After the fiesta is over
Mehotcheva, Teodora Hristova

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Mehotcheva, T. H. (2010). After the fiesta is over: foreign language attrition of Spanish in Dutch and German Erasmus students [S.l.]: [S.n.]
The journey leading to this dissertation began very inconspicuously some eight years ago on a bus. I very distinctly remember, after a 24-hour bus ride, looking through the bus window at the beautiful valley of Trieste and thinking: What am I doing here?! I don’t speak the language, I don’t know anybody and all I have are my two suitcases. Somehow, and mainly due to my quickly acquired Italian skills, I managed to survive my Erasmus year. Three years later, one new language and three suitcases, I found myself again staring through a window. This time I was on a plane looking ahead to a night on a bench at Madrid airport on my way to Barcelona. I couldn’t speak the language and I didn’t know anybody either. Four months later I could speak some Spanish and little did I know that in 8 more months the quest for my quickly escaping Italian would begin.

The proverb says ‘Everything that happens twice, will happen a third time’ and three and a half years later I found myself looking through yet another window. This time on a train (after a plane and a car ride): two new languages and one attrited; only one suitcase. This was the beginning of an on-going love affair between a dedicated skier and the Lowlands. After another two years and numerous trips between houses one (Barcelona), two (Sofia) and three (Groningen); after interviewing 60 of the most amazing Erasmus students and two incredible au-pairs; meeting a bunch of great new friends; a very successful house hunt that led to a very special person; two new languages and one attrited here we are at the beginning of this dissertation.

I did not find my Italian after all but I learned quite a few things about escaping languages and besides, my hope that one day I would go back to Italy and there, on a narrow cobbled street with shouting Italian housewives, I would be reunited with my Italian is still not dead. This has been an incredible journey for me: with lots of ups and downs (I hope the downs will soon start attriting), exhilarating moments and moments of pure stagnation (like in a real Dynamic System) and although you can only see the serious and ‘boring’ part here I hope you enjoy it and find it useful.
In order to realize this project I have counted with the financial support of AGAUR in the form of FI research grants for the duration of the PhD program at UPF and an additional BE grant for one of the periods spent in Groningen. The Department of Translation and Language Sciences at UPF also supported me with an EBES grant for the second visit to Groningen. In addition, without the generous leave of absence which my home institution, New Bulgarian University, granted me this PhD would have only remained a dream. I am immensely grateful to all three institutions for the opportunity given.

Through the years, quite a few people helped me make this project a reality. First and foremost, I would like to express my utmost gratitude to the participants in the study for sharing their time and their experiences with me. In addition to reminding me what a great fun Erasmus exchange is, you took me to the most remote and exotic places on earth with your stories. Thank you for the great time spent together and for the patience when struggling with tests, questionnaires and disappearing pictures on the computer screen.

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On academic level, I would like to thank my supervisor at UPF, Carmen Pérez-Vidal for her careful reading of the manuscript and her support with the never-ending formalities of the Double PhD contract. She has been an incredible teacher and an exceptional researcher, leading by example as much as by her actual teaching. It has been a privilege to be able to work with her. My sincere gratitude also to my promoter, Monika S. Schmid who is such an inspiration. Her knowledge and capacity never stop to surprise me. Thank you for teaching me so much about attrition and life in general. Finally, thanks as well to Kees de Bot who was initially my promoter. His kind support and attention go far beyond the duties of a promoter, for which I am immensely grateful. I never doubted that with such a team to supervise the process this would, after all, become a real dissertation.
During my stay in Groningen I was very lucky to come across an incredible group of friends who not only made my stay unforgettable but made me, and still make me, feel very homesick every time I leave. Dear Agueda, Ani, Bregtje, Farah, Gülsen, Hanneke, Joyce, Sybrine, Tal, Xiaoyan and Yana, thank you for the incredible moments spent together at conferences, with the bikes, little dinners, *patat speciaal* and *kibbeling* at the market (and then in the gym trying to burn out all the extra calories). Many thanks to Ani and Joyce for providing me with a roof during some of the data collection visits; to Bregtje for translating the summary in Dutch and to Yana for her moral support. Gülsen, especially to you for your warm words when I most needed them and for your help with all thesis-related matter. To you and Hanneke, thanks as well for standing behind me on this special day as paranymphs. Thanks, too, to Chris McCully for his wise advice in a very delicate situation and in general for always making people feel so special.

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On personal level, I want to say thank you to my family and in the spirit of multilingualism the next lines will be in Catalan and Bulgarian as otherwise these would be just a few more lines in the 200 pages that my family would not be able to understand:

Gràcies a la meva família catalana pel seu recolzament incondicional no només amb el tema de la tesi i els viatges interminables, sinó també per la comprensió i delicadesa que varen demostrar en un moment molt delicat. Us estimo molt. / Na мама и татко за безкрайната им подкрепа, за всекидневието им и за всичките им жертви докато бях дете и студентка; за всеки ден, който съм далече от дома; за това, че в тъмните комунизически години ми записаха да уча английски и загова, че винаги са ме подкрепяли да продължа напред. Благодаря!
I am going to end up with two very special people in my life. One of them shared with me every moment of the last 5 months, all my feeling, anxieties, frustrations and happiness. Unfortunately he would not be here to share my joy at the end of this trip. For his patience and tenderness, I want to say thank you. And finally Marc. I do not have enough words in all the languages I speak to describe my gratitude for what you have done for me, for all the things you have taught me. Thank you for all the patience, for putting up with my absence (and my presence at the final stages of the writing); for making me believe in my dreams and last but not least for spending a honeymoon under the drizzling rain in the Netherlands instead of on a white sandy beach in the Caribbean.

Teodora H. Mehotcheva
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