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**Workshop - Heritage Language Practices: Current issues and future directions**

# **BOOK OF ABSTRACTS**

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**Convergence and Divergence in Heritage Languages: the Sociopolitical Context**

Heritage speakers grow up in a bilingual environment and as adults vary widely in their proficiency in the heritage language, ranging from receptive, low to highly fluent and native-like. Many of them, but not all, display “errors” typical of first and second language development, especially in aspects of grammar. Their grammatical knowledge diverges in several ways from the knowledge of their parents, the input providers. Up until now, the vast majority of formal linguistic-oriented studies on heritage speakers finding divergent outcomes have been conducted in the United States, a country that does not promote active and long-lasting bilingualism in immigrant families. The escalating pressure on immigrant children to become fluent speakers of English interferes with the healthy development of the heritage language. While there are several factors that determine heritage language acquisition, research has focused on the role of the immediate input, language use, and language dominance factors. Less is known about how the larger sociopolitical context contributes to heritage language maintenance and transmission in society more generally. In this talk, I discuss examples of convergent outcomes of heritage speakers with their input providers, and most of these studies have been conducted in other parts of the world, where bilingualism and multilingualism seem to have higher status. Convergent outcomes support the assertion that while heritage speakers are born with the cognitive capacity to learn their languages fully, the extent of heritage language acquisition is highly determined by the context. The language of heritage speakers looks the way it does, not because of deficiencies within the individual, but because of the educational practices, social attitudes and policies that deprive these speakers of their native language. Understanding the external forces beyond the family that shape heritage language development and contribute to convergent and divergent outcomes is critical to support the survival of heritage languages for several generations.

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**Word order and information structure in heritage Russian**

This study examines whether heritage speakers (HSs) of Russian are aware of the relationship between word order and information structure (IS) in Russian. The canonical word of Russian is SVO, while OVS is the most common non-canonical (scrambled) word order (Bivon 1971, Bailyn 1995). Under neutral prosody, old information is usually preverbal, and new information – postverbal (King 1995, Slioussar 2011, among many others). Russian is a case-marking, article-less language, as shown in (1). For common nouns, and under neutral prosody (stress on the rightmost constituent), IS is associated with (in)definiteness: the preverbal bare NP is more likely to be interpreted as definite, and the postverbal NP – as indefinite, as shown by the English translations of (1a-b). However, IS is in principle independent of (in)definiteness, as illustrated by (2), where both NPs are proper names, hence definite: rather, the word order reflects whether Lena or Nina is new information.

- (1) a. Koška        uvidela sobaku.  
       cat.Nom    saw    dog.Acc  
       *"The cat saw a dog."*  
       b. Sobaku        uvidela koška.  
       dog.Acc    saw    cat.Nom  
       *"A cat saw the dog."*
- (2) a. Lena        uvidela Ninu.  
       Lena.Nom    saw    Nina.Acc  
       b. Ninu        uvidela Lena.  
       Nina.Acc    saw    Lena.Nom  
       *"Lena saw Nina."*

We tested the relationship between word order and IS via a bimodal Acceptability Judgment Task, in which each target sentence was presented as an answer to a question. The 48 target sentences were SVO and OVS sentences with neutral prosody (stress on the rightmost constituent), posed as an answer to a question that placed either the subject or the object in narrow focus (e.g., for (1), the

questions would be *Whom did the cat see? / Who saw the dog?*, while for (2), the questions would be *Whom did Lena see? / Who saw Nina?*).

Monolingual native Russian speakers performed as expected, rating SVO sentences high when the object is new information and low when the subject is new information, and the opposite for OVS sentences. We are currently analyzing results from Russian HSs who speak either English or Hebrew as their dominant language; preliminary findings suggest that HSs do exhibit sensitivity to the relationship between word order and IS. The full results will be reported.

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**Comparing ultimate attainment in second and heritage language speakers: Syntactic and morphological knowledge of Italian accusative clitics**

The acquisition of a heritage language, normally the weaker language of early bilinguals, has been oftentimes defined as incomplete, especially for morphosyntax. As a result, heritage speakers, typically early bilinguals, resemble late bilinguals more than L1 speakers, calling into question the role of age of exposure. The effects of syntactic complexity on morphosyntactic structures, however, have not been sufficiently considered hitherto. In this talk, I report on the effects of age of exposure and syntactic complexity by comparing heritage, L2, and L1 speakers on knowledge of Italian accusative clitics in three structures. An oral structural priming task and a speeded grammaticality judgment task find a discrepancy in the level of ultimate attainment heritage speakers reach for syntax and morphology. While their abstract representation of clitic structures approximates that of L1 speakers more closely, their morphological knowledge of clitics aligns with L2 speakers, suggesting early exposure has tangible effects only on syntactic knowledge. In turn, syntactic complexity affects the representation of clitic structures in a predictable manner, regardless of age of exposure, but is inconsequential to explicit knowledge of morphological forms in monolingual and bilingual speakers. Lack of age of exposure effects in the morphological domain are attributed to interface vulnerability.

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### **Writing in academic genres: Advanced biliteracy in Spanish as a heritage language**

The number of bilingual speakers of Swedish and Spanish as a heritage language (HL) in Sweden is considerable (King & Ganuza 2005) yet there is little research about them (Parada 2016).

HL speakers seldom develop advanced-level written proficiency in their HL; instead, they tend to use colloquial language (Valdés 2014). Writing in academic genres poses a considerable challenge to university students in general (Swales 2014). HL speakers are not an exception, especially considering that their educational needs have not yet been incorporated to the tertiary level of education in Sweden (Alberius et al. 2017). Besides, research on HL users' academic writing in Sweden is particularly scarce.

HL speakers are those individuals who have been exposed to an L1 (in this study Spanish) in the immediate environment since early childhood while having been exposed simultaneously to the majority language (here Swedish) in the context where they live (Irizarri 2016, Montrul 2012, Rothman 2009). HL speakers constitute a heterogeneous group whose language skills vary (Flores, Kupisch & Rinke 2018; Yanguas 2010), since factors such as the level of education in the HL (Bylund & Díaz 2012) and the amount of contact with the HL (Donoso 2017) have an impact on their linguistic repertoire.

On this background, the aims of this study are, firstly, to find out whether HL speakers adopt Spanish writing conventions when writing in Spanish or if they rely on the writing conventions of their dominant language, in this case Swedish. Given that HL speakers have had exposure to Spanish since birth, it was expected that lexico-grammatical features in their academic writing in Spanish would be native-like, which could be interpreted as linguistic interdependence phenomena (Cummins 1979), whereas their rhetorical style and information structure would be similar to those of Swedish-speaking L2 users of Spanish, a case of reverse transfer: transfer from an L2 to an L1 (Cook 2003). The second aim is to find out if users of Spanish as an L2 exhibit the same kind of writing conventions as Spanish

HL speakers. On the basis of research on cross-linguistic influence (Ryan 2018), it was hypothesized that L2 users of Spanish would exhibit non-nativelike features of lexis and grammar.

The data of the present study are BA-degree projects, n=75, and research papers, n=10. BA-degree projects constitute a highly demanding task due to the modest preparation students get to write in this specific genre (Swales 2018).

The participants are university students: Spanish HL speakers (simultaneous and sequential bilinguals), n=25; Spanish L2 speakers (Swedish L1), n=25 and Spanish natives, n=25. At the time of the data collection, the groups were in their third term of Spanish (C1 according to the CEFR) as a foreign language at university level.

In order to investigate the features that the different groups display in academic writing, a non-experimental comparative study was carried out in which the analytical categories of intertextuality management, information structure (Swales 2004; 2014), syntactic complexity, subclause ratio (Bulté & Housen 2014) and text-binding (Portolés 2003) were measured.

The results show that HL speakers' texts share features that are typical of spoken Spanish. In their texts, text-binding functions are expressed by paratactic structure and paraphrasing. Some plausible explanations might be assigned to the type of schooling received in Swedish and in their HL, since the teaching in the HL is centered on spoken rather than written production. Reverse transfer could also be an explanation. The L1 and L2 groups display a high degree of syntactic complexity. The L2 users commit more lexical-grammatical errors than the Spanish L1 and HL users. Implications for biliteracy development in HL- and L2 users are discussed.

Keywords: academic writing in bilinguals, written production in Spanish as heritage language, biliteracy in written academic genres.

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### **Exploring accentedness in Spanish as a third and as a heritage language**

Previous research on foreign accent has largely focused on adult second language (L2) learners. In recent years, however, there has been a growing interest in studying the acquisition of phonetics/phonology by heritage speakers (HSs) and third or additional language (L3/*L<sub>n</sub>*) learners. A general belief endorsed in such studies is that both HSs and L3 speakers may have an advantage over other groups of learners, albeit for different reasons. On the one hand, HSs benefit from an early exposure to the heritage language at home, which often results in near-native pronunciation. Nonetheless, even those HSs who attain a high level of proficiency tend to develop a subtle accent. On the other hand, L3 speakers are experienced learners with a larger phonetic-phonological repertoire that could help them outperform more typical L2 learners. It has been suggested that L3 learners are prone to producing L1-accented speech, although the L2 has also been found to exert influence on the L3 sound system. In this talk, we explore accentedness by examining voice onset time (VOT) production in these two understudied groups. Of note, previous work points to a correlation between VOT and degree of foreign accent. Therefore, the acquisition of VOT patterns is a suitable candidate for this kind of investigation. We compare two groups of trilinguals: 1) HSs of Spanish with English as a dominant language and learning French as an L3; and 2) L3 learners of Spanish with English as an L1 and French as an L2. They were recorded producing English, French, and Spanish words containing voiceless stops in stressed word-initial position. Unsurprisingly, our results indicate that the HSs are closer to native-like VOT patterns in Spanish. However, a fine-grained comparison of their production to that of monolingually-raised Spanish-speaking controls also uncovered some isolated deviations from the monolingual norm. In our discussion, we elaborate on what seems to make HSs' accent less pronounced than that of L3 learners, and make (methodological) suggestions for future investigation into the distinctiveness of the so-called "heritage accent".



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**Comparing the effects of implicit and explicit instruction on Spanish heritage learners' linguistic knowledge**

Despite the increases in the Spanish heritage language population in the U.S. (Brown & Thompson, 2018), few studies have empirically examined the outcomes of heritage language (HL) instruction (e.g., Montrul & Bowles, 2010; Potowski, Jegerski, & Morgan-Short, 2009; Torres, 2018). The existing data suggest that HLs' language development may differ from that of second language learners in important ways, yet there is little specificity on which to make evidence-based pedagogical recommendations for HLs. This study investigates not only the extent to which HLs benefit from explicit or implicit instruction but also what type of knowledge results from each type of instruction. A group of 60 second-generation Spanish-speaking HLs at the university level completed a pretest, posttest and delayed posttest that consisted of an untimed acceptability judgment task (AJT), intended to tap explicit knowledge, and an elicited imitation task (EIT) intended to tap implicit knowledge (Ellis, 2005; Bowles, 2011; Yan, Maeda, Lv, & Ginther, 2016). Between sessions 1 and 2, participants received either explicit or implicit instruction or were assigned to a tests-only control group. Explicit instruction consisted of a processing instruction treatment on the past subjunctive in inexistential clauses, whereas implicit instruction consisted of an input flood using the same sentences as in the processing instruction, built as a meaningful story that participants read for comprehension. Results of a linear mixed effects regression indicate that explicit and implicit instruction did not lead to similar gains. Only HLs in the explicit group improved significantly over time, whereas participants in the implicit group did not show significant gains relative to the control group. These findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that explicit instruction is necessary for the acquisition of the Spanish subjunctive for both L2 and HLs (Potowski et al, 2009). Furthermore, somewhat unexpectedly, results indicated that *explicit* instruction led to *implicit* knowledge (as shown by gains on the elicited imitation task), whereas it did not lead to explicit knowledge gains (as shown by the

AJT). Results will be discussed and contextualized in light of prior findings in classroom second and heritage language acquisition.

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### **Research methods for the study of real-time sentence processing by heritage speakers**

In research on heritage speakers, one important concern is that they may respond differently to experimental measures than other participant groups to which they are frequently compared, leading researchers to advocate for a shift away from traditional metalinguistic judgment measures in heritage language research [1] and towards real-time psycholinguistic methods like self-paced reading, eyetracking, and ERPs [2,4]. Thus far, only a handful of studies have responded to this limitation in the literature. The present study addresses this gap by exploring the potential of two real-time measures of sentence comprehension, self-paced reading and eyetracking, in the empirical study of heritage speakers.

More specifically, the present study examined what processing strategies are employed in response to difficulty that arises during meaningful sentence comprehension. The linguistic target was a processing effect that occurs when a noun phrase (NP) appears after an intransitive verb, as in *While Anna slept the baby played in the crib*[5]. In such stimuli, signs of processing difficulty are usually observed on the postverbal NP (i.e., *the baby* in this example), relative to a comparison condition in which the verb is transitive (e.g., *While Anna dressed the baby played in the crib*). Such processing difficulty presumably occurs because of a conflict between Late Closure, a structural preference to incorporate each subsequent word into the existing phrase rather than to initiate a new one[3] and the lexical subcategorization of the verb, which in this case does not allow for the post-verbal NP to be so incorporated. The present study examined the processing of such stimuli by heritage speakers using self-paced reading and eyetracking.

In Experiment 1, heritage speakers and native speakers raised in Spanish-speaking countries read 20 critical stimuli like the example in (1) below, along with 140 distractors in a self-paced reading task. Analyses showed increased reading times on the critical NP (*la obra* “the piece”) following intransitive versus transitive verbs (*acabó* “finished” vs. *volvió* “came back”) for both groups. In addition, only the heritage speakers showed a spillover effect on the post-critical region (*tenía* “had”). Thus, it seemed that the heritage bilinguals struggled more to resolve the processing conflict than the comparison

group, but it was not clear to what extent the observed effects were related to the self-paced reading format, which does not allow rereading, a potentially important recovery strategy. Therefore, we conducted a second experiment using eyetracking, which allows and records backward eye movements, known as regressions.

In Experiment 2, different groups of heritage speakers and native speakers raised in Spanish-speaking countries read the same stimuli while their eye movements were recorded. Both groups had longer go-past times and total reading times on the critical NP following intransitive versus transitive verbs. In addition, both groups also made more regressive eye movements out of the spillover region and back to the pre-critical verb when it was intransitive. Thus, the two groups appeared to have comparable levels of processing difficulty as measured by eyetracking and they both utilized rereading as a recovery strategy when the experimental task allowed them to do so.

Taken together, the outcomes of these two experiments suggest that 1) heritage speakers may be more reliant on the ability to go back and reread that is possible with eyetracking and in normal reading but not during self-paced reading, since they showed greater processing difficulty than the comparison group in Experiment 1, where rereading was not possible and 2) self-paced reading and eyetracking can each be uniquely revealing when it comes to bilingual sentence processing, which underscores the importance of research using a variety of experimental tools and measures with heritage speakers.

### Example Stimulus

- 1) a. Cuando el escultor acabó la obra tenía tres metros de altura. TRANSITIVE  
b. Cuando el escultor volvió la obra tenía tres metros de altura. INTRANSITIVE  
“When the sculptor finished/came back the piece was three meters tall.”

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