

The present talk focusses on bilingual speakers, so called that heritage speakers (HSs), who grow up with a minority language, mainly spoken within the family, and a dominant environmental language. Research on the development of heritage languages has consistently shown that HSs develop a particular language competence, which may differ from monolingual grammars, both in production and comprehension (see Montrul, 2016, for an overview). Differences in the output of heritage bilingual and monolingual speakers have been interpreted in terms of incomplete or diverging linguistic competence due to several factors, such as cross-linguistic influence, language dominance and reduced input. In this talk I discuss the role of three further aspects: the role of timing of acquisition, of linguistic variation in the target language and the availability of the formal register to HSs.

Based on various data from EP as a heritage language, I will provide evidence for the idea that phenomena acquired late in monolingual acquisition may be significantly delayed or differentially pronounced in heritage grammars if input is reduced at a certain age. This has been shown for the acquisition of the subjunctive mood in complement clauses (Flores et al. 2017) or the preverbal position of clitic pronouns (Flores & Barbosa 2014) by HSs of EP.

However, differential outcomes in heritage grammars cannot be exclusively explained by timing of acquisition. Other factors come into play such as language internal variation and the availability of the formal register. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that HSs show more variable knowledge in language domains characterized by variation, particularly in colloquial speech. This is the case of clitic placement in oral EP, for instance, where enclisis is often used in contexts which require proclisis. Also the use of clitic allomorphs is characterized by variation in colloquial speech, which is reduced in literate speech. As demonstrated by Rinke & Flores (2014) and Flores, Rinke & Azevedo (2017), these are precisely the structures that impose more challenges to HSs (such as to illiterate monolingual speakers of EP).