

Heritage Language Variation and Change in Toronto

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Over half of the world's population is multilingual (Tucker 1999), yet, strangely, variationist studies tend to examine one language at a time, essentially treating speakers as monolingual (Nagy & Meyerhoff 2008; but cf. Poplack 1980, Poplack & Meechan 1998). Even in Toronto, possibly the most multilingual city in the world, two major sociolinguistic projects focus exclusively on English (Tagliamonte 2007, Walker & Hoffman 2008). Full understanding of how linguistic variation is used to construct identity requires examining multilingual speakers' full repertoires, building on studies of speaker's monolingual facets and their patterns of code-mixing. The **Heritage Language Variation and Change Project** complements other projects in Toronto by examining variation and inter-generational change in 7 heritage languages (HLs) in ethnic enclaves also analyzed for English, representing a range of typological traits and immigration history: Cantonese, Faetar, Italian, Korean, Russian, Ukrainian, and Urdu. This project addresses questions such as:

- Which features, structures, rules or constraints are cross-linguistically relevant to borrowing? Which are borrowed earlier and more often in HLs?
- Which social factors are cross-linguistically relevant to borrowing?
- Do the same (types of) speakers lead changes in HLs and in English? Is leadership in language change inherent, or do leaders choose to use one language for this social "work"?

This poster describes the methods involved in constructing a large multilingual corpus. In our initial fieldwork season (summer 2009) we are conducting 40 interviews in each HL, with time-aligned transcription underway simultaneously. Each HL is represented by first-, second- and third- (wherever possible) generation speakers, balanced for demographic factors. The ultimate goal of this project is analysis of cross-linguistic variables that differ from English (e.g. null subject, consonant cluster reduction) to test for parallel conditioning across HLs. The goal of this poster is to encourage collaboration with experts in these languages.

References

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