

Book Review

Bernhard Brehmer & Jeanine Treffers-Daller (Eds): Lost in Transmission : The Role of Attrition and Input in Heritage Language Development

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As the title of this edited volume suggests, the book is organised around two main concepts: heritage language development and language attrition. Heritage languages are getting increased importance and attention in modern societies with the development of language rights of minorities and diasporas. A heritage language is defined as the language which differs from the *de facto* language of the given country (e.g. English is the *de facto* language in the United States, whereas other languages are considered to be *heritage* languages). Polinsky (2007; 2008) uses the concept of *heritage language* to define the language learned in childhood and ceased to be dominant as a consequence of emigration. Benmamoun, Montreal & Polinsky (2013:133) give the following definition of a heritage speaker:

a heritage speaker is an early bilingual who grew up hearing (and speaking) the heritage language (L1) and the majority language (L2) either simultaneously or sequentially in early childhood (that is, roughly up to age 5 [...]), but for whom L2 became the primary language at some point during childhood (at, around, or after the onset of schooling). As a result of language shift, by early adulthood, a heritage speaker can be strongly dominant in the majority language, while the heritage language will now be the weaker language.

Whereas, language attrition has been defined as “the non-pathological decrease in a language that had previously been acquired by an individual” (Köpke & Schmid, 2004: p. 5). The first language of immigrants tend to fade over time due to the reasons of “disuse, lack of input or

reduced input” of the L1 (Bardovi-Harling & Stringer, 2010: 34), and the new language environment (L2) has a large impact on L1 (i.e. cross-linguistic influence).

The book being reviewed is a great example of the exceptional cooperation of many authors in the field of bilingualism, second language acquisition, and attrition, respectively. “Lost in Transmission” assembles the theoretical and empirical studies in the field of heritage language acquisition in the immigration domain. Therefore, it can be a beneficial resource for researchers who are inclined to work in the field of bilingualism. The *content* of the book is selected thoughtfully for the reader to be able to familiarise him/herself with the field of heritage language acquisition and language attrition by simply going through the titles of the chapters (11 chapters). The volume aims to discuss the approaches and theoretical viewpoints in the area of heritage language development.

The text is organized into three parts: 1) chapters 1–3 focus on both first-generation immigrants and heritage speakers; 2) articles 5–8 tackle the factors of developing the heritage language; 3) the final articles (9 – 11) concentrate on L1 attrition and its effects on the acquisition of minority languages.

The first chapter of the book “*Two sides of one coin? The relevance of first language attrition for the acquisition of heritage languages*” by Brehmer and Treffers-Daller, takes a closer look at the phenomenon of language attrition and heritage language in connection with the theory of post- and pre-puberty period (Bylund, 2009; Flores, 2010; 2012; Montrul, 2008; Pallier, 2007). As they claim, the process of assimilation to the majority language is a typical feature of the heritage speaker. The article includes the comparison between L1 attriter and heritage speaker; an example of sequential bilinguals, whose L1 lexical and grammatical features can be weakened due to the lack of L1 exposure. The authors attribute this state to the fact that input in the heritage language is provided usually by parents, who are themselves considered to be late sequential bilinguals. The authors review the literature on heritage speakers concerning their linguistic skills at the lexical and grammatical levels. As provided in the article, heritage language acquisition is formed by a multitude of factors, including the social and political immersion of a heritage speaker in the host community. It is concluded, that the study on heritage speakers is still not well developed, even though it is a fascinating and promising field of study.

The following chapter by Aalberse et al. “*Definiteness in Wenzhounese Chinese in the Netherlands and in China: Evidence for a generational*

change in two locations” answers questions about the noticeable marking of definiteness on nouns among the speakers of Wenzhounese Chinese in China and the Netherlands. The results show the increased usage of demonstrative constructions among the second generation of Wenzhounese Chinese speakers, both in China and the Netherlands respectively. Growth of the use of definiteness markers considered to be an impact rather a generation related, than a location effect. The authors propose the appearance of a heritage scheme for both China and the Netherlands. Moreover, the lower usage of Wenzhounese is an outcome of significantly less used language by the second generation and leads to changes, for instance, more explicit demonstrative constructions instead of neutralizing tone distinctions.

The article “*Effect of first language attrition on heritage language and ultimate attainment: Two generations of Turkish immigrants in the UK*” by Karayala lays the dataset, collected from both adult heritage speakers and first-generation immigrants from Turkey to the UK and compares it with the data from monolingual Turkish speakers. The results show that is the findings of the heritage speakers are no different from the results collected from the monolingual control group. Such an outcome is explained by less frequent L1 input before the age of 5 with increased L2 environment impact, causing the diminishing accuracy in grammatical elements: evidentials. The author states that the sufficient influence of L1 in early childhood is an essential element in preserving evidential in heritage Turkish.

In the chapter “*Not in the mood: Frequency effects in heritage speakers’ subjunctive knowledge*” Giancspro compares heritage speakers of Spanish in the US to late native Spanish–English bilinguals, who immigrated to the US after the age of 13. The results show that the heritage group underperformed the natives and was less accurate with the lower frequency verbs. Therefore, the heritage Spanish speakers might fail to use the subjunctive mood with the verbs of lower frequency in their Spanish input.

The following chapter “*Word order variation in the heritage languages: Subject shift and object shift in Norwegian*” by Anderssen and Westergaard, explores the aspect of specific word order. The main subject was the heritage Norwegian speakers in the US, who tend to position the subject and object differently concerning negation markers. The authors examined the effect of two factors on the frequency of object/subject shift: 1. Structural similarity and difference are compared to the neighboring majority languages. 2. Frequency of shift occurrence. The Corpus of American-Norwegian Speech was used to collect the data for analysis.

The conclusion is that the subject and object shift occurs due to the restructuring in heritage Norwegian, as the frequency does not play a leading role in the maintenance of these structures. However, the structure is tending to overlap due to cross-linguistic influence.

The impact of the amount of use of the heritage language on language use is discussed in the next chapter by Diebowski "*Language contact: Gender agreement in Spanish L2 learners and heritage speakers*", who compares Spanish L2 learners and heritage speakers in how accurate they are in gender assignment and gender agreement. The result is that the heritage speakers perform well regarding gender accuracy in written tasks, as well as oral tasks. On the contrary, the adult L2 learners of Spanish, with the frequent exposure and use of the language performed comparably acceptable, considering the factor, that they were enrolled in Spanish-Language classes, which might have a positive effect on their language overall.

In the study "*How do parental input and socio-economic status account for differences within and between the cohorts?*" Montanari et al. tests the effect of how the amount of exposure and use of the heritage languages were affected by the socio-economic status, educational level of parents, and dominant language. The participants of the study were children, between 6 and 10 years old, with Russian and Turkish as a heritage language, living in Germany. The aim was to compare the vocabulary size in the heritage language and the connection between the above-listed factors for lexical development in the heritage language. The picture naming task was used to reveal the positive results of receptive vocabulary knowledge; however, the results were ambiguous. In conclusion, most of the factors, affecting life and language, contribute to the variability of vocabulary acquisition.

The following article by Andreou et al, "*Heritage and non-heritage bilinguals: The role of biliteracy and bilingual education*" aims to identify the difference between heritage speakers and non-heritage speakers within aspects of schooling. The study was conducted with the help of the Sentence Repetition Task (SRT). The aim of the research was to explore Albanian-Greek heritage and non-heritage bilinguals' ability in their two languages and explores the contribution of working memory in SRT accuracy. Besides, the authors define biliteracy as the ability of bilinguals to read and write in two languages. As for SRT, it is considered to be the most appropriate and precise tool to measure general language abilities and implicit knowledge. Klem et al. (2015) refer to SRT as the best set of linguistic tasks that reflect the coherency of language processing systems at many different linguistic levels. The results of current study were clear

evidence for the Interdependence Hypothesis (Cummins 2001), a development of the bilingual child's cognitive abilities, with an institutional support in both of their languages. Biliteracy and bilingualism itself enhance the development of cognitive skills.

Elif Krause in the paper "*High sensitivity to conceptual cues in Turkish heritage speakers with dominant German L2: Comparing semantics-morphosyntax and pragmatic-morphosyntax interfaces*" discusses the Interface Hypothesis and tests to reveal the interference between different cognitive domains, which can be problematic for bilingual language processing. To test the hypothesis, Krause uses two different experiments: to check the semantics-morphosyntax and pragmatics-morphosyntax layers in producing the same structure. The groups of Turkish heritage speakers in Germany were taking part in the experiment. The discussion of results discloses the higher sensitivity to animacy and givenness constraints in choosing the clear plural markings on the verb in the heritage speakers and monolingual control group. The results propose the deviant behavior of the heritage speakers in comparison with monolinguals and being called "hyper-sensitive" withhold of semantic and pragmatic properties of the plural subjects that force the use of undisguised plural marking on the verb.

The next chapter of volume "*The Frequency Code and gendered attrition and acquisition in the German-English heritage language community in Vancouver, Canada*" by Esther de Leeuw, explores the pitch level and span in a group of German L1-English L2 late bilinguals in comparison to two monolingual control groups. The participant of the study was the late bilinguals who immigrated to Vancouver, Canada as adults and spend approximately 40 years. The results suggest that the bilingual males increased their pitch in both English and German languages, and widened their pitch span, therefore indicating non-aggressive, friendly behavior, but deviating from both monolingual pitch norms. Thus, the results propose that pitch changes are closely related to the social and political environment in which they are set; as a low pitch level is associated with dominance and aggression which is related to their ethnic origin after WWII.

The last section by Shi Zhang "*Does extensive L2 exposure trigger L1 attrition of perfective and durative aspect marking in Mandarin Chinese?*" describes the study on the attrition of *perfective* and *durative* aspect marking in Mandarin spoken by Chinese immigrants who moved to the UK as adults and had lived there for an extended period of more than 7 years. In the study, Zhang concentrates on the interaction between lexical and grammatical aspect in Mandarin Chinese and investigating the

acceptability of the perfective marker *le* and the durative marker *zhe* in the combination of different lexical aspects. The data collected with the help of the acceptability judgment task showed no clear sign of L1 attrition within the perfective and durative aspect marking. The author proposes the connection with the Interface Hypothesis, considering that the Mandarin Chinese involves only a syntax-lexicon interface, which considers being less problematic for bilinguals.

To conclude, many chapters conclude with case studies and snapshots of this volume provides a deeper description of the shreds of evidence of distinguishing between the standard language, acquired by the most monolinguals in the homeland and the language acquired by the heritage speakers, who are exposed to it in the host country. A heritage language is shaped by various factors, for example, the social and political immersion of the heritage speaker in the host country, institutional support, maintaining in the family or attending heritage language classes. The researches on the heritage language provide inspiration for future research as it continues to surprise in many ways, from development to shaping and maintaining. The volume lays the groundwork for future research for researchers, undergraduate and graduate students who are interested in the field.

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