Variation in heritage languages:
Language contact vs internal developments

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Workshop description

A fascinating area for research on bilingualism is offered by heritage speakers (HSs). The constant contact of the heritage language and the majority language creates a contact-linguistic setting that is particularly open to linguistic variation (cf. Montrul 2016). Previous studies on heritage languages have shown that HSs are close to monolingual speakers in some language areas, e.g., they often develop monolingual-like competence in sound production. In other domains, however, HSs tend to show noncanonical patterns, e.g., they prefer overt structures in both syntax and morphology over those that are covert (cf. Polinsky 2018).

In the past, noncanonical structures have often been viewed as attrition or incomplete acquisition, as critically discussed by Rothman and Treffers-Daller (2014). However, these structures can also be seen as indicators of new grammatical options in bilingual systems. The goal of this workshop is to discuss the status and source of such structures: (1) noncanonical phenomena as development of new dialects vs. incomplete acquisition or erosion, (2) the distinction of contact-induced change vs. language-internal developments and variation, and (3) the relevance of internal vs. external grammatical interfaces.

This workshop invites speakers to present their research on both heritage and majority languages from different language domains: phonetics and phonology, morphology and syntax, semantics and pragmatics. We welcome presentations ranging from theoretical grammatical analysis to corpus linguistics, and covering a variety of language pairs, settings, and age groups. The desired result is to gain new insights into the dynamics of language variation in contact situations and the modelling of noncanonical structures in the grammatical system.

References: Montrul, Silvina (2016). The acquisition of heritage languages. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Polinsky, Maria (2018). Heritage languages and their speakers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Rothman, Jason & Jeanine Treffers-Daller (2014). A prolegomenon to the construct of the native speaker: Heritage speaker bilinguals are natives too! Applied Linguistics 35(1), 93–98.