

The grammar of Portuguese heritage bilinguals is not incomplete

Cristina Flores (Universidade do Minho, Braga) & Esther Rinke (Goethe-University, Frankfurt)

In this presentation, we argue against the view that the I-grammar of so called heritage bilinguals (i.e. early bilinguals which acquire one of their native languages as a minority language) is per se incomplete or deficient. We will identify some factors which may be responsible for the fact that their linguistic output may show some differences in comparison to monolingual speakers.

Although it is uncontroversial by now that the human language faculty is endowed with the ability to acquire more than one native language as a native language (Meisel, 2001), it has been noticed that speakers acquiring a minority language in a familial context (so-called heritage bilinguals) may not reach the same proficiency in their heritage language as monolingual speakers (Montrul, 2008). However, the extent to which heritage speakers differ from the monolingual controls depends on the type of test, the linguistic domain as well as the phenomenon under investigation.

In our paper, we will focus on the linguistic competence of Portuguese migrants who were born in Germany and have acquired European Portuguese (EP) as heritage language and German as the dominant environmental language. We will compare them to monolingual speakers living in Portugal by summarizing the results of three different data elicitation tasks: a) a global foreign accent rating test, b) a grammaticality judgment task focusing on their knowledge of object clitics and c) the analysis of a corpus of spontaneous speech with respect to the realization of objects.

We will pursue the following research questions: i) Does the output of heritage bilinguals differ from that of monolinguals in the different tasks?, ii) If yes, in which respects does it differ and which domains are particularly problematic?, iii) How can the differences between bilingual and monolingual native speakers be explained?

In the global accent rating task, speech samples of monolingual and bilingual speakers were rated by monolingual EP listeners according to their degree of nativeness. The stimuli included were speech samples collected in naturalistic semi-spontaneous production tasks (e.g., interview, story narration, picture description, and biographic accounts). In this talk we will compare the results of two groups: 12 lusophone heritage speakers (10 female (F) and 2 male (M)) in the age span of 19 to 30 years (mean age = 23.08 yrs; standard deviation (SD) = 4.01 yrs), who grew up in Germany or Switzerland and 6 monolingual Portuguese speakers with ages ranging from 26 to 43 years (mean age = 32.17 yrs; SD = 7.65 yrs). The results demonstrate that heritage bilinguals show higher variation concerning the evaluation of their accent, whereas monolingual participants were consistently rated as native speakers of EP (mean rating 1.07; SD = 0.07). This meets the results reported by similar studies (Hopp & Schmid, 2013; Kupisch et al., 2014; Stangen et al., in press). Nevertheless, the mean value of the heritage speakers' group is very close to that of the monolinguals (mean = 1.72; SD = 0.98).

The second kind of data comes from an offline grammaticality judgment test (Rinke & Flores, 2014) focusing on the speakers' morpho-syntactic knowledge of clitics. We will focus on the results of 16 lusophone heritage speakers in the age span of 20 to 43 years (mean age = 28.8; standard deviation [SD] = 6.7) and 16 Portuguese monolingual speakers in the age span of 17 to 49 years (mean age = 28.3; SD = 11.1). Their morpho-syntactic knowledge of clitics is of special interest because this domain includes aspects stabilized through the formal and written register, as well as properties that show variation between the vernacular and more formal register. The results reveal that overall heritage speakers show lower performance than the monolingual controls, presumably attributed to lower explicit knowledge and

metalinguistic awareness. They deviate from monolinguals especially in aspects that are acquired late in L1 acquisition and explicitly trained in classroom instruction (e.g. allomorphic forms of clitics, see (1)), whereas they perform much better with respect to phenomena that are related to the spoken register (e.g. clitic climbing, see (2)). In particular, the heritage speakers - although they may not reach the same level of accuracy as the monolingual speakers - show the same sensitivity to phonological distinctions and case asymmetries (e.g. with respect to topicalisation), which are part of the implicit knowledge of native speakers of EP.

- 1) (*O ladrão escondeu-se*) *mas os meninos viram-no.* (enclitic *-no* instead of *-o* after nasal)
(the thief hides-himself) but the children saw-him_{clitic}
- 2) *Hoje não consegui fazer o teu bolo preferido, mas posso-o fazer amanhã.*
today not managed to make the your cake preferred but (I) can-it_{clitic} do tomorrow

For the purpose of this paper we analyzed a third type of data, namely the spontaneous speech consisting of oral interviews. We compared the realization of object by 8 heritage bilinguals and 8 age-matched monolinguals (5474 tokens) with respect to frequency of occurrence and target deviant structures in the following conditions: object type (DP, clause, clitic, demonstrative pronoun, strong pronoun, double object, null object, QU-element), clitic position (proclisis vs. enclisis), clitic climbing, use of clitic allomorphs (*-lo(s)*, *-la(s)*, *-no(s)*, *-na(s)*) and case (accusative vs. dative). The results show that the two groups make use of all options of object realization in EP and even show the same tendencies. The only difference between the heritage bilinguals and the monolingual speakers consists in the fact that the former use considerably more null objects and demonstratives at the expense of clitic pronouns. This indicates that bilinguals tend to avoid the use of clitics. Additionally, there are very few examples of target deviant structures in the speech of both groups. The bilinguals only make some more errors with respect to the ungrammatical use of enclisis in proclitic contexts (see (3)). However, the overall rate is very low (14 cases of ungrammatical enclisis and 214 cases of grammatical enclisis). There are no cases of deviant allomorphic forms – a subject that was particularly difficult in the GJT.

- 3) **Mas não conheciam-se antes*
but no knew-them_{clitic} before

In conclusion, although they have difficulties in some domains in the GJT, there are only slight differences between the heritage bilinguals and the monolingual controls with respect to their global accent and spontaneous speech production. The difficulties in the GJT are mainly related to constructions which are part of the written/formal register and with the fact that an untimed GJT requires a certain amount of metalinguistic knowledge. Both factors may explain the differences in the bilinguals' linguistic output; however the data show clearly that the I-grammar of adult heritage speakers is not deficient or incomplete if compared to monolinguals.