

Heritage Language Acquisition: The State of the Science

Silvina Montrul
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Heritage languages have long been the realm of sociolinguistics and anthropological linguistics but the last fifteen years have seen an impressive growth in research on heritage languages from a psycholinguistic and experimental perspective as embraced by mainstream theoretical approaches to language and language acquisition. Today, the study of heritage languages has moved from the margins of linguistics to occupy a central place in the language sciences where multiple disciplines and approaches converge to understand the complexity of this particular bilingual situation at the social and individual level. In this talk I will take stock on what this different perspective has accomplished, by addressing in particular the theoretical and empirical debate on the underlying factors leading to incomplete acquisition, on the one hand, and the nature of the end-state grammar of heritage speakers, on the other. The goal is to assess how our knowledge of heritage languages and their acquisition has evolved in the last few years and to point out what lies ahead, so that we can articulate clearer implications for advancing research, instructional practices, and language policies on heritage languages in years to come.