


SHORT COMMUNICATION

Introduction to the special issue on Heritage languages & Bilingualism

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This special issue of the *Nordic Journal of Linguistics* is dedicated to heritage languages and bilingualism. Heritage languages are naturalistically acquired languages, but not the dominant language in the broader society (Rothman 2009:156) and over the last two decades, there has been a growth in research to languages in this specific bilingual setting (see Montrul 2016, Polinsky 2018 for overviews). However, the study of bilingualism and language contact has contributed to our understanding of the formal and social nature of language long before the term ‘heritage language’ was used (especially Haugen 1953, Weinreich 1953).

The field of heritage language linguistics contributes empirically and theoretically to discussions concerning language acquisition and maintenance throughout the lifespan, linguistic processes, and language variation and linguistic knowledge. For example, the different and varied input that heritage speakers receive affects their acquisition of linguistic representations and changes in language use over time may affect how speakers access those representations in comprehension and production of their heritage language (Putnam et al. 2019). Acquisition and maintenance are recurrent factors in explaining the often-observed differences between heritage speakers and monolingual homeland speakers of the language.

In addition, the particular sociopolitical contexts in which heritage languages are spoken offer fertile ground for investigations into a wide range of social factors that affect language maintenance and shift (Wilkerson & Salmons 2008, Frey 2013, Aalberse et al. 2019), as well as language changes related to community-wide bilingualism (e.g. Haugen 1953, Nagy 2011). Finally, the study of heritage languages can provide insights for our formal linguistic theories (Benmamoun et al. 2013, Scontras et al. 2015, Lohndal et al. 2019), although this has only been pursued relatively recently.

The Scandinavian heritage languages in the US have received renewed attention in the last decade (e.g. the chapters in Johannessen & Salmons 2015, Page & Putnam 2015). For this special issue, we welcomed manuscripts on both Nordic and non-Nordic languages to represent the breadth of the field of heritage languages. In addition, we believe that including a large variety of languages into our studies advances the field by promoting opportunities for comparing and contrasting heritage

language contact patterns in numerous social settings, and complements growing comparative work on dyads with multiple majority languages (Scontras & Putnam 2020).

This special issue comprises four articles on Nordic and non-Nordic heritage languages. In their article ‘Voicing patterns in stops among heritage speakers of Western Armenian in Lebanon and the US’, Niamh E. Kelly and Lara Keshishian investigate heritage speakers of Western Armenian (WA) in two different contact situations, viz. in Lebanon and in the US. While WA traditionally has a surface contrast between voiceless aspirated stops and voiced stops, the voicing patterns in the heritage speakers in both groups are found to differ from this traditional system, aligning phonetically with the majority languages (Arabic and English). Kelly and Keshishian argue how their findings indicate majority language transfer in the WA phonology.

The article ‘Converbs in heritage Turkish – a contrastive approach’ by Kateryna Iefremenko, Christoph Schroeder and Jaklin Kornfilt, also discusses one heritage language in two contact situations. They investigate adverbial subordination expressed by converbs (adverbial participles) in heritage Turkish in Germany and the US, finding that heritage speakers use converbs differently from canonical Turkish. This pattern is most systematic in adolescent heritage speakers in Germany, and the authors argue that a slight generational change is ongoing in this community. Differences between the speakers in Germany and the US are argued to be the results of structural differences between the two majority languages and sociolinguistic differences between the communities. Finally, the authors point out that the heritage speakers do not create completely new patterns, but rather extend patterns existent in monolingual Turkish to new contexts.

The role of different contact languages is furthermore addressed in the paper by Cher Leng Lee and Chiew Pheng Phua, ‘Singapore Teochew as a heritage language’, although in a somewhat different way. They investigate the use of lexical items in a story-telling task by heritage speakers of Teochew in Singapore. In this particular contact situation, different generations of Teochew speakers grew up with a different majority language (Hokkien, Mandarin, English). The results indicate that these shifts in majority languages are reflected in the vocabulary of the heritage speakers, as different age groups were found to have borrowed lexical items from the majority language that was most dominant in their development. This study exemplifies an interesting case where a single heritage language has been in contact with numerous languages with varying degrees of social dominance over time.

Although not on Nordic languages, these three papers all discuss topics that are directly relevant for the study of Nordic heritage languages as well: variation between speakers, influence from the dominant language(s), generational change and extension of existing patterns. These topics are also addressed in the final paper of the special issue, in which Kari Kinn investigates the use of bare possessives in American Norwegian (AmNo) in ‘Split possession and definiteness marking in American Norwegian’. Norwegian traditionally exhibits a form of split possession, whereby a restricted group of kinship terms can be used without a definiteness marker in post-nominal possessive constructions. Kinn shows that although this phenomenon is in decline in present-day urban homeland Norwegian, it is retained or even extended in the speech of most of the AmNo speakers. Only a minority of

the heritage speakers do not use bare kinship nouns in possessive constructions, and those are argued to have a different sociolinguistic profile than the typical AmNo speakers. Kinn provides a syntactic analysis of the AmNo split possessive system in terms of a small-scale parameter present on a small set of lexical items (i.e. kinship terms) and shows how the change in AmNo is systematic and does not involve loss or incompleteness.

For this special issue, we received more manuscripts than we had space for in a single issue. We are very happy that this process has resulted in additional articles focusing on Nordic heritage languages, that will be published in 2022. Although they investigate different linguistic domains and language-pairs, the articles in this special issue and those forthcoming show the breadth of heritage language linguistics as a field of study. The articles demonstrate how the field advances issues in contact linguistics, language variation and change, and theoretical questions within different frameworks. Furthermore, they illustrate recurrent topics in heritage language studies, inside and outside of the Nordic languages.

We would like to thank the NJL editors and Marit Julien in particular for the invitation to edit this special issue. We are very grateful for this opportunity to, in a modest way, contribute to ongoing discussions in the field of heritage languages and bilingualism. We also thank the editors for their support throughout the process. We would furthermore like to express our gratitude towards all our reviewers, who contributed with their time and expertise to this volume. Finally, we wish to thank all authors for submitting their very interesting papers to the special issue. We hope that the readers will enjoy reading them, and we look forward to the publication of the additional papers in 2022.

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