A possible account that would be useful for future research could be that Putnam and Sánchez’s (2013) feature reassembly approach is bidirectional, and can run in reverse in the initial acquisition of Spanish HSs’ morphosyntactic knowledge. Speakers with high HL exposure may not present differences from other populations of speakers of the same languages, while those with lower exposure may experience greater crosslinguistic influence. Specifically, in the face of crosslinguistic influence, HSs may master structures at the receptive level gradually before they consistently map these features onto surface-level morphology. Patterns of exposure may modulate the *rate* of development as well as the route, that is how and to what extend to certain features are activated in HL grammars when compared to monolingual or bilingual speakers. This approach aligns with data in Portuguese HSs (Flores et al., 2017; Torregrossa et al., 2023), in which rates of development are tied to experiences speaking and learning the HL. It also aligns with Lohndal and Putnam’s (2021) claim that variable form-function mappings are a typical characteristic of mature heritage grammars.

This approach has a number of appealing advantages. Firstly, it obviates the need for separate frameworks of HL acquisition (e.g., Montrul, 2008, 2013) and attrition (e.g., Hicks & Domínguez, 2020; Polinsky, 2011). By this account, decreases in exposure could also explain a gradual process of reassembly of features by populations who provide input to HSs, leading to qualitative differences in their input. Lower levels of home language activation could increase the optionality with which bilinguals use particular structures due to incipient featural shifts. In fact, Monturl and Sánchez-Walker (2013) demonstrate such a tendency in some of the Spanish-dominant adults who provide input to HSs in their study on the acquisition of DOM. This claim is also consistent with Hicks and Domínguez’s (2020) approach to emergent optionality in contexts of HL attrition.

Moreover, as additional research concerning within-speaker differences in HL knowledge emerges, feature-based accounts are compatible with exoskeletal models of linguistic processing that may be necessary for explaining the gradient within-speaker effects that HSs exhibit in their inflectional systems (see Lohndal and Putnam, 2021, 2024 for arguments supporting this position). Finally, this approach aims to fully capture the nuanced characteristics of HSs’ linguistic systems. Understanding these intricacies at each of the levels sketched in Figure 1 is necessary for a more holistic understanding of HL competence more generally, but also contributes to the aforementioned “paradigm shift” (Giancaspro et al., 2022, p. 484) that seeks to celebrate, validate, and explain bilingual and contact varieties.

If this approach is along the right lines, it presents a number of testable questions for future research. The first is if HLs are continually vulnerable to the influence of crosslinguistic influence, or if there are particular developmental stages or a “threshold” of input that prevent language attrition. A related question is if the protracted development of the HL in childhood is maintained across the adult years, or if this is a time period that is susceptible to periods of feature reassembly. Finally, it is not clear at which point in the developmental process within-speaker variables such as lexical and type frequency influence gradience in HL knowledge, although recent research such as studies cited previously (e.g., Giancaspro, 2020; Giancaspro et al., 2022; Hur, 2020; Thane et al., In Press) has found that these variables influence HSs’ linguistic knowledge. Each of these questions presents opportunities for future studies that aim to sketch out a more holistic approach to child HL development evaluating all levels of research.