

“It's literally in my genetics but then I have that American twist”: Knowledge of social meaning among Albanian heritage speakers

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In this presentation I present key findings from a comprehensive dissertation in which I examined the sociolinguistic knowledge of heritage speakers of Albanian in the United States, compared this knowledge to that of their Albanian language-dominant parents, and analyzed the context in which these heritage speakers are exposed to and use the Albanian language in their daily lives.

In general, very little is known about the sociolinguistic knowledge that heritage speakers have about variation in their language, either in heritage contexts or in the homeland. Two recent studies on heritage Spanish offered conflicting results with regard to the extent and nature of heritage speaker sociolinguistic awareness. While it seems that heritage speakers are on a par with their non-heritage peers in the perception of variation in familiar dialects (Chappell 2019), it is not clear that heritage speakers have the same sociolinguistic constraints as their parents (Maddux & Rao 2019). Moreover, there is virtually no previous work available that has addressed the sociolinguistic knowledge of Albanian heritage speakers in particular.

In the dissertation I designed several methodological components in order to tease apart the various factors at play in heritage speakers' sociolinguistic knowledge. Data collection included perception tasks such as a verbal-guise experiment and in-depth ethnic orientation and sociolinguistic interviews in which I employed novel methods to elicit variation in attention paid to speech. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, I have been able to capture systematic patterns among heritage speakers while balancing this with individual-level insight into the diverse experiences that heritage speakers have had that influence their sociolinguistic knowledge. In this presentation, I focus on data from participant narratives about these sociolinguistic experiences.

The results of this project provided clear evidence that heritage speakers do acquire complex sociolinguistic knowledge. However, while verbal guise results showed that heritage speakers express many of the same attitudes towards linguistic variation that their parents and other non-heritage speakers express, the results from the interviews and narratives demonstrated that the means of acquiring these social meanings are unique to the heritage context in that they tend to involve a great degree of overt instruction from their families and friends, or are based on a relatively small set of exemplars.

The present work is important to the field of heritage studies as it is the first work of its kind to take into account both perception and production of sociolinguistic variation by heritage speakers, and to pair those results with metalinguistic discussion of how heritage speakers came to acquire such sociolinguistic knowledge. Taken as a whole, the results of this project demonstrate the continued need for researchers to consider heritage speakers in their own right and to move away from the knee-jerk reaction to compare them to an idealized monolingual standard.

Chappell, W. (2019). The sociophonetic perception of heritage Spanish speakers in the United States: Reactions to labiodentalized <v> in the speech of late immigrant and U.S.-born voices. In W. Chappell (Ed.), *Recent advances in the study of Spanish sociophonetic perception* (pp. 239-264). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Co.

Maddux, N., & Rao, R. (2019, October 12). Heritage Spanish /bdg/ in an underexplored social context. Paper presented at the meeting of *New Ways of Analyzing Variation 48*, Eugene, Oregon.