

A Comparative Analysis of Heritage and Non-Heritage Speakers' Use of Cantonese, Hindi, and Mandarin Confirmationals

Introduction: This research investigates the range of variation in the use of confirmationals in heritage and non heritage speech in three languages: Hindi, Cantonese and Mandarin. Following Benmamoun et al (2013), we define heritage languages as linguistic varieties that are spoken by a demographic minority in a society where the dominant language is different. By contrast, non-heritage linguistic varieties are dominant language of their society. Birdsong (2004) has shown that language acquisition in a native monolingual society brings about language mastery whereas in an asymmetric multilingual society first language speakers of heritage varieties lack various aspects of language acquisition. Further, Montrul (2012) has shown that asymmetries arise between heritage varieties and their counterparts in the strength of form-meaning mappings and the mastery of case specific morphology. We investigate how heritage and non heritage varieties of Hindi, Cantonese and Mandarin differ with respect to the use of confirmationals. Confirmationals are grammatical devices (intonation, particles or phrases) speakers use when they want request confirmation about their beliefs. For instance, Canadian English speakers use the sentence final particle *eh* as a confirmational, as in “It’s cold out *eh?*”.

Hypotheses: We hypothesize that the use of confirmationals in heritage speech differs from the use of confirmationals in non heritage speech, such that heritage speakers use fewer confirmationals than non heritage speakers, and that contextual constraints on the use of confirmationals are relaxed in heritage speech.

Empirical Domain: In Cantonese the confirmationals we are investigating are *me1* and *ho2* (for an analysis of these confirmationals in non heritage speech, see Lam, 2014), in Mandarin, the confirmationals we are investigating are *ma*, *ba*, and *dui bu dui* (for an analysis of these confirmationals in non heritage speech, see Ettinger and Malamud, 2013), and in Hindi, the confirmationals, we are investigating are *na* which, to our knowledge, has never been investigated.

Methodology: We assess variation by eliciting confirmationals with 3 heritage speakers and 3 non-heritage speakers of each languages under investigation. The distribution of each confirmational is determined with respect to syntactic factors, e.g. clause typing (declarative, interrogative, imperative) and contextual factors, e.g. across contexts differing depending on the degree of expertise and distribution of knowledge across participants. These factors have been shown to condition the use of confirmationals across languages, and particularly for Cantonese and Mandarin (Eh-Lab, 2016). Elicitation is carried out with the use of storyboards administered in the target languages to prevent any interference from English (Burton and Matthewson, 2015). A biographical informational survey of participants is used as a control measure, to ensure that the participants fit the working definition of heritage or non-heritage speakers.

Preliminary Results: As we hypothesized, there is a difference in confirmational use in heritage and non heritage speech, as heritage speakers use fewer confirmationals than non heritage speakers, with fewer contextual restrictions in all three languages. This supports the hypothesis that the grammar is different between the heritage and non-heritage speakers.

Conclusion: This research is relevant to multicultural societies as it collects data from heritage and non-heritage speakers of Cantonese, Hindi and Mandarin. Preliminary findings show a consistent change in the grammatical strategies of heritage speakers in all three languages as their use of confirmationals become less contextually conditioned in heritage speech.

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