The development of sociolinguistic competence:
Implications for language pedagogy and community language practices

*Colloquium Organizers:*
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# Heritage Language Variation and Change Project in Toronto: Bilinguals' competence in their Heritage Language

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*Abstract*

Over half the world's population is multilingual (Tucker 1999), yet variationist studies tend to examine one language at a time, treating speakers as monolingual (Nagy & Meyerhoff 2008 ). Toronto, possibly the most multilingual city in the world, provides a perfect venue for changing this trend. To complement projects focusing exclusively on English (Tagliamonte 2007, Walker & Hoffman 2008), the **Heritage Language Variation and Change Project** examines variation and inter-generational change in 7 heritage language (HL) communities with a range of typological traits and histories: 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 in contact with English?
- Do the same (types of) speakers lead changes in HLs and in English? *i.e.*, is leadership in language change inherent, or do innovators choose one language for this social "work"?

Full understanding of how linguistic variation constructs identity requires examining multilingual speakers' full repertoires, building on previous studies of their monolingual facets and patterns of code-mixing. Findings have application in developing appropriate pedagogical programming for home-speakers of these languages and for providing language-appropriate resources to the communities. Beyond documentation, 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 and move toward a theory of linguistic change in the massively multilingual metropolitan environment.

The methods involved in constructing a large multilingual corpus are described, including discussion of balancing sensitivity to cultural differences with the needs of comparative methodology. Sociolinguistic interviews, ethnic orientation questionnaires and picture-descriptions provide a range of data. We target 40 speakers in each HL, representing first-, second- and third-generation speakers.

**References**

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**Paper to be considered for:**

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*Summary* (62 word)

**Heritage Language Variation and Change Project in Toronto:**
**Bilinguals' competence in their Heritage Language**

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We document variation and inter-generational change in 7 heritage examining which features,
structures, rules or constraints are cross-linguistically relevant to borrowing and whether the
same speakers lead changes in their HL and English. Recorded conversations, questionnaires and
picture-descriptions provide data from 40 speakers in each HL (first-, second-, third-generation).
The goal is a theory of linguistic change in massively multilingual metropolitan environments.