Discussion questions for ‘German as a Heritage Language’

I just discovered this paper while prepping the discussion questions for the NHLRC and was so inspired that I think we need to read and discuss it: “Can German Remain a Vital Heritage Language in the United States?” by Renate Ludanyi. Heritage Language Journal, 2013.

Questions

1. How does she describe the position of German as a ‘heritage language’ in the US? How does that fit with what we’ve learned and seen this semester?

2. She draws on Grin’s three conditions that “constitute a necessary and sufficient set” (p. 46) for language preservation:
   a. capacity development, the development of advanced language proficiency and the ability to use it;
   b. opportunity creation, creation of domains that give speakers opportunities to use the language naturally;
   c. and the desire to invest time and effort to learn and use the language, because it brings certain rewards (p. 43).

   How do these match with other views of language preservation we’ve discussed? What would you add or change here?

3. How does German compare with other heritage languages in the US that we’ve talked about or that she talks about?

4. What’s the situation she describes for German worldwide in terms of numbers of speakers, etc.?

5. She gives a detailed description of Schiffman’s view of the history of German language education in the US. What’s the basic argument? How does this fit with Antje Petty’s arguments on immigrant-language schools in Wisconsin?

6. How does she describe the current situation of German teaching in the US? How does heritage language learning fit into this picture?

7. What efforts are being made here and elsewhere to support German as a heritage language?

8. What are ‘community-based schools’?

9. What factors make maintenance of German challenging?

10. What’s her assessment of how likely efforts to maintain German are to succeed?

11. What do you make of the idea of trying to build efforts for German as a heritage language parallel to those underway for other languages in the US?