English is the dominant academic language as well as the most regularly used. This is significant to the construct of identity as Norton (2014) believes that resources available for social practices relate to the way identities are constructed. Therefore, the lack of resources in Italian could suggest more opportunities to identify with English.

The proportions of spaces coloured within the silhouette are equally divided between Italian and English, for example, the left and right legs are regarded as Italian, which implies equal consideration of the two identities (Tabaro et al., 2020). She did not include a heart in her drawing however during the interview she described :

“If I did the heart, it would be 3,000 different colours as I feel Italian and English at the same time”.

Pria indicates that there may be different ways to express a dual identity. Practically, she can describe that she is half English and Italian due to her parent’s provenances, which is clear from the spaces being divided equally. With this quote, she also suggests that identity can be expressed emotionally, with the idea that she cannot rationalise her identity as it is in a constant state of change. Norton Pierce (1995) described identities as changing and a site of struggle. The struggle is contingent on a dynamic negotiation of power as a language that may be valued in one place may be radically devalued in another (Darvin and Norton, 2015). For example, Italian is valued in Italy but loses this power when it becomes a HL in the UK, where English dominates and is considered a global lingua franca. Therefore, learners position themselves or are positioned by others differently,

governed by biases and assumptions of the larger sociocultural contexts (Darvin and Norton, 2015). For this reason, Pria highlights the struggle in choosing and representing her identities as they co-exist and may change in time and place (Darvin and Norton, 2015).

This drawing could be interpreted as a depiction of the site of struggle that Pria faces when choosing between her Italian and English. Furthermore, it is possible to assume that both her languages and cultures co-exist within her construct of identity equally, mirroring her bilingualism (Norton, 2014). However, English is the dominant language of communication and academia, possibly due to increased language exposure as she has always lived in the United Kingdom.

#### **4.2.3. Luisa and Eloise:**

The next case studies were based within the same family as both sisters were willing to participate, therefore they shared a parental questionnaire response. They are both attending secondary school and their ages are between 14-16; Louisa is the eldest of the two. Their mother is English, and their father is from the southern region of Campania. In the parental questionnaire, the father specified provenance from the city of Naples and all members of the paternal side of the family still live in Naples. Campania is one of the regions in Italy with a stronger regional identity, therefore it is surprising that the father displays very strong both national and regional identities. This is mirrored in his linguistic abilities: when he was asked to state his linguistic repertoire, the father stated that he is bilingual Neapolitan-Italian and both grandparents had L1 Neapolitan. However, during the interviews, Luisa states that Neapolitan is not often used: even with high linguistic proficiencies in the Neapolitan dialect, the main languages included in the family policy are English and Italian, this could be because the children do not understand it. Luisa states:

“...if he was to say something to me in Italian, I can understand it but I won't reply in Italian”.

This highlights a situation of diglossia within the family as English and Italian are used daily, even if the children rarely respond in Italian.

Both students spent one year learning Italian through their parents and online platforms, without formal bilingual education, possibly due to the lack of provision of complementary schools in the area. In the interviews, Luisa describes the linguistic situation at home:

“I know when I was younger (my dad) used to speak to me in Italian a lot”

and Eloise confirms this:

“I think he ... spoke a lot of Italian to my sister when she was younger ... I was more around my mum”.

These data from the interview suggest that the father had more time available to dedicate to speaking and teaching Italian when Luisa was younger therefore, Luisa had more linguistic input at home.

The parents completed the questionnaire and discussed the answers together. Overall, they demonstrated a positive perception towards bilingualism and HL instruction. They want their children to learn Italian to communicate with family, and they deem bilingualism as “important” as it has “the potential to open up opportunities, and “broaden their knowledge of different cultures”. These perceptions are like Pria’s parents, who also believed in the social and cultural capital of learning and second language.

These sentiments are only reflected by one of the daughters’ responses to the student questionnaire. Eloise rated 5 for the importance of bilingualism in communicating with family and 5 for the importance of maintaining Italian, linking it with a feeling of shame for not being able to use it (Table 2). Contrastingly, Luisa rated the importance of Italian maintenance a 4 out of 5 and rationalised this further:

“I think it is important...but if I had to know English or Italian... English is the more important one cause it’s the global language”.

She rated the importance of bilingualism a 3, stating that “bilingualism can get you further places”, which is mirrored by her parents’ views on the utility of learning a second language. However, she then continues to explain:

“...nowadays if you know English, there is Google Translate everywhere and if you know English it’ll get you fairly far”.

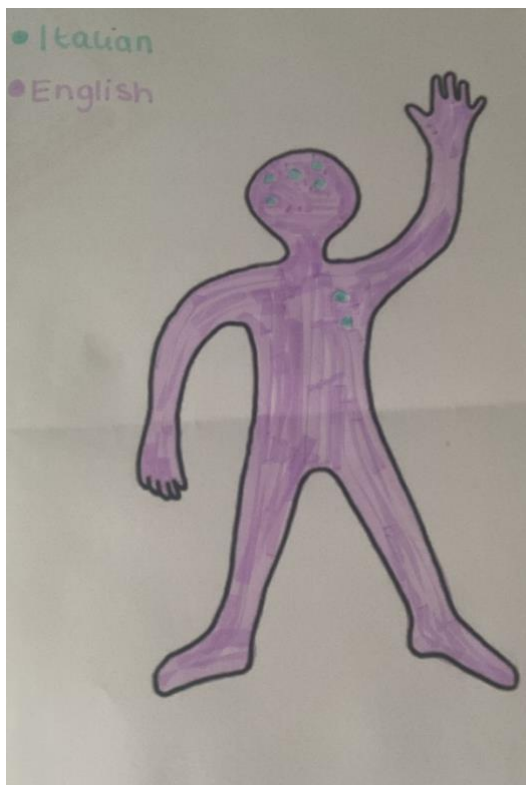
There is a clear divergence between the siblings’ views of their HL, which suggests that parental perspectives are not the only aspect which can impact students’ understanding of bilingualism. It would be interesting to see whether these sentiments are also reflected in their identifications with the heritage culture, explored in the next section.

#### 4.2.4. Luisa's Linguistic Portrait:

Luisa often refers to her Neapolitan heritage in her interview and recognises that she has traits in behaviour and speech, specifically regarding her accent:

“Some of my behaviours and when I talk, they are very Neapolitan...”.

However, she does not include this regional heritage in her LP but only depicts Italian and English as her main linguistic repertoires, which could be due to the lack of familiarity with



the dialect, as she clearly states about her father's language use:

“...when he speaks Neapolitan like obviously, I don't speak that...”

Luisa completed the LP using two colours, purple to depict English and turquoise for Italian. However, this colour choice was based on the two-coloured highlighters she had available and had no specific emotional or cognitive association with the languages portrayed. She represented the repertoires based on identity and proficiency. If the LP is analysed based on how the space and proportion of the silhouette are covered per language (Muller, 2022), it is clear that English

is her dominant language and therefore the colour purple occupies most of the silhouette.

Figure 2: Luisa's Linguistic Portrait

This is confirmed in the interview:

“Both are very important to me, but it's English that I know because it is where I live, it's what we speak at home... the dominant language”.

The turquoise circles represent Italian in the brain area of the portrait and show her low self-efficacy in Italian language knowledge and proficiency. This mirrors her self-rated ability and proficiency score in the student questionnaire where she graded herself a 1 for confidence, 2 for use and 3 for understanding (Table 2). The distance between the placement of the dots is then explained in the interview:

“I know ... random words...I could not necessarily form sentences that you would need to use every day ...”.

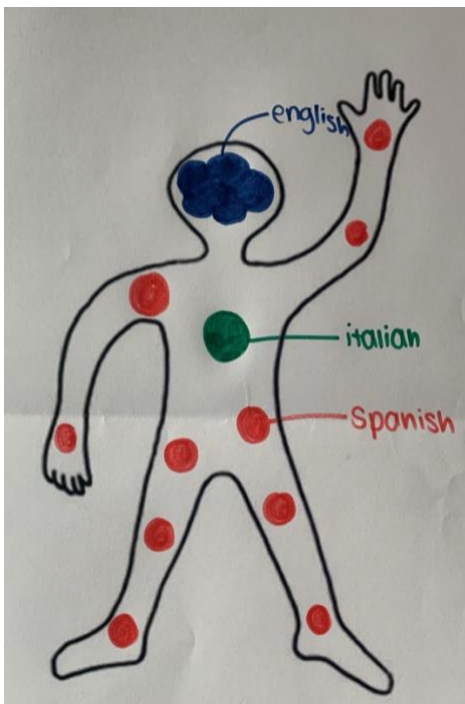
Luisa describes her language knowledge as unorganised and the low confidence in use could be a reason behind the reduced, but present, amount of blue in the portrait. Italian is present around the heart represented by two single turquoise dots spaced apart. In the interview, she was asked to explain the position of Italian in this area:

“...I guess I am half Italian so I thought I might as well whack it in there.”  
“...It won't be just English because apparently, I've got some Italian in me...”.

There is a dissonance between how connected she feels with her Italian heritage and the information provided by her family. The word ‘apparently’, it could be assumed that she added the Italian because she acknowledges the facts of having dual nationality and some knowledge of the Italian language, even though she does not identify strongly with this part of her heritage.

#### 4.2.5. Eloise's Linguistic Portrait:

Eloise represented her languages based on proficiency rather than sentiment of identification. For this reason, she included all her linguistic repertoires: English, Italian and Spanish which she is currently learning at mainstream school. Yet, the positioning and colours used to represent each language are significant in analysing her identity



construct (Muller, 2022). Eloise used red to represent Spanish and green for Italian. During the interview, she was asked about the thought processes behind these choices:

“Spanish it's just red cause it's red on the flag and in Italian I didn't want to do red again, so I did green cause that is the other colour on the flag”.

This reasoning contrasts with her option of blue to symbolise English as she “likes the colour navy”. It appears from these explanations the choice for Italian and Spanish was rational and practical suggesting an emotional connection with English. Nevertheless, the positioning of her dual nationalities

Figure 3: Eloise's Linguistic Portrait

was represented in significant areas of the silhouette.

“... in your brain, I think in English, and I am English...based... I am a quarter English and a quarter Welsh and...Italian is the main thing... it will always be in my heart”.

The area of the mind covered in blue suggests a cognitive association with English, such as the use of the language for thought processes and communication with English (Martin, 2012). Next, Italian is placed in the location of the heart, which could signify a stronger emotional link with the language (Martin, 2012). Within the silhouette, Spanish is represented in numerous dots which proportionally take up more space than Italian and English.

“I feel like (Spanish) .... I know a lot of words ...but it’s not ... in a particular order... I couldn’t speak to it fluently I just know a lot of bits...it’s not organised ...”.

Eloise has no lineage connections with Spanish therefore, the positioning of Spanish is less related to the heritage identity with the language but to proficiency and language knowledge. She continues to explain that her knowledge of Italian and English is more organised, in the latter as she regards herself as “*fluent*” and in the former, her knowledge is “*related to each other*” even if she believes she “*does not know a lot*”.

“If I were to do it how Italian I feel I would have done ...half the body ... I would have done that half Italian \*points and the left side \* and ... done ... a little bit of English and then just mixed”.

Eloise emphasises that her languages and identities can be represented in different ways based on her perception of subject knowledge, emotions, use and lineage. Regardless of her limited knowledge of the Italian language, she still considers and represents it as equal to English.

### **4.3. SUMMARY:**

The case studies were based on three participants. Pria, aged eleven, has Italian lineage to the region of Emilia Romagna, and Italian-dialect diglossia is present in the home. She attends a complementary school online and places high importance on knowing her HL and bilingualism. Mirroring Norton’s identity theory, Pria’s LP demonstrated that her identities are a site of struggle as they co-exist, and change based on time and space. Luisa and Eloise are sisters, and their Italian lineage is from Naples in Campania, characterised by a strong regional identity. Luisa’s LP suggests that she has a weak Italian

identity and there is a dissonance between her weak feelings of connection to an Italian heritage and the information provided by the family. Eloise showed a low perceived confidence and self-rated proficiency; however, she demonstrated an emotional connection to Italian due to the placement of the language on the silhouette. None of the participants represented their dialect in the silhouette nevertheless they exhibited awareness of diglossia by highlighting the lack of mutual intelligibility between Italian and dialects.

## **CHAPTER 5: EXTRACTING AND ANALYSING THEMES**

### **5.1. OVERVIEW:**

The present study investigates the perceptions of bilingualism of children and parents in the Italian community in the UK and examines the impact of bilingual education on HLL identities considering Norton Pierce's identity theory (1995). The methodological approach adopted is a series of qualitative case studies, using LPs, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews to consider participant experiences. The history of a divided nation-state and lack of mutual intelligibility due to a situation of diglossia with standard Italian and regional dialects contribute to the fragmentation of the Italian community in the UK. Therefore, HL education could have a central role in connecting the community and contribute to an Italian identity for a new generation of immigrants. This chapter expands on the findings. Firstly, it discusses research question one, establishing the perceptions of bilingualism, secondly, it accounts for the role of HL bilingual education on student identity. The relevance of the data gathered in the study is related to other research and theories in the field of SLA and HL learning.

### **5.2. RQ1: What are the perceptions of bilingualism amongst Italian heritage students and their parents within a bilingual education context?**

Capital is the extent to which an individual recognises the value of the linguistic or cultural benefits of the language (Darvin and Norton, 2015). According to Norton (2013), individuals learn an L2 as they know they can acquire symbolic and material resources which increase their capital. This theory is central to answering the first research question as students recognised the linguistic hierarchy between English and Italian, and recognised the capital associated with knowledge of their HL. Parental perspective is important as studies have shown that identity and perceptions of the HL are developed by the expectations set in the home (Potowski, 2007). Therefore, student interviews and parental questionnaires are considered in this section to gain a comprehensive view of the perceptions of bilingualism amongst HLLs. Overall, the parents associated bilingualism with increased future opportunities and connections with family. This section analyses three emerging themes, building on the case studies presented in Chapter 4. Social capital suggests a link between the use of HL and connections with family. Linguistic capital demonstrated positive perceptions by supporting interdisciplinary knowledge and establishing their bilingual identity in an English-dominant environment. Finally, the

chapter discusses awareness of the linguistic hierarchy that privileges dominant languages.

### 5.2.1. Social capital:

Throughout the interviews, all students mentioned the link between family and their HL learning; the former seemed to play a role in forming their perceptions of bilingualism. Pria highlighted the connection she formed between the Italian language and her relationship with her mother. Similarly, Eloise discussed how bilingualism and knowledge of her HL could support her relationship with her dad and her family:

“(when I think of Italian) I think of family definitely... my mum especially” - Pria

“I should be able to speak to my family... to help my dad a bit maybe and just to... understand a bit more...”

“I wish I knew how to speak to her (my grandma) because then I would be able to answer her questions”. - Eloise

These sentiments are also reflected in the parental questionnaire. The shared reason for students' enrolment in bilingual education was the *“need for the child to communicate with their family and cultivate family relationships through heritage language knowledge”*. Tyrrell et al. (2014) suggest that, when considering participant views, the role of the home becomes central, as it is a site where students initially form their HL learning experience, especially when all other environments to which the child is exposed are English-dominant. Therefore, the students' reactions can reflect the family's perception of bilingualism.

The students indicated that bilingualism could be the end goal for their HL maintenance and the importance of a second language to maintain a connection with their Italian family. In turn, this could be interpreted as a positive perception of bilingualism, as students recognise the value of a second language. Differently, Luisa did not bring importance to her family relationships as she could still communicate with them through translation software.

“...If we didn't understand anything then we would just Google Translate...”  
“... one way or another we end up communicating whether that is with Google translate or...some of them know quite good English...”. - Luisa

Luisa created a relationship with her Italian-speaking family without the need to speak her heritage language (HL), suggesting she is indifferent to the use of bilingualism for cultivating relationships. Nevertheless, she places importance on speaking a second language for improved prospects as bilingualism “can you get further places”. Even though this statement may not be directly related to bilingualism with Italian, it suggests that she perceives the financial and work-related benefits of speaking more than one language. Bearnse and de Jong (2008) investigated secondary students’ perceptions of their participation in a Spanish-English two-way immersion programme. They found that HLL learners viewed bilingualism as important to maintain roots with family, whereas the Anglophone students viewed bilingualism solely for better job opportunities (Bearnse and de Jong, 2008). Therefore, this quote can also offer insight into this participant’s identity. Her response could also be due to influence by family as her parents stated they believed bilingualism was significant for an improved career. Regardless of the family influence, this quote suggests that there is a positive association between bilingualism and knowledge of the HL is seen as cultural capital.

### **5.2.2. Linguistic capital:**

Linguists argue that choice of language can have social significance (Wei, 2005). In this study, two participants comment on the use of their HL in an English-dominant setting, to communicate without others comprehending. Pria describes an interaction with an Italian friend during mainstream school, to aid them in a difficult situation.

“ I definitely speak Italian at school so then people don’t know what we are talking about... he was being really mean and then (my friend) was like \*mimics friend\* in Italian ...” – Pria

“...(we use Italian) probably when we were gossiping about someone...” - Luisa

Bilinguals can make rational choices of language according to the way they perceive a certain situation (Wei, 2005). Pria engages in code-switching and makes use of Italian to cope with complex situations in an English-dominant environment such as school. Similarly, Luisa also makes use of her linguistic repertoire in a context where she must not be understood by others. This could be seen as a form of linguistic capital as the HL is seen as a communicative source which would not be otherwise available. Myers-Scotton (2000) in his paper explaining the norms of rationality in code-switching, suggests that engaging in such language practices means that they can make optimal use of the resources in their linguistic repertoire. Finally, code-switching and using the HL in an

English-dominant environment can also be interpreted as a method to establish their connection with the community and ascertain their bilingual identities (Myers-Scotton, 2000), which suggests a positive perception of their bilingualism. Participants are aware of the low number of speakers in their milieu, and how their bilingualism can be used as an advantage in specific social situations and to implicitly establish their bilingual identity.

Students also recognise bilingualism's linguistic capital by using their repertoires to aid them in interdisciplinarity.

“...Italian is very similar to ... Greek and Latin so you can get references to a lot of words...”

“...It was ... quite easy for me to learn about the Romans because I knew all about ... things words like 'cena' ...” – Pria

Valdés et al. (1999), in their study focusing on the bilingual education strategies for Spanish HLL in the United States, noticed that speakers used their HL to connect with other disciplines across the curriculum (Valdés et al., 1999). Similarly, Pria is conscious that she can transfer literacy and vocabulary skills from one language to another, and the support this can provide her in mainstream lessons. The recognition of this value brought by her HL could suggest a positive perception of bilingualism (Darvin and Norton, 2015).

### **5.2.3. Awareness of linguistic hierarchy:**

Hamman-Ortiz (2020) demonstrated that students tend to be aware of the hierarchical systems that privilege dominant languages and language varieties. The data from this study mirrors Hamman-Ortiz's findings; some place reduced value on their HL.

“What is the point of me learning Italian? What if I don't want to go to the South?... You only speak it in Italy.” – Eloise

“If I had to know English or Italian...I think English is the more important one cause it's the global language... where else...are you going to learn Italian?...” – Luisa

“...there is no point trying to learn what jibberish he (my dad) is saying...” – Luisa

“...sometimes I ... can't be bothered...” - Eloise

All the participants in this current study grew up in the UK, and have spent brief holiday periods in Italy, therefore, they are exposed to English as the dominant language of

society. The use of the word “jibberish” refers to Naepolitan, and demonstrates a negative perception of the dialect, however, it also highlights the lack of mutual intelligibility between Italian and the regional dialect. These quotes suggest that the participants do not see the value of the HL or dialect, outside of Italy, and English is being understood as the language of status (Seals and Peyton, 2016). Djuraeva et al. (2022) highlight that the unequal value of languages can affect goals of those who try to acquire a language as there is limited focus on the development of minoritized languages. In the last two quotations, both students associate learning their HL with negative emotions, demonstrating a lack of interest in acquiring Italian. Norton (2013) suggests that student perceptions could be influenced by opinions in the home, and the resources available to connect them to the heritage community. Luisa and Eloise are sisters, so they share similar opinions on the value of languages, as they could be exposed to a similar environment. However, this negative perception of bilingualism does not reflect that of the parents: in the questionnaire, they deemed it *extremely important* for their children to become bilingual due to increased opportunities. Therefore, the negative perception of bilingualism in Italian, could be due to a lack of resources and connections with the community outside of Italy and in their country of residence of Italy.

Globalisation also led to a reshaping of the linguistic capital (Darvin and Norton, 2015). Pria highlighted how recognising and embracing her HL and culture can lead to her being viewed differently in a monolingual English environment. Firstly, she highlights the positive aspects of this recognition:

“...In England, I feel more Italian because it’s a bit boring to just be in English so...being from somewhere else makes me a bit more interesting...”

“...I am the only Italian in my class, so it makes me more recognisable...” – Pria

These suggest a positive association with her heritage background; however, she also recognises that this makes her a minority in an English-dominant environment. In addition, she reflects on how her linguistic heritage could lead to her being teased in mainstream school:

“... if someone didn’t know I was Italian I don’t think I was Italian because I haven’t...got an accent when I speak English... in some ways, I am glad I don’t have an accent because if I did, I might get teased a lot...” – Pria

Based on the context in which this participant is learning their HL, these negative perceptions of bilingualism can be rationalised. As previously discussed in the literature review, there has been little support for the HL of students in mainstream education, and

according to Weekly (2020), the media often criticises households that do not speak English, leading to negative associations with multilingualism. These sentiments have also been observed by the participants. Pria highlights that speaking a language other than English may not be well perceived. The Douglas Fir Group (2016) emphasises that some of the barriers bilingual students may encounter are how they are perceived by others, even when such associations may be incorrect, or discriminatory. Considering Pria's case study, even though she is attending a complementary school which placed Italian in a position of power within her academic realm, she recognises that English is still seen as the language of greater status (Potowski, 2007) and that more importance is being placed on being monolingual English than on being bilingual with a distinctive native language (Seals and Peyton, 2016). Overall, the data shows that students also have negative perceptions of bilingualism: public attitudes regarding the use and proficiency in heritage languages other than the dominant can affect and inhibit the use of the former and the desire to learn it (Seals and Peyton, 2016). This places importance on the opportunities to provide HL maintenance and regard heritage languages as an added value, and not an impairment.

#### **5.2.4. Summary:**

There were three main emerging themes within the data. The first was regarding cultural capital, which highlighted that the participants valued bilingualism with their HL to maintain a connection with family. Furthermore, one participant emphasized the financial benefits of bilingualism, such as improved career opportunities, which according to the literature could be an indication of low identification with the heritage identity. The second theme regarded linguistic capital where the HL is used as a communicative source which would not be otherwise available, to establish their bilingual identity in an English-dominant setting. Finally, students demonstrated awareness of the linguistic hierarchy and the situation of diglossia. This was associated with a negative perception of bilingualism, noticing that their HL is less valued outside of Italy.

### **5.3. RQ2: What impact does bilingual education have on the identities of Italian-heritage students?**

The following subheading tries to answer the second research question regarding the impact of HL education on the identities of Italian-heritage students through the data conveyed in interviews and LPs. Norton (2013) suggested that identities can be influenced

by practices common to institutions such as schools, homes, and resources available in the heritage community. In this study, HL education is related to formal complementary education and education within the home.

### **5.3.1. Improved sense of Italian community:**

As discussed in the literature review (Section 2.2), Italy's history of weak national identity is characterised by dialects which hinder mutual intelligibility between regions. This is reflected in the Italian community in the UK, leading to fragmentation, which is emphasised by the lack of support for the expatriates who want to support their HL and culture.

Eloise and Luisa's Italian heritage has provenance from the Campania region in southern Italy, specifically, from Naples. This is significant since, not only the location is characterised by a strong regional identity, but also the dialect is emblematic of the identity of the city of Naples, the capital of the region. Pria's family is from the northern region of Emilia-Romagna, from the Romagnolo area: the region is further split between Emilia and Romagna, which leads to a weaker overall regional identity than the Neapolitan, but a stronger identity to the specific half. For this reason, it is also characterised by numerous dialect variations. Therefore, there are differences between the strength of regional identity within the provenances of the participants.

All three learners recognised that the situation of diglossia, which characterises their heritage regions, is mirrored in language practices in their home.

“...I think if there was a language option for Neapolitan maybe people would tick it... if dad is talking to his friends in Neapolitan, I haven't got a clue...” – Luisa

“...my grandad can only speak a little Italian...”  
“when they are talking amongst themselves, they only speak the dialect, whenever they talk to me, they speak Italian Italian...” – Pria

“...I can ... tell the difference (between Neapolitan and Italian) ...” – Eloise

Nevertheless, Pria, who is enrolled in a complementary school, referred to her identity as 'Italian'. This contrasts with Luisa, whose HL learning was provided at home hence receiving the least amount of formal Italian education, as she associated her identity with regional traits.

“I try to be Italian” – Pria

“... I’ll speak like a southerner... some of my behaviours and when I talk are very Neapolitan”

“...Maybe I have traits of a Neapolitan... I will react in a very Neapolitan way...”- Luisa

The students recognise the feelings of division among Italians, both in Italy and those living in the UK, as they comprehend the regional identities led by diglossia. The lack of inter-regional communication caused by dialects could be at the core of the fragmentation society in Italy, which is also reflected when Italian nationals immigrate. The theme of community also emerged from the interviews, with students reflecting on their personal experiences as Italian heritage learners in the UK.

“I have two friends that are Italian...” – Pria

“...There are only two people in my year that are Italian...” - Eloise

“I think there is a community, but it restricts itself to Italy... they will just form their bubble with the people they know...”

“There is no Little Italy in England...there are people there, it’s just that these people are not connected...”

“...I would be open (to meeting more Italian people) but I just don’t think there is that at all...” – Luisa

Pria and Eloise highlight the lack of resources that connect them to other Italians while living in the UK. Luisa expands on this, by describing the difficulties in joining the community as they are in “*bubbles*”, possibly created by common regional cultures, dialects, and identities. According to The Douglas Fir Group (2016), bilingual education can shape groups that have access to it, and the relationships they can establish with others. One of the adjacent themes emerging from the interviews was the role of education in facilitating access to the community. Eloise is learning Italian through self-taught courses online and reflects on attending a complementary school, expressing her need to find an environment where her heritage is accepted:

“It ... might be nice to be in a place where someone would... meet me for the first time and read my name and be able to say it... I would feel a bit more in the right place”.- Eloise

Similarly, Pria’s parents believed that attending a complementary school allowed their child to “see other families...in the UK that have similar backgrounds”. The Douglas Fir

Group (2016) highlighted those identities become available through membership in communities. The classroom is a safe space which creates opportunities to meet other members of the Italian community. Park and Davis (2011) believe that bilingual education provides a sense of power for the HL within the academic environment and having this resource available could lead to obtaining a stronger identity. Therefore, the findings which emerged from the interviews and case studies suggest that formal bilingual education would strengthen belonging to the community, which is central to identity formation.

### **5.3.2. Reflection on bilingual identity:**

The participants in this study do not view bilingualism as an extraordinary ability but appreciate how bilingual education increases awareness of their bilingual identities (Hamman-Ortiz, 2020). Pria is the only student to maintain her HL through a complementary school, and her case study shows that she is more aware of her bilingual identity. In her LP, the proportions which were coloured split the figure in half.

“...when I am in Italy people recognise me, ‘cause I go to school and at school they recognise me as the English girl and everyone, they kind of jump on top of me...”

“...And then in England, I feel more Italian because it is a bit boring to just be English...”

“...I just feel half and half”- Pria

None of the other participants verbalised or demonstrated such awareness of a dual identity based on their location. Brease and de Jong (2008) believe that bilingual students can negotiate their identities in a classroom environment, differently from those who receive education at home. Therefore, Pria’s case study suggests that, generally, bilingual education allows students to reflect and increase awareness of their bilingual identities. However, education within a classroom setting may facilitate this by increasing contact with other members of the community, which cannot be done from home. These quotes confirm Norton Pierce’s (1995) identity theory being multiple, changing and a site of struggle. Learners who speak from one identity position change based on their access to their practices and resources available within the context, therefore they can claim alternative identities from which to produce their desired language (Norton, 2014). Pria seems to negotiate her bilingual identity based on the context and relations of power and is fully aware of this shift in identity (Norton, 2014).

### 5.3.3. Perceived proficiency and confidence:

Yu (2015) and Arredondo et al. (2016) found a correlation between language proficiency and identity: the higher proficiency in the HL, the stronger their affiliation with the ethnic group and identity. All three students demonstrated awareness of their proficiency through their responses to the questionnaire and consequent reflection on the responses.

“ I can understand it but I won’t reply in Italian... I can’t necessarily form sentences, but I know what words are...” – Luisa

“...I can understand to a decent level...” – Luisa

“... I can understand I just don’t know how to reply... might take me a second... to figure it out, but I can figure it out...”

“...in Italian, the bits that I do know are all related to each other...” - Eloise

Luisa scored her confidence level a 1 in the questionnaire, 2 for proficiency and 3 for understanding (Table 2). Eloise provided the same responses, however, in her LP she depicted her Italian knowledge as organised compared to Spanish, suggesting that learning Italian informally has provided opportunities to reflect on her proficiency. Pria, who attended the complementary school, recognised her language learning progression:

“...when I was a baby, I used to speak Italian and English muddled together”

“(I use English) because sometimes my answers need to be more complicated”

“I don’t know so many words in Italian, and I don’t usually write in Italian... I am much better at speaking Italian and understanding Italian than writing and reading it. I will prefer reading than writing Italian...” - Pria

Hamman-Ortiz (2020) demonstrated that students in HL maintenance programmes offered by schools saw themselves as more competent bilinguals than those who were not supported. Pria’s explanation of Italian proficiency is more exhaustive, referring to all four skills, and recognising that these are self-ratings and preferences. Norton Pierce (1995) introduced the idea that identity is inseparable from the process of acquiring a new language since every time language learners speak, they are organising a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Therefore, considering the difference between these case studies, and that language learner identity is inseparable from the process of acquiring a language (Norton, 2013), the support from formal bilingual education seems to strengthen learners’ national identities.

#### 5.3.4. Imagined communities:

With the increased exposure to resources and other Italians living in the UK, learners' imagined community construct is also strengthened, which is central to identity formation. The participants who gained a bilingual education through complementary schools and online platforms exhibited a strong affiliation with the imagined communities.

“ ... I would blend in quite well (in Italy)... I could see myself living there once I know... how their lifestyle is...”

“I would go even now. I would be open to going to school there even having no knowledge of Italian...”

“I know that in Italy there are ... some schools ... you can go out with your friends, and you can get the train everywhere...” – Eloise

“...I would like to live where my grandparents live, it's an enormous farm... the bedroom that I sleep ... it's three times the size of the bedroom here...” - Pria

Eloise associated her imagined life in Italy with a sense of freedom compared to her current school system. Similarly, Pria projects her past experiences with her grandparents into her future in the heritage country. Both learners desire to become or anticipate becoming members of their heritage community because of what they perceive they have to offer (Anderson, 2008). The student whose HL education solely came from exposure at home, does not have the same construct of imagined communities.

“...Living no... I wouldn't ever consider living there and fitting in there... you have got to be able to speak to people because I can't do that, it would be more difficult for me...” – Luisa

According to the LPs (Chapter 4), Luisa demonstrated a low identification with her Italian heritage. This could be a direct connection with her proficiency and confidence in Italian use: formal education in the HL could improve her proficiency and resources which lead to contacts within the community. As such, this study corroborates other findings in the literature: the intensity to which a student views the imagined communities and their identity with heritage can depend on their proficiency levels and encounters with speakers of the language, which can all be provided by formal HL education.

### **5.3.5. Summary:**

The data demonstrated that general bilingual education could provide enrichment of the national heritage identity, through increased perceived language proficiency and confidence. There is also the indication that formal education through comprehensive schools seems to be the most effective. According to Norton's identity construct, power dynamics and the perception of linguistic hierarchies can impact student identity formation (Norton, 2014). Using the HL in formal education provides empowerment. This is thanks to an improved sense of community, by allowing students to connect with others who have similar heritage backgrounds and creating a safe environment for students to express their bilingual identity.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION**

### **6.1. SUMMARY OF AIMS AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY:**

This thesis explored the impact of bilingual education on HLLs' identities and the students' perceptions of bilingualism. HLLs were identified by lineage: this definition does not limit participants by proficiency but establishes that they must have a connection to the HL and culture through heredity (Carreira, 2004). The literature analysis in Chapter 2 established that there is little to no support for bilingual students' heritage languages in mainstream education in the UK: bilingual learner needs are not being met and the system does not take advantage of resources within the community (Conteh et al., 2013). The lack of attention to heritage languages means that the responsibility of maintaining them falls on the communities. Students are taught through after-school provisions, in complementary schools, by parents or in online self-taught classes (Conteh et al., 2013; Weekly, 2020). The national fragmentation caused by a strong regional identity characterised by dialects means that Italians abroad lack mutual intelligibility to form networks (Conti, 2012). This study focussed on the Italian community in the UK as this demographic is understudied in SLA and poses a unique context for HLLs.

This project adopted a post-structural approach through Norton's identity construct established in 1995. Within this theoretical framework, languages are used as tools to negotiate identity within situations of unequal power (Norton Pierce, 1995). The construct represents learner identity with three characteristics central to SLA research: multiple, a site of struggle and subject to change (Norton Pierce, 1995). The work also included sub-themes such as imagined communities developed by Anderson (2008), resources available and power within societies (Pavlenko, 2002). This study employed a multi-case study methodology and recruited three participants aged 11 to 16, along with their parents. Data was gathered first through a parent/guardian questionnaire to select participants and understand the student's background and previous language learning experiences, which also allowed for triangulation. Then students were asked to complete a questionnaire to self-rate their proficiency and to complete LPs to gain visual insight into their association between language and identity. Finally, interviews were used to gain more in-depth qualitative data: these were recorded, transcribed, and coded for analysis.

## **6.2. REVIEWING RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

### **6.2.1. RQ1: What are the perceptions of bilingualism amongst Italian heritage students and their parents within a bilingual education context?**

The main themes emerging from the data related to social, linguistic capital and linguistic hierarchies. All students mentioned aspects of social capital as a positive association with bilingualism: two students and parents recognised the importance of bilingualism to maintain a connection with their Italian family, whereas one of the case studies, placed importance on improved future opportunities. Students also knew bilingualism allows them to engage in rational code-switching to make optimal use of the resources they have in their linguistic repertoire and support them in more complex situations (Myers-Scotton, 2000). The final theme demonstrated a negative perception of bilingualism due to the awareness of the linguistic hierarchy between English and Italian. The unequal value of languages affected the goals of the participants due to the limited focus on the development of minoritised languages (Djuraeva et al., 2022). Furthermore, it emphasised that negative public attitudes regarding the use and proficiency in heritage languages other than the dominant can affect and inhibit the use of the former (Seals and Peyton, 2016). This places importance on the opportunities to provide a HL education and regard all languages as an added value, not an impairment.

### **6.2.2. RQ2: What impact does bilingual education have on the identities of Italian-heritage students?**

Bilingual education can increase resources (Norton, 2013) that connect students to other Italians with similar experiences, creating a safe space and sense of power for the HL within the academic environment. Participants also appreciated that their educational context allowed them to reflect and be aware of their bilingual identities. The LPs demonstrated that identities can co-exist within individuals and are a site of struggle: identities change based on access to their practices, power, and resources within the context (Norton, 2014). Therefore, HLLs can claim alternative identities from which to produce language (Norton, 2014). Both students who studied through courses could rate their proficiency accurately: this supports the literature which states that formal bilingual education can increase national identity through the augmentation of proficiency. Finally, the participant who attended a complementary school demonstrated a stronger concept of imagined communities, possibly due to increased exposure to an Italian community,

which is central to identity formation (Gao, 2012; Djuraeva et al., 2022; Norton, 2014). Overall, bilingual education can strengthen student identities, however, the provision of formal teaching of the HL through complementary schools may be more efficient.

### **6.3. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The participants highlighted the weak feeling of community for Italians living in the UK, due to the lack of mutual intelligibility and connections created by the host and heritage countries (Conti, 2012). The data showed the importance of implementing HL education to create a safe space for students to express their bilingual identities and create opportunities to link the community. Once support and links are increased, it could be easier to overcome the shortage of teachers in Italian, therefore improving the quality and quantity of Italian HL learning (Willoughby, 2014). To overcome the lack of teaching materials, resources could be shared from the Italian school system (Willoughby, 2014). One of the parents in the questionnaire confirmed the success of exchanges with schools in Italy: this can improve the HL education quality as materials have already been tested. Finally, insight into student's perception of bilingualism and identity formation can be used to make the course curriculum more relevant to why HLLs need to learn Italian (Willoughby, 2014), such as communicating or translating for family.

### **6.4. LIMITATIONS:**

The following section discusses the recognised limitations of this work, which include participant demographics and recruitment, language, and sample size.

#### **6.4.1. Participants and Recruitment:**

Firstly, all participants were supposed to be recruited from the same complementary school for them to have the same bilingual educational background and context. However, there were not sufficient responses from families who fit the selection criteria: the collection was expanded to a community outside of the local area, and to those students who maintained their HL through online courses or were taught by parents. Consequently, participants were from different bilingual educational backgrounds and geographical areas within the UK. This varied their learning experiences and could have impacted the data collected. Secondly, two of the participants were siblings, therefore some of the data may overlap, especially regarding parental views on bilingualism and HL maintenance. Thirdly,

the students recruited varied in age, ranging from 11 to 16 years old, which could lead to diverse experiences. This also means that the way they rationalise their thoughts and provide details in responses can also diverge. Finally, studies demonstrate the impact of gender on SLA and learner motivation (Norton, 2014), so the fact that all participants were female, could be a limitation.

#### **6.4.2. Language:**

The parent/guardian survey was carried out in English, and the option to respond in Italian was not provided. This could limit the scope of the survey to potential English-dominant speaking parents which in turn could have biased views on bilingualism and HL maintenance. This linguistic aspect was controlled within the qualitative data collection for the student interviews, as they were allowed to use Italian when they felt most appropriate to ease communication.

#### **6.4.3. Sample size:**

Considering the current population of Italians living in the UK is approximately 276,669 (CENSUS, 2021), this study cannot generalise and capture all the identities of Italian HLLs, as it was a small-scale study. However, it can function as a starting point for further investigation and highlight the need for more attention and support to this demographic.

### **6.5. CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH:**

Considering the findings and limitations of this study, it would be interesting to research children in a primary school setting as, similarly to adolescents, they are in the process of forming their identities. Future research should also consider exploring both genders, to identify differences within identity formation. Additionally, involving students who all attended the same school in the same geographical area within the UK could also yield more accurate results for a specific part of the Italian community. There is only one bilingual Italian-English school in the UK, located in London, to focus a similar project on students who are exposed to more hours of formal language learning and attending full-time education. Finally, it would be informative to carry out a project that examines case study identities longitudinally, to research the development of identity over time.

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## CHAPTER 8: APPENDIX

### 8.1. CUREC FORMS:

SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES  
INTERDIVISIONAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE  
DEPARTMENTAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Department of Education  
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY  
[student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk); [staff.curec@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:staff.curec@education.ox.ac.uk)



Martina Taffarello [REDACTED]  
Department of Education, Social Sciences Division  
University of Oxford

26 February 2024

Dear Martina,

#### **Research ethics approval**

**Research title:** Bilingual education and the linguistic heritage of Italian students in the United Kingdom: a case study exploring identity.

**Research ethics reference:** EDUC\_C1A\_24\_082

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Education Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the University's procedures for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to confirm that, on the basis of the information provided to the DREC, ethics approval has now been granted for this study.

Please note the following:

**Personal data:** It is the responsibility of the PI to ensure that all personal data collected during the project is managed in accordance with the University's [guidance and legal requirements](#).

**In-person activities:** Any data collection involving in-person interactions with participants must have an up-to-date fieldwork risk assessment in place; further guidance is available from the Safety Office's [website](#).

**Amendments:** Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the information in your ethics application as submitted at date of this approval, as all changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. The amendment form is available on the [SSH IDREC webpage](#).

We welcome feedback on your experience of the ethical review process and suggestions for improvement. Please email any comments to [staff.curec@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:staff.curec@education.ox.ac.uk) / [student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:student.curec@education.ox.ac.uk) or [ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'James Carroll'.

James Carroll  
DREC member

cc: Anna-Maria Ramezanzadeh [REDACTED]

## 8.2. RESEARCH TOOLS:

### 8.2.1. Linguistic Portrait Outline:



## 8.2.2. Interview Outline:

**STUDENT INTERVIEW OUTLINE:** Semi-structured questions will be adapted based on the answers provided by the children.

### **Self-rated ability and confidence:**

Why did you give yourself a score of ----?

Why did you give yourself a score of ----?

What would you like to improve on the most? Why?

- If they ask for example (listening, reading, speaking, writing).

### **Linguistic Portraits:**

Did you include all the languages you know?

- If no: Which ones are missing and why?

Which of the languages you illustrated are most important to you?

- Why/why not?

Why did you choose \*location\* to represent \*language\*?

- Did you connect languages to specific places in the silhouette? Why?

Why did you choose \*colour\* to represent \*language\*?

Why did you choose \*shape\* to represent \*language\*?

Why do you associate \*emotion\* with \*language\*?

### **Language background:**

If not previously answered: Which languages, do you speak?

Why are you learning Italian?

Do you enjoy going to the Italian at the school? Why?

Do you know a lot of people who speak Italian?

- Who do you usually speak Italian with the most?

Did you know Italian before starting the school?

### **Community:**

Do you think going to an Italian school has helped/will help you become closer to the family or friends who also speak it? How?

Do you think going to an Italian school has helped/will help you get to know more people who are also Italian? How?

Do you connect your languages with specific people? How?

### **Regional identity:**

From the parental questionnaire: Do you also know Romagnolo? When do you use it?

What would you say the differences are between speaking Italian and Romagnolo?

Which language do you prefer to use now? Why?

### **Perceptions of bilingualism:**

You answered with --- on question 4: Why do you think it is --- important to learn Italian?

Is it important to go to an Italian school? Why?

You answered with --- on question 4: Why do you think it is ---- important to know more than one language?

### 8.2.3. Questionnaires Outline:

#### STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE:

1. Do you feel confident when using Italian?

				
1	2	3	4	5
I do not feel confident at all	I don't feel confident	I feel confident	I feel quite confident	I feel very confident

2a. If you had to give your use of Italian a mark, what would it be?

				
1	2	3	4	5
Awful	Bad	Okay	Good	Amazing

2b. if you had to give yourself a grade for your understanding of Italian, what would it be?

				
1	2	3	4	5
Awful	Bad	Okay	Good	Amazing

3a. Is it important to know Italian?

				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important at all	Not important	Okay	Important	Very important

3b. Is it important to know Italian and English (know more than one language)?

				
1	2	3	4	5
Not important at all	Not important	Okay	Important	Very important

## 8.2.4. Parent/guardian questionnaire:

Q1. Full name of child enrolled at the [redacted]

Q2. Current year group of child enrolled at [redacted] (number only).

Q3. Number of academic years your child has been enrolled in the programme (including this academic year):

- 0 - 1
- 2-3
- 4-5
- 6-7
- 8-9
- 10+

Q4. Which of the following family members hold Italian Nationality?

- Parental figure 1
- Parental figure 2
- grandparent 1 (paternal)
- grandparent 2 (paternal)
- grandparent 1 (maternal)
- grandparent 2 (maternal)

Q5. Please complete the table below like the example:

Type 'N' for not applicable

Type 'no' if answer is no.

	Italian regional provenance e.g. Calabria	Italian regional variation spoken e.g. Calabrese	Does this family member also speak standard Italian? e.g. yes/no
Parental figure 1	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Parental figure 2	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Grandparent 1 (paternal)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Grandparent 2 (paternal)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Grandparent 1 (maternal)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
grandparent 2 (maternal)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Q6. How many years has the family been living in the United Kingdom?

less than 12 months

1- 2 years

3- 4 years

5 -6 years

7 - 8 years

9 - 10 years

11 +

Q7. How many years has your child been living in the United Kingdom?

less than 12 months

1 - 2 years

3 - 4 years

5 - 6 years

7 - 8 years

9 - 10 years

11 +

Q8. Which languages are spoken at home?

Italian

English

Spanish

French

German

Other please specify

Q9. Which languages does your child speak at home?

Please provide answers in order of dominance.

Please include any regional languages spoken i.e. Sicilian

Language 1

Language 2

Language 3

Language 4

Q11. Which option best describes your reason for enrolling your child at an Italian school?

I want my child to be able to communicate with family

I want my child to be able to understand and use their heritage language

I want my child to be able to understand their heritage culture

I want my child to become bilingual/multilingual.

I want my child and my family to be more integrated in the Italian Community in the UK

I believe knowledge of Italian will allow my child to have better opportunities

Others : please specify

Q12. Do you deem it important for your child to maintain their heritage language (standard Italian)?

Definitely not

Probably not

Indifferent

Probably yes

Definitely yes

Q13. Please justify your answer to Question 12.

Q14. Do you deem your child becoming bilingual important?

Definitely not

Probably not

Indifferent

Probably yes

Definitely yes

Q15. Please justify your answer to question 14

Q16. How involved do you feel with the Italian community?

Not involved at all

Not involved

Indifferent

Involved

Very involved

Q17. In your opinion, has enrolling your child on an Italian school increased the sense of belonging to the Italian community?

Increase substantially

Some increase

No change

Some decrease

Decreased substantially

Q18. Please justify your answer to question 17.

Q20. How strongly do you relate to a regional identity? (i.e. Sicilian)

Very strongly

Strongly

Not strongly

Not strongly at all

Q19. How strongly do you relate to an Italian identity?

Very strongly

Strongly

Not strongly

Not strongly at all

### 8.3. CODING FRAMEWORK (emerging codes in orange) AND QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES:

<b>CODE</b>	<b>DEFINITION</b>
<b>Capital</b>	The extent to which learners recognise the value of learning the language and for what reason. It brings something to me or makes people see value in me
<b>Diglossia</b>	recognition of the situation of diglossia with Italian/dialect
<b>Emotions</b>	Emotions associated with the language or experiences connected with the heritage language culture
<b>Imagined Communities</b>	How the participants visualises future opportunities associated with the heritage language/possibility of being associated within the community of the heritage language
<b>Linguistic Portrait</b>	Only when they are explaining their choices for the linguistic portraits
<b>Resource Availability</b>	Concerning the resources available to the participant which create connections with the heritage language/culture and can allow them to use the heritage language. This could be people, schools, tools, materials, connections to home country.
<b>Rose of Heritage Language</b>	Understanding the role of heritage language within society - this can include the perception of a linguistic hierarchy within society.
~Family Influence	The influence that family or parents have on the perception of heritage language/culture
~Italian community in the UK	The perceptions of the existing Italian community in the UK
~Proficiency	Perceived proficiency in the heritage language and the effects
~Regional identification	Recognition of individual regional differences, and participant identification with their heritage region versus heritage nation.
~Role of school	Recognition of the role of school in connecting them to the community

Table 1: Participant's overview

Student information			Education			Family Background					
Name	Gender	Age	Years in the UK	Type of heritage education	Years enrolled in heritage education	Languages spoken by child	Languages spoken at home	Italian heritage background	Languages spoken by parents	Regional identification of parents	Italian identification of parents
Pria	Female	11	10	Complementary school online	2 to 3	English ; Italian ; Italian ; occasional dialect expression	English; Italian ; Italian ; occasional dialect expression	Mother and maternal grandparents from Emilia Romagna	Mother speaks Italian and Romagnolo dialect as an additional language ; Father speaks English and has Italian as additional language	very strong	strong
Eloise	Female	14	11+	Self-taught online, some lessons taught by parent	1	English	English, Italian	Father and paternal grandparents from Naples, Campania	Father is bilingual Italian-Naopolitan ; Mother speaks English	very strong	very strong
Luisa	Female	16	11+	some lessons taught by parent							

Table 2: Student Questionnaire Responses

Name	Confidence in use of Italian	Self-perceived use of Italian	Self-perceived understanding of Italian	Importance of knowing Italian	Importance of bilingualism
Pria	4.5	4	5	5	5
Luisa	1	2	3	4	4
Eloise	1.5	1	3	4	5

#### 8.4. SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT:

I: So on a scale of 1 –5, one being least confident, 5 most – Do you feel confident when using Italian?

E: Maybe like a one or two.

I: Okay, so if you had to give your use of Italian a mark that would be speaking or writing?

E: One probably.

I: If you had to give yourself a grade for understanding Italian, could be listening, or reading – what would it be?

E: Like a 3.

I: For both listening and reading...

E: No, just for like reading and understanding.

I: Okay... and is it important for you to know Italian as a language?

E: I think I probably should know it and I feel a bit like sort of shame that I don't know it.

I: Okay so I can put 5 for very important?

E: Probably like a four or five yeah.

I: 5 okay... is it important for you to know both Italian and English?

E: I think it is important for me to know like English and Italian because one, I live in England, and two, I am Italian and I should be able to speak to my family so like again four or five, possibly 5.

I: Perfect, I will ask you more questions about this later on \*proceeds to explain linguistic portrait\*.

I: The first question I wanted to ask was about the questionnaire, why did you score yourself as like 1 or 2 in confidence?

E: Because I don't really like it, I've tried to learn Italian quite a few times, online and with my dad, but I don't know I cannot really like understand it. I just cannot remember it. I'm just like, in public if I was in Italy, I would just feel kind of embarrassed speaking Italian because also I don't know why, but like whenever I try to speak another language, I just cannot do the accent, so I literally just sound like I am saying the words in an English accent.

I: And what about your use and understanding?

E: When I am in Italy and stuff like I can understand I just don't know how to reply cause I don't know it but even if my dad like says something to me in Italian but might take me a second or two like to figure it out, but I can figure it out.

I: Did you include all the languages you knew on the person?

E: No, French.

I: And why didn't you include it?

E: Because I used to do French but then I quit cause I was like on a course where I had to do French and Latin if I wanted to do Spanish as well and I just didn't really enjoy it.

I: Okay and out of the ones you have illustrated, which one is the most important to you out of those 3?

E: English just cause I speak it and live it.

I: Okay yeah, that makes sense, so looking at the image, you placed English in the facial area, why did you decide to put it there?

E: Like you know in your brain I think in English and like I am English sort of, based, you know. That's probably why.

I: Okay yeah, so do you associate English with a particular sort of aspect of your life?

E: probably... my family in England, and all my friends and stuff, you know, sort of my life in England.

I: And what about the Italian, what can you tell me about the positioning you chose?

E: I think cause like obviously I know like I will always be Italian and I'm like sort of because apparently, I am like  $\frac{1}{4}$  Welsh so if i am only  $\frac{1}{4}$  English and  $\frac{1}{4}$  Welsh and like Italian is you know the main thing. So, I guess it always will be like in my heart do you know what I mean?

I: Yeah, and why did you choose the colour green for Italian, blue for English and red for Spanish?

E: It's more for a practical reason, just cause in Spanish it is just red cause it's red on the flag, and in Italian I didn't want to do red again, so I did green cause that is the other colour on the flag, and English I just like the colour navy, so I wanted to use navy.

I: That makes sense, and what about the positioning of the Spanish, your kind of have it all over.

E: Yeah, I think because I like I know a lot of it just, I feel like it's all kind of like I know a lot of words of it but it's not like in a particular order. So, like do you know how on the sheet it's all kind of like dotted around everywhere? It's sort of like I don't know it in, I couldn't like you know covered like, but I couldn't speak to it fluently I just know a lot of bits.

I: Dotted around.

E: Yeah, it's not organised or anything.

I: Whereas you would consider your Italian and English more organised compared, according to the image?

E: I feel like English cause I am fluent in English, it's sortof like it's all together and then in Italian the bits that I do know it's all related to each other.

I: What would you say they are related to?

E: Well, if I am being honest, I just started trying to learn Italian again and it's like the first thing they make you learn is ordering stuff in restaurants, so it's just that's all I really know how to do.

I: It's what you have spent more time learning... so the amount of space the language takes on the figure does it mean anything in this case, because Spanish takes a lot more space than the others?

E: Yeah, I think it only really applies in Italian because it's like I don't really know. In terms of like knowing it I don't really know a lot that is why I have only done it small, but if i were to do it how Italian I feel I would have done like half the body or something.

I: And if you had done half the body in Italian, what would have done for the English?

E: Can you see the screen? I would feel like I would have done that ½ Italian and then maybe done like a little bit of English and then just mixed like thinking back on it like maybe a bit of French and Spanish as well.

I: Would you have coloured in the right side or left side of the figure in Italian?

E: Probably left.

I: So, do you happen to associate any emotions with Italian?

E: I don't know, I hope it does not seem rude but like in Naples especially they are really loud so sort of one of the things sort of get like really loud and sort of like angry. I sort of think well this is a bit like being in Italy and I guess I kind of like associate.

I: Right, yes.

E: Being sort of loud and angry with me being Italian.

I: That makes sense, honestly there is no judgement, it's your opinion and that's what will make the research so no filters you can say anything. So, what have you started recently to pick Italian up again?

E: I think... well, I am going to Italy in the summer, and I go to Italy every year and I just feel like it must be it's more... I feel kind of bad for my dad when he's, you know, he's going to see his friends and he's like happy to be there. And I feel bad having to be like all the time "Can you tell them this? Can you translate this? How do I say this?" so I guess it's sort of like to help my dad a bit maybe and just to you

know understand a bit more. I just feel like a baby that doesn't know what is going on cause everyone else, and when we have like big gatherings as well where all my dad's friends come together and their children are together again, I feel like they want to speak English, but we want to learn Italian like me and my sister. So, it is also like because I like helping them with English as well. I think it's a bit more annoying for them to help us with Italian.

I: It is interesting that you are saying that it's for your dad, not just for you. Do you enjoy learning Italian?

E: It depends in like what... sometimes I like it, and sometimes... sort of. I'm happy. I'm like "Yeah this is going to help my dad" and I am thinking of all the good things. But then sometimes I am just like I really cannot be bothered with this.

I: Why can't you be bothered?

E: I don't know. I think it is because I feel like a big reason I have been so on and off with Italian is because like Italian, you only speak in Italy, you know French or Spanish, Spanish you can speak it in South America, some African countries can speak French and I have always thought like what is the point of me learning Italian? What if I don't want to go to the South?

I: That's an interesting point, do you know a lot of people who are Italian or that speak Italian, in your circle of friends, not parents.

E: I have... there are only two other people in my year that are Italian, one's a girl who I am really close with and... but she lived in Italy for two years and she speaks fluent Italian. I don't think she really, I think I am not really like as inclined to like to ask for her help with Italian because she lives, like she doesn't live in Italy anymore she lives in Bermuda... I have another, a boy in my year but I think he just sort of does the same thing that i did like I am Italian but i don't speak it or I don't like to know any.

I: Do you think that if you went to an actual Italian school and I am not saying in Italy but for example and after school do you think it would actually help you be more connected with the community?

E: I think it would be nice to not be so singled out, because I feel like a lot of people when I don't really know why but when people are talking about me the first thing they will say is like she's Italian and I'm just like how do you know that sort of? And also, another thing which I know might sound selfish, but a lot of people at my school don't know how to pronounce my surname, so I feel like it actually might be nice to be in a place where someone would like to meet me for the first time, read my name and be able to say it so I just feel like I would be more... I would feel a bit more in the right place.

I: So you could be part of the community if there was a bit more connection?

E: Yeah.

I: Would you be open to meeting more people your age and making more friends your age that were Italian or had the same heritage?

E: Yeah, I think so, but only if they sort of like what was in the same place, not really knowing much but wanting to learn.

I: That's interesting, who do you speak Italian with the most at home?

E: My dad speaks Italian the most to me and he wants us to learn Italian, but I don't speak back because I don't really know how to and, I just like to think it is good for me to understand before I start speaking. To be honest, my dad does more of the translating and stuff and cause in they, you know English is quite a slow language. And in Italy they speak quite fast so I can't really keep up with what they are saying. But I really like seeing my friends in Italy because I like the family friends, you know because it is nice to... it's kindof boring just seeing my parents' friends but when they have children it is more fun.

I: Mmm so you have people you would consider friends back in Italy?

E: \*nods\*

I: What about your grandma because I know that she doesn't really speak English.

E: Mmm I grandma doesn't speak any English, but she'd be like I mean she tries but it doesn't really work. She just speaks to my dad and then she will say stuff to us and i will just look at my dad and just be like what is she talking about?

I: How do you feel in that situation?

E: I mean, I wish I knew how to speak to her because then I would be able to answer her questions without having to go back and forth. It is hard to have a conversation with a translator.

I: Yeah of course that makes sense. How much Neapolitan is used? And are you familiar with it?

E: I only realized a few years ago that like I mean Neapolitan is just a few words I mean it is not a completely different language. I mean you can definitely tell the difference I remember when we went to the North, everyone spoke so much softer than in Naples where they speak quite aggressively.

I: So, do you tend to connect your language with a specific person?

E: Probably just my dad.

I: Did he speak to you a lot as a child?

E: No, I think he always says he spoke a lot of Italian to my sister when she was younger, and I think I feel kind of bad cause he always blames himself for not teaching me and my sister how to speak Italian. I guess because I was more around my mum when I was younger, I was like you know English was the only thing I spoke.

I: Going back to your questionnaire, why do you think Italian was important, does communication with family play a part?

E: To be honest I think it is just nice to say like oh I can speak like Italian as well. Because I always remember when my friend told me that she could speak Italian for the first time, and I was like I am so jealous. It would be nice to be able to you know speak to all the people in Italy and sort of be like independent as I am in England. You know ordering your own food and like speaking to people without someone in between, you know?

I: Sure, could you see yourself living in Italy then? Fitting in there?

E: I think I would blend in quite well once I got a tan so I think like, personally I don't look like super English I think I look fairly Italian, but I think I could see myself

living there only once. I had like sort of enough like knowledge of Italian and sort of like how they I guess how their lifestyle is.

I: What about moving there? Do you think that it is something you could do in the future?

E: I would like to go even now. I would be like open to go to school there even having no knowledge of Italian. I think it would be a little more... you know like my school is quite restricted and what I can do, I feel like I would be more free there.

I: Restrictive and free in what way?

E: At my school it is kind of like you can't go out like with school boundaries. You have to stay in one place. But I know that in Italy are at least some schools I think you can go out with your friends, and you can get the train everywhere if you are in a central place and that you know, you can just drop a message to your parents. But I feel like it's not as easy to do that here because it is not very like sort of life urban.

I: So that part of Italian culture you resonate with that idea of more freedom?

E: \*nods\*

I: I think that is interesting. These are all my questions so let me stop the recording now.

*\*End of transcript\**