

## The importance of adopting a multi-faceted approach to analyzing heritage speakers' performance

### What this research was about and why it is important

The acquisition of mood selection (e.g. subjunctive or indicative) by heritage speakers (HSs) of Spanish has often been described as highly variable in nature, exhibiting patterns that significantly differ from those observed among monolingual and first-generation Spanish-dominant (bilingual) controls. Divergent outcomes are more common in the domain of production and are usually associated to contexts where the choice between using indicative and subjunctive depends on the speakers' communicative intent. Most of the previous literature, however, has examined HSs' performance from a deficit view, limiting their analysis to one form –subjunctive– rather than two, and focusing on speakers' knowledge and use in late-acquired contexts, which are far more vulnerable to language change or loss. The present study proposes a change in the way mood alternations are analyzed by 1) testing an early-acquired and unexplored construction (reported assertion and commands); 2) targeting both possible moods; and 3) revising and expanding the notion of divergence, adopting a more comprehensive analysis of heritage language grammars that goes beyond a mere comparison with that of Spanish controls.

### What the researchers did

- They tested the interpretation and use of indicative and subjunctive mood in two early-acquired constructions: reported assertions (*La profesora les dice a los alumnos que estudian<sub>[IND]</sub> más* 'The teacher says that the students study more') and reported commands (*La profesora les dice a los alumnos que estudien<sub>[SUBJ]</sub> más* 'The teacher tells the students to study more').
- They interviewed two groups of Spanish-English bilinguals: 25 first-generation Spanish-dominant controls and 76 HSs of Spanish. The latter were subdivided in 3 (Advanced, Intermediate and Low) based on their Spanish proficiency.

### What the researchers found

- A certain level of optionality was observed among all participants, challenging the notion that first-generation speakers exhibit clear cut indicative/subjunctive distinctions.

#### Interpretation task:

- All participants were able to establish a distinction between indicative and subjunctive across contexts, however, the likelihood of doing so was significantly lower as proficiency in Spanish decreased.
- Advanced HSs were the only group of HSs that patterned like controls, overwhelmingly preferring the use of indicative for assertions and subjunctive for commands. Despite being able to differentiate between indicative and subjunctive loss of modal contrasts was widespread among intermediate and low-proficiency HSs.

#### Production task:

- Advanced HSs were the only group of participants who reproduced the pattern observed among Spanish controls. Intermediate and low-proficiency HSs, in contrast, showed more variability.
- The expression of reported commands triggered a wide range of responses, especially among HSs with lower levels of proficiency. Despite their lack of convergence with the control group, Intermediate and low HSs found alternative and highly innovative ways to convey the same meaning through other forms (periphrases of obligation, imperative...).

### Things to consider

- Optionality with respect to the interpretation and use of mood contrasts among Spanish-English bilinguals is rather common, even in early-acquired contexts.
- Level of proficiency in Spanish is a strong predictor of participants' performance, modulating the degree of variability in the interpretation and use of indicative and subjunctive mood.
- To better understand the nature of heritage language grammars, future studies should analyze participants' responses from a more inclusive perspective, acknowledging instances of linguistic innovation as well as those involving linguistic restructuring.

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