

Causes of disfluencies in the heritage language: Cognitive, semantic or both

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AG 1

Previous studies have shown that heritage speakers (HSs) usually attain monolingual-like knowledge in their heritage language (HL) except for occasional non-canonical phenomena in some domains including morphosyntax, semantics, pragmatics, phonetics and phonology and interfaces. However, much less is known about the extent to which the mechanisms underlying their spoken production are affected by bilingualism. In order to explore whether they use the same mechanism in speech planning and execution as the monolingual speakers, we investigate disfluencies in their spontaneous speech. As discontinuities may affect up to ten percent of all words and one third of all utterances in natural speech (Shriberg 2001: 153), they provide a window to understanding the underlying mechanisms of speech (Dell 1986; Levelt 1989). Our informants, HSs of Turkish living in Berlin (n= 35) and monolingual speakers in Istanbul (n=30) were shown a 13-minute excerpt from a silent movie (Modern Times) and asked to retell the sequence. At the current stage of our investigation, all speech samples are transcribed according to CHAT conventions (see <http://childes.psy.cmu.edu>) and hesitation phenomena are classified into five types: silent pauses, filled pauses, retractions, repetitions of discourse and false starts. For each speech sample, individual categories of hesitation phenomena will be counted and subsequently recalculated per 1,000 words so as to be analysed and compared with data from the monolingual speakers. Filled pauses are pauses that are predominantly related to the semantic function of discourse markers (i.e., discourse organization and information structure), whereas other hesitation markers – silent pauses, retractions, repetitions and false starts – are associated with cognitive issues such as lexical retrieval or information recall. In view of previous findings from bilinguals (Schmid & Fägersten 2010), we predict that our participants will overuse hesitation markers associated with cognitive processing as they have to manage two linguistic systems at the same time. In particular, increased disfluency for longer and more complex sentences and before lexical items (i.e., nouns and verbs) would be very likely. We also expect more disfluencies that have semantic functions when compared with monolinguals as well as a different distributional pattern in terms of their location (i.e., mostly in clause-internal contexts as opposed to clause boundaries) due to interlanguage effects. In order to explore the impact of background variables (i.e., language use, proficiency, age of L2 onset and attitudes), on the incidence and distribution of hesitation markers, a separate set of analyses will be carried out. We hope that our analyses will reveal intriguing findings about speech planning, production and monitoring of the HSs, and help us understand the role of language internal versus interlanguage effects in HL variation.

References: Dell, G.S. (1986). A spreading activation theory of retrieval and sentence production. *Psychological review* 93, 283–321. Levelt, W.J.M. (1989). *Speaking: From Intention to Articulation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Schmid, M.S. & K.B. Fägersten (2010). Disfluency markers in language attrition. *Language Learning* 60(4), 753–791. E. Shriberg (2001). To 'errr' is human: Ecology and acoustics of speech disfluencies. *Journal of the IPA* 31, 153–169.