

Christoph Schroeder

What is heritage language research good for? A critical discussion, with examples from Turkish language contacts

Abstract: The term “heritage language” describes a sociolinguistically specific constellation of language contact – a non-dominant language in close contact with another language, which is the socially dominant language of the respective society. Three examples from recent research on clause combining in Turkish as a language in contact with German and English are discussed. They show that acknowledging the specific sociolinguistic constellation of (non)-dominance in heritage languages contributes to and benefits from language contact research. It is argued that the term “heritage” obscures more than it helps to make this contribution visible.

Keywords: heritage language, bilingualism, language contact, Turkish, clause combining

1 Introduction

The following discussion of the term “heritage language” aims to clear some fog and make it visible that much of the research that goes by this name contributes to contact linguistics and that the term obscures more than it helps to clarify the intersection between bilingualism research and contact linguistics. I begin with an examination of the term and then discuss three examples from research on the development of Turkish as a non-dominant language in Germany and the USA. They are intended to strengthen my argument.¹

¹ This contribution is dedicated to my dear colleague Thomas Stolz. Thomas and I have been acquainted for a very long time (roughly 35 years, after all!) and share a common interest in contact linguistic research. I am much more limited in this area than Thomas; unlike him, I don’t dare to venture into new waters as much as he does. Another area in which I find myself in common with Thomas’ work is my mistrust of terminology. I see this in Thomas’ work on colonial linguistics.

I benefit immensely from the co-operation with the following colleagues, without who the Turkish-related research and analysis, which I base Part 3 on, would have been impossible: Kateryna Iefremenko, Onur Özsoy, Cem Keskin and Jaklin Kornfilt. Furthermore, I am grateful to the editors of this volume for helpful comments.

Christoph Schroeder, University of Potsdam, e-mail: christoph.schroeder.iii@uni-potsdam.de

2 Heritage language, heritage language speakers

2.1 Definition

A common, and generally accepted definition of “heritage language” (HL) goes like this: “A language qualifies as a HL if it is a language spoken at home or otherwise readily available to young children, and crucially this language is not a dominant language of the larger (national) society” (Rothman 2009: 156).

The concept of a heritage language thus appears as a sociolinguistically specific constellation of language contact: A heritage language is a sociolinguistically non-dominant language that exists in close contact with the dominant language of society, which is another language. Speakers of this language become bilingual at the latest when they enter the societal institutions where the dominant language of the majority is used (e.g., kindergartens, schools).

2.2 The object of study in current research practice

When reviewing the academic literature on heritage languages and heritage language speakers, it becomes evident that with few exceptions, languages identified as “heritage languages” are allochthonous languages in countries where nation-building has historically been closely tied to the establishment of a national language, and where the languages identified as “heritage languages” have established themselves in the course of migration.

This is the first peculiarity of the term: In linguistic research (though not in education), the term is almost exclusively applied to allochthonous minority languages, not to autochthonous ones:

- In North American linguistic research, no publication applies the term to indigenous languages. For these languages, different terms exist, despite the evident (non-)dominance relationship.
- Similarly, research (in English) on heritage languages in Germany does not apply the term to recognized minority languages such as Sorbian, Frisian, or Romani.
- Studies on “German abroad” sometimes use the term “heritage language” (e.g. Shah et al. 2024 on German in South Africa), but usually they do not.
- In Franco-Romance studies, an interesting distinction exists between (i) *langue d’héritage*, the direct translation equivalent sometimes used for allochthonous minority languages, and (ii) *langue héréditaire*, which refers to French as an autochthonous language outside France (e.g., in Switzerland, Belgium).

- In Hispano-Romance studies, the equivalent term *lengua de herencia* seems to be well-established for contexts where Spanish is an allochthonous minority language; however, this does not (yet?) apply to indigenous languages in South America (see Mulík et al. 2022).²

Occasionally, translating “heritage language” into another language seems to challenge linguistic intuition. In linguistic publications in German, the equivalent term *Erbsprache* has sometimes been used (e.g., by Tracy 2014 and Gagarina 2014), but this use is marginal. Typically, the term *Herkunftssprache* is used, which conveys “origin” rather than “inheritance” or “transmission.” Similarly, the Turkish translation *miras dili* is occasionally used in linguistic studies published in Turkish, but only in order to refer to heritage languages in Europe or the USA (and not to minority languages in Turkey), and the term mainly provokes confusion.

2.3 Conceptual critique

The second peculiarity of the term “heritage language,” as well as “heritage speaker,” lies in the first part of the compound, “heritage.” Without much debate, it is generally assumed that “heritage” here means something akin to “something transmitted by or acquired from a predecessor” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)³. This brings us to UNESCO, which with its *World Heritage Convention* seeks to protect tangible and intangible values: “Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations”.⁴

Interestingly, however, the *World Heritage Convention*, which is the UNESCO’s key document on world heritage and so far ratified by 196 states,⁵ does not mention language at all. Although some member states include language in their working definitions of intangible heritage (see United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2001), these references are exclusive to autochthonous or indigenous languages, with no mention of allochthonous languages.

Regardless of whether allochthonous or autochthonous languages are being discussed, the backward-looking perspective implied by the term “heritage” remains problematic (McCarty 2008, cited in Ennser-Kananen and King 2013: 1). “Heritage” conveys something static and isolable, potentially meant to be preserved as is – an

2 I am grateful to Annette Gerstenberg and Melanie Uth (both Potsdam University) for sharing with me their inside in the “heritage”-terminology concerning Romance languages.

3 Retrieved from: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/HERITAGES>, accessed 2024-12-20.

4 Retrieved from <https://www.unesco.org/en/world-heritage>, accessed 2024-11-29.

5 Retrieved from <https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>, accessed 2024-11-29.

understanding that contradicts the dynamic concept of language held by modern linguistics, which views language as arising from communicative and social interaction (see Ennser-Kananen and King 2013: 1).

2.4 Historical Background of the term (and more critique)

How, then, did the term “heritage language” come to be used in linguistics? Its establishment is relatively recent, with its explicit use beginning in the Canadian educational sector in the 1970s through the *Ontario Heritage Language Program* (Cummins 2005). Initially, the term encompassed “languages spoken by indigenous people or immigrants” (Cummins 1991: 601–602, cited in Ennser-Kananen and King 2013: 1). Until the year 2000, the term remained primarily within the educational sector, focusing on “heritage learners” and the schooling of migrant or indigenous minorities in North America, particularly in the USA and Canada. Around the early 2000s, a significant shift occurred: linguists began to focus on the “heritage language speaker”. This was likely influenced by the founding of the *Heritage Language Journal* in 2003. The journal became the primary venue for publishing research on the linguistic development of “heritage language speakers.” Researchers who had previously studied speakers of Russian, Korean, Spanish, etc. in the USA under the label of “American/Korean/Spanish/etc in the USA”, “minority languages”, “allochthonous languages”, or even “reduced languages” (Polinsky 1995) adopted the term “heritage” for their linguistic research agenda. This research explored issues such as the acquisition of non-dominant languages, the role of input in language acquisition, and linguistic phenomena like attrition, incomplete acquisition, erosion, or simplification – all of which sparked significant theoretical debate.

A key concept that has always been central to heritage language research is the “baseline”. This term was first explicitly mentioned in Polinsky and Pereltsvaig (2003: 136):

The language which constitutes the main input for heritage learners is the baseline. This baseline may be the same as the standard language promoted by the literature, media, or religion, but it can also be vastly different from the standard. Determining the baseline spoken by the original immigrants is crucial for our understanding of the lexicon and structure of a heritage language. Once the baseline is established, we are faced with the question of what factors in the history of a particular émigré community helped preserve the community’s language and what factors moved them away from the original language.

The baseline thus became the reference point for investigating how heritage speakers develop linguistic competence in their heritage language, and the influence of extralinguistic factors, such as input intensity and dominance relations between languages, on this development.

Now, of course, the exact determination of the baseline becomes a methodologically complex, if not almost impossible, endeavour: There is nowhere near enough data available to determine what exactly the Russian or Turkish etc. looked like, which provided the initial linguistic input for what then developed into the linguistic practice of the heritage language speaker. In order to escape this data gap, heritage language research helped itself by simply comparing monolingual speakers of the respective language (in the country where the language is a majority language) with the linguistic productions of the heritage speakers, and interpreting systematic deviations in the linguistic practice of the heritage language speakers from the linguistic practices of the monolingual speakers in the context of input factors and language loss.

This, I suppose, is one reason why the heritage language research programme focused exclusively on the languages of immigration and largely ignored autochthonous minority languages: monolingual speakers of autochthonous minority languages are difficult to find, and so the reference point for linguistic change, crucial for the research agenda of heritage language research, could not be identified. A second reason may have to do with who has the power over labelling: Immigrants and their descendants in the super-diverse societies of the Global North have less of a tendency to see themselves as a homogeneous group and to represent themselves to the outside world as such; indigenous minorities, on the other hand, do. They often have a lobby and therefore the power to demand their own labels and defend themselves against external labelling. Cummins (2005: 591) points this out early on: “Canadian First Nations communities generally do not see their languages as heritage languages and prefer to use terms such as indigenous or aboriginal languages”.

Thus, there are two good reasons why linguistic heritage language research has focussed almost exclusively on the languages of immigration: firstly, practical reasons, namely the need to determine the baseline, which could be better achieved by studying non-dominant languages that had not only multilingual but also monolingual speakers. And secondly, these are hegemonic issues: In the case of allochthonous languages, the labelling power lies unchallenged with the investigators and not with the investigated, unlike in the case of autochthonous languages.

2.5 New developments in heritage language research

More recently, however, there have been two interesting new strands in heritage language research, and the reception of these new approaches raises the question of whether the term as a whole does not obscure more than advance multilingualism and language contact research.

On the one hand, voices are becoming louder that fundamentally question the meaningfulness of the comparison between monolingual and bilingual speakers. In principle, this message is already contained in the famous title “Neurolinguists, beware! The bilingual is not two monolinguals in one person”, where Grosjean (1989) argues that the complementary distribution of linguistic repertoires in multilinguals between their languages makes competence comparisons between monolinguals and bilinguals impossible, in principle. At the same time, corpus linguistic studies make it clear that the individual speaker variation in monolinguals is no less large than that in bilinguals (Shadrova et al. 2021), and this makes the idea of a monolingual “control group” problematic – and thus also that of the “baseline” (see above). Rothman et al. (2022, 2023) accordingly argue that heritage language research should leave the monolingual speaker aside and instead focus more on subgroups of bilingual speakers in order to work out the significance of individual factors (input, access to literacy, etc.) for multilingual language development.⁶

Another new approach to heritage language research moves away from the deficit-orientated approach that has dominated heritage language research for some time with terms such as attrition, incomplete acquisition, erosion or simplification. Instead, this approach understands systematic phenomena in heritage languages, that differ from the monolingual variety of the respective languages where they are dominant languages, as instances of language change through language contact. These can and should be analysed using the ‘toolbox’ of language contact research – albeit with an important extension that takes up the special sociolinguistic situation of heritage languages as non-dominant languages in the larger society: It is assumed that the varieties that arise in the language of heritage speakers have an important source in the limited access of heritage speakers to the structures of the written norm of the respective language and to the registers of formality in

⁶ This approach of detailed investigation of input factors is also interestingly extended by recent studies on bilingual speakers of different ages, one of their languages being a non-dominant language, who immigrate to the country where this language is the dominant language. We are dealing with a (re)activation of language knowledge, the investigation of which can be an important contribution to multilingualism research, especially with regard to the central question in second language acquisition research about the role of age in the acquisition of another language (cf. Antonova-Unlu and Bayram 2023).

this language. As Wiese et al. (2022) argue, this can lead to a “levelling” between the linguistic practices of the heritage language used in different communicative situations (Wiese et al. 2022).

2.6 Do we (still) need the term “heritage language”?

Considering what was said above, the term “heritage language” appears as problematic. For one thing, it is problematic in itself, as the semantics of “heritage” go in the wrong direction. Secondly, the term initially implies that all languages are meant that are in a non-dominant sociolinguistic constellation with the respective majority language. In research practice, however, we see that specific non-dominant languages are meant, namely those that have come into this sociolinguistic situation through migration. For the linguistic research questions associated with heritage language research, however, such a distinction cannot be constitutive.

Especially if we consider the more recent trends in heritage language research mentioned above, it becomes clear that heritage language research, with its specific sociolinguistic orientation, contributes to two fields of research. One is cognitively orientated bi- and multilingualism research, and the other is language contact research. It sensitises both fields of research to the challenge of investigating dominance relationships between languages. The term “heritage language”, however, implies an independent field of research – but this is not the case. Rather, it is counterproductive to stick with this term, as it isolates heritage language research and thus blocks the view of the enrichment that research on the development of non-dominant languages brings or could bring for the aforementioned fields of research.

In the following, I will use the term “non-dominant language” instead of “heritage language”, in order to stress the societal status of these languages, which appears to be the crucial feature with regard to the contribution research on these languages makes to the wider field of language contact research. The attributes which constitute the heritage language definition beside the non-dominance remain untouched (nativeness of the language, early bilingualism of the speakers).

3 Heritage language research enriching language contact research

Now that we have (hopefully convincingly) successfully “deconstructed” the term heritage language, I would like to give three examples from research on Turkish as a non-dominant language in Germany and the USA and put them in context with

other language contact literature on Turkish. In this way, I hope to show that and how this research, freed from the “straitjacket” of the heritage concept, contributes to language contact research.

3.1 The data

The research reported in the following comes from a large-scale, cross-linguistic investigation carried out within the context of the Research Unit “Emerging Grammars in Language-Contact-Situations: A Comparative View” (short ‘RUEG’; <https://www.linguistik.hu-berlin.de/en/rueg>)⁷. In the investigation, monolingual speakers of English, German, Russian, Greek and Turkish in those countries, where these languages are the dominant languages (U.S., Germany, Russia, Greece and Turkey, respectively) and bilingual speakers of the respective languages in Germany and the U.S., as well as Turkish-Kurdish (Kurmancî) bilingual speakers from Turkey and Turkish-Kurdish-German trilingual speakers in Germany and bilingual German-English speakers in the U.S. were investigated. Bilinguals and monolinguals were approached as two speaker groups to be investigated, rather than experimental vs. control group. All bilingual speakers were born in the country of the respective dominant language or had arrived there at an early age.⁸ In all categories, two age groups were covered: adolescents (14–18 years), and adults (22–35 years), and roughly 30 speakers from each monolingual and bilingual age group participated.⁹

RUEG based its research upon production data and in order to be able to capture broader repertoires of the speakers, RUEG used the “Language Situations” (“LangSit”) set-up for elicitations (Wiese 2020). In this elicitation method, participants are familiarized with a fictional event (here: a film narrating a minor car accident) and asked to imagine themselves as a witness to this event, and then act out telling different interlocutors about it in different communicative situations, here:

7 Funded by Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG (FOR 2537). Speaker: Heike Wiese; further PIs: Artemis Alexiadou, Shanley Allen, Oliver Bunk, Natalia Gagarina, Mareike Keller, Anke Lüdeling, Judith Purkarthofer, Christoph Schroeder, Anna Shadrova, Luka Szucsich, Rosemarie Tracy, Sabine Zerbian; postdoc: Kalliopi Katsika; PhDs: Katerina Iefremenko, Esther Jahns, Martin Klotz, Thomas Krause, Annika Labrenz, Maria Martynova, Katrin Neuhaus, Tatiana Pashkova, Vicky Rizou, Wintai Tsehaye, Yulia Zuban.

8 In general before the age of 36 months, although in some cases this was extended (up to 48 months) where otherwise it would not have been possible to recruit enough speakers.

9 Kurdish (Kurmancî) speakers (bilingual and trilingual) only belonged to the adult group.

- 1) leave a voice message for a friend, via instant messenger (informal-spoken);
- 2) write a message to a friend, via instant messenger (informal-written);
- 3) leave a voice message on a police “witness line” (formal-spoken);
- 4) write a witness report for the police (formal-written).

At the end of data elicitation, participants were asked to fill in a sociolinguistic questionnaire on biographical data including language use and personality traits.

Bilingual speakers were recorded twice, in their non-dominant language and in the majority language, with the two sessions at least three days apart. Monolingual speakers were recorded once, in the majority language.¹⁰

For Turkish, then, just as for the other languages, the elicitations thus yielded matched elicited, semi-spontaneous data across registers, contact-linguistic settings, and bilingual and monolingual speaker groups in two age groups.

Research on Turkish in the framework of RUEG concentrated on two grammatical domains, namely on the postverbal position, and on clause combining phenomena. We concentrate here on the latter, not only, but also, because it contributes to Thomas Stolz’ research.¹¹

3.2 Aspects of clause combining in Turkish as a non-dominant language in the U.S. and in Germany

3.2.1 Example 1: Frequency changes in clause combining

The first example I discuss is that of general frequencies of finite and non-finite hypotactic vs. paratactic clause combining. As is well known, the SOV-language Turkish is a language which strongly relies on non-finite subordination, where a clause is headed by a clause-final verbal form which combines with a subordinator in the form of a suffix. The language has three main strategies of nonfinite subordination: (i) complement clauses which are clausal nominalizations; (ii) preposed relative clauses headed by participles; and (iii) adverbial clauses headed by converbs (Kornfilt 1997; Göksel and Kerslake 2005) or nominalizations in combination with postpositions.

¹⁰ All data is accessible through the online corpora Lüdeling et al. (2024) and Iefremenko, Klotz and Schroeder (2024).

¹¹ Allow me to stress that all the research I address here comes from collaborate publications, where the author of this chapter is involved. I am grateful to my colleagues for allowing me to use the examples and discuss the joint findings.

Previous studies on Turkish as a non-dominant language in Germany and the Netherlands produce a clear picture, at first appearance: In comparison with the monolingual setting, finite means of clause combining are more frequent in Turkish as a non-dominant language in Germany or the Netherlands, be these subordinating and/or paratactic combinations, while non-finite means of clause combining are less frequent (Dollnick 2013, Bayram 2013, Treffers-Daller et al. 2006). The named studies discuss this tendency as “incomplete acquisition”, in a pair with contact-induced convergence. That is, the dominance of the majority language minimalizes the input of Turkish, respectively, and the acquisition of the language remains incomplete. In addition, the contact language (German and Dutch, respectively), where non-finite subordination plays but a minor role and finite subordination is the preferred means in hypotaxis, triggers Turkish to “steer away”, so to speak, from non-finite subordination.

In a recent publication from the RUEG-group, Özsoy et al. (2022) as well as Iefremenko et al. (2024) partly confirm the frequency relations: In terms of overall frequencies, native speakers of Turkish in Germany and in the U.S. indeed use fewer non-finite clausal structures compared to monolinguals in Turkey, but instead prefer paratactic clause combining strategies. However, this does not seem to account for converbs in the language use of native speakers of Turkish in the U.S., which show similar frequencies like the monolingual speakers in Turkey. Also, the authors show that the frequency differences between bilingual and monolingual varieties of Turkish are observed only in formal communicative situations: When bilingual speakers are asked to perform in the formal communicative situation of reporting the traffic accident they have witnessed to the police, they use significantly less non-finite subordinating constructions than the monolingual speakers from Turkey in the same communicative situation. On the other hand, the difference between monolingual and bilingual speakers dissolves when it comes to informal communicative situations. Here, also monolingual speakers produce significantly less non-finite structures than in the formal communicative situations. And the frequencies of non-finite subordinations are more or less alike between monolingual and bilingual speakers, in the informal communicative situations.

Non-finite clause combining thus reveals itself as the preferred means of clause combining in the formal register(s) of monolingual Turkish in Turkey (see also Schroeder 2002), while in the informal register(s), its role within the domain of clause combining is less prominent. The reduced frequency of non-finite subordination, which is attested in all investigations of Turkish as a non-dominant language in contact with German, Dutch and English, thus reveals itself neither as an instance of “incomplete acquisition” nor as triggered by contact with the majority language(s). It rather is an instance of “internal change”: Informal features of a language, that are present in the monolingual variety, spread and consolidate in the

specific contact situation of the same language when it is a non-dominant language (see also Wiese et al. 2022 as well as Schroeder et al. accepted and Iefremenko and Schroeder 2024).

3.2.2 Example 2: Frequency and qualitative changes in converbs

As mentioned above, adverbial subordination in Turkish is mainly carried out by means of clauses headed by converbs. Following Johanson (1995) the canonical system of Turkish converbs can be described along three parameters, namely

- (i) the aspectual relation between the converb clause and the superordinate clause,
- (ii) the modificational relation which the converb clause exerts on the superordinate clause, and
- (iii) the subject relation between the converb and the superordinate clause.

With respect to (i), the aspectual relation can be

- either intra-terminal, that is it expresses the event occurring within the limits of the event in the superordinate clause,
- or it can be post-terminal, where the event is expressed as having begun before the event in the main clause unfolds,
- or it can be terminal, where the event is expressed as coming to an end before the event in the superordinate clause has begun.

However, as Johanson (1995: 319) stresses, it is “not unusual for aspectual units to combine or to vacillate between post-terminality and terminality”.

As for (ii), the converb clause can

- either modify the superordinate clause in the sense that it provides further information about the event, its purpose or cause, the conditions under which it occurred, the degree, manner and means of realizations,
- or it can be non-modifying, i.e. it simply expresses a sequentiality of events.

Finally, with respect to (iii), there are some converb forms which clearly prefer same-subject relations between the converb clause and the superordinate clause, allowing for exceptions only when the subject of the latter is in a possessor-posses-sum-relationship with the subject of the former, while some other converbs freely allow varying subject relations between the converb and the superordinate clause. Iefremenko et al. (2021: 135) summarize these relations with the following table (Table 1).

Table 1: Features of converbs in canonical Turkish. Parentheses indicate a marginal and more restricted use.

Converb-form	Aspectual relation		Modificational relation		Subject relation	
	Intra-terminal	(Post-)terminal	Modifying	Non-modifying	Same-subject	Varying subject
-(y)Ip		x		x	x	(x)
-(y)IncA		x	x	x		x
-(y)ArAk	x	(x)	x	(x)	x	(x)
-(y)ken	x	(x)	x	x		x
-DIğIndA	x		x	x		x
-mAdAn		x	x	x		x

As for converbs in Turkish(es) in a non-dominant sociolinguistic constellation, a study by Turan et al. (2020) on Turkish in Germany supports converbs to be in line with the more general results for nonfinite subordination in Turkish in Germany as given in the previous section. The study concludes that bilingual speakers of Turkish in Germany use significantly fewer converbs than monolinguals (in Turkey) and instead use a higher number of finite forms. Turan et al. (2020) also note what they call “unconventional uses” of the converb *-(y)Ip* by bilingual speakers, and they base this on the assessment of monolingual judges, which were asked to consider appropriateness. These uses pertain to issues of coreferentiality, aspectuality and coordination. That is, the bilingual speakers in their study used different subjects with the verb in the main clause and with the converb; moreover, they used this converb in aspectual functions which differed from monolingual Turkish, or they connected the converb to the main clause by means of the coordinate conjunct *ve* ‘and’.

In the RUEG-context, Iefremenko et al. (2021) present four findings which partly confirm Turan et al. (2020), but also go beyond: First, as already stated above, lower frequencies are only found with bilingual speakers in Germany, but not so in the U.S. Second, the converbs *-(y)Ip*, *-(y)ArAk* and *-(y)ken* in bilingual Turkish appear to extend in functionality. To be more specific, these converbs can also be modifying (post-)terminal and express succession of events with the emphasis on the causality of the action, i.e. the function that in canonical Turkish is expressed exclusively by the converb *-(y)IncA*. The third finding concerns the phenomenon of coreferentiality: Like Turan et al. (2020), Iefremenko et al. (2021) find examples, where bilingual speakers use the converbs *-(y)Ip* and *-(y)ArAk* with different subjects in superordinate and converb, and the two subjects are not in a possessor-possessum relationship. However, these are always examples, where these forms are used outside of their canonical aspectual and (non-)modifying relation. The

fourth finding concerns systematicity across groups: While these non-canonical converb uses rather appear to be matters of individual variation with the speakers in the U.S. and the adult speakers in Germany, they appear to be more systematic with adolescent speakers in Germany.

Turan et al. (2020) are rather ‘helpless’, one may say, when it comes to the interpretation of the phenomena they found. They consider the decrease of frequency of converbs in bilingual Turkish in Germany as a process of “grammaticalization” (2020: 9), without being able to say in which direction this goes, and a “vulnerability” of syntax to “foreign Influence” (2020: 10) concerning non-canonical uses, again remaining nebulous with regard to the details of this “foreign influence”.

To me, this helplessness is another indicator of heritage language research remaining very much within its own limits and not situating their research into a wider perspective of studies on language contact and language change, and not considering the specific sociolinguistic situation of non-dominant languages within this.

For once, we can refer back to what was said in the sub-section above about frequency relations: These are strongly related to issues of register and, thus, rather an instance of internal change (as for the direction of this change, more will be said in the following sub-section). In addition, the wider perspective of Iefremenko et al. (2021), which not only look at bilingual Turkish in Germany, but also in the U.S., allows to be clearer with regard to “foreign influence”: With the highly productive *-ing* form, English has a converb with a much higher frequency and broader functionality than comparable forms in German (Iefremenko et al. 2021: 138 based on König and Gast 2018: 71–72). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the presence of the English converb also stabilises the use of converbs in Turkish among Turkish-English bilinguals, hence the higher frequency of converbs in Turkish in the U.S. compared to Turkish in Germany.

Furthermore, both Turan et al. (2020) as well as Iefremenko et al. (2021) find “unconventional uses” of converbs in terms of aspectual, modifying and subject relations. However, Turan et al. (2020) miss out that these uses are interdependent, namely that they are an outcome of a general broadening of functions of converbs in Turkish in the non-dominant constellation. “Unconventional” different-subject relations with *-(y)Ip* and *-(y)ArAk*-converbs only occur where these forms are used outside of their canonical aspectual and (non-)modifying relation. Furthermore, these uses are not a completely new development, but they are an extension of a limited freedom of varying subject relations with these converbs when the subjects are in a possessor-possessum-relation already in canonical (Turkey’s) Turkish, and in this, these subject relations adhere to a continuum noted for converbs in Turkic languages in general (Bárány and Nikolaeva 2020).

Lastly, Iefremenko et al. (2021) show that the “unconventional uses” of the *converbs* in non-dominant native Turkish are most systematic in the group of adolescent speakers in Germany. Here, sociolinguistic considerations are in order. As Iefremenko et al. (2021: 133) point out, Turkish is much more vital in Germany than it is in the U.S. The Turkish community in Germany is large and sociologically comparatively tightly-knit, especially in urban areas. In contrast, the Turkish community in the U.S. is not only much smaller in number, but is also scattered throughout the much bigger country. As a consequence of this demographic, sociological and geographical situation, Turkish is used in more social domains in Germany than in the U.S., i.e. people use it in informal public domains (markets, cafes, shops, during leisure times, etc.), and it is a vital language in adolescent peer groups, in Germany. In variationist sociolinguistics, adolescents are identified as a central group for language change (Tagliamonte 2016) – given, of course, a situation, where the language at issue is actually used in the peer groups. This is arguably much more likely the case in Germany than in the U.S., hence the stronger systematicity of non-canonical uses in the group of bilingual Turkish-German adolescents in Germany may well be linked to a sociolinguistic dynamic.

3.2.3 Example 3: Qualitative changes in clause combining

The third example I want to discuss has as a starting point the paratactic clause combining strategy which Turkish varieties both in Germany as well as in the U.S. seem to prefer. Above, I identified this phenomenon as internal dynamics, where informal features of a language, that are present in the monolingual canonical variety, spread and consolidate in the specific contact situation of the same language when it is a *npn*-dominant language.

Paratactic clause combining brings with it a higher functional load on connectors, which organize the semantic and pragmatic relationship between clauses, so to speak ‘in the place of’ the various means of hierarchic syntactic organization which characterize hypotactic structuring (Givón 1979; Miller and Weinert 2009). As Schroeder (2002), Kerslake (2007) and Schroeder (2016) show, in the informal registers of (Turkey’s) Turkish, the use of paratactic connectors not only increases in comparison to formal language use, but there exist also particular forms which belong almost exclusively to this register. Özsoy et al. (2022) as well as Iefremenko et al. (2024) show how this tendency continues in non-dominant Turkish in Germany and the U.S. The bilingual speakers not only use more paratactic connectors than monolingual speakers, but it appears that “the general shift to more paratactic structuring seems to trigger an expansion of the function of specific connectors (. . .) and temporal adverbs (. . .) into more general clause-connecting devices” (Özsoy

et al. 2022: 17). Thus, the higher functional load on paratactic clause combining in bilingual Turkish in Germany and the U.S., as opposed to monolingual Turkish, trigger an expansion of the part of speech of connectors in Turkish.

However, the story does not end here, and its continuation brings us to one core term in language contact, namely, convergence.

Studies on Turkic languages in contact with Indo-European show how and that Turkic languages incorporate Indo-European-type subordination strategies, that is, finite clauses with a clause-initial subordinating connector, which is a free morpheme. Balkan Turkic and Karaim in contact with Slavic languages and Khalaj, Uzbek, and Azeri in contact with Persian contact can be cited as examples, see Johanson (2021: Secs. 55.2.6, 55.3.8, 903–904, 913–916, 923–924) and further literature cited within.

In a detailed investigation of Balkan Turkic varieties Keskin (2023) shows how in contact with the Indo-European subordination strategies, Balkan Turkic varieties develop all kinds of different subordination strategies, which belong neither to the “Turkic type” nor to the “Indo-European type” of subordination, but are hybrid structures in-between. See the following three examples of such hybrid clauses from Rumelian Turkic: In (1), the relative clause is preposed, but it has a clause-initial free connector and is a finite clause. In (2), the finite relative clause is postposed and has a free subordinator, which is, however, clause-internal. And in (3), the adverbial (consecutive) subordination has an initial free subordinating connector, but the clause is non-finite (all examples cited from Keskin 2023: 161–162):

- (1) Rumelian Turkic (Razgrad, Bulgaria; Murtaza 2016: 81)

[*ani* sırala-*di-m*] to urba-lar
 CONN tell-PST-1PL DIST clothes-PL
 ‘the clothes that I told you about’

- (2) Rumelian Turkic (Mireshe, Kosovo; Sulçevsi 2019: 255)

o sene [bu cade *ne* yap-ıl-*di*]
 DIST year PROX road CONN make-PASS-PST.3SG
 ‘the year that this road was built’

- (3) Rumelian Turkic (Razgrad, Bulgaria; Haliloğlu 2017: 214)

Çuval doqū-du-lā onlā-dan [*ani* zāre-ler-i quy-*mā*].
 sack weave-PST-3PL 3PL-ABL CONN grain-PL-ACC put-NOM.DAT
 ‘They weaved sacks from them to put the grains in.’

Keskin (2023) argues that these structures should be understood as instable “transition types” in the transition from the Turkic to the Indo-European type of subordination.

Now, similar structures have been noted also in non-dominant Turkish(es) in Europe, however, with the authors not really knowing what to do with them. Bohnacker and Karakoç (2020: 182) as well as Şan (2023: 13), for example, cite “non-standard” examples, where Swedish-Turkish bilingual children (in Bohnacker and Karakoç 2020) and the German-Turkish bilingual children (in Şan 2023) combine the (paratactic) causal coordinator *çünkü* with a non-finite adverbial clause. Also Turan et al. (2020: 8) consider as “unconventional use”, where bilingual speakers of Turkish in Germany connect the converb to the main clause by means of a coordinate conjunct.

In a study using the RUEG corpus, Keskin et al. (2024) concentrate on such structures and find an abundance of them in the texts from German-Turkish and English-Turkish bilinguals and adults from Germany and the U.S. Most frequent are the constructions already noted by Bohnacker and Karakoç (2020) and Şan (2023), where a paratactic connector introduces a non-finite clause, see (4).¹²

- (4) Turkish in Germany, bilingual speaker 05FT, informal-spoken
gerek-iyor-muş [*çünkü* *bunlar-a* *şahit ol-duğ-um için*]
 be necessary-PROG-EVID because these-DAT witness-NOM-1SG for
 ‘It was necessary because I witnessed these.’

However, Keskin et al. (2024) also find (with Labrenz et al. (accepted)), an emergence of the use of discourse markers as subordinating connectors in the language use of the bilingual speakers, sometimes in combination with finite clauses, as in (5), sometimes with non-finite clauses, as in (6):

- (5) Turkish in Germany, bilingual speaker 18MT, informal-spoken
anla-dı-n [*yani* *bi çift* *var-dı* *top-lu*]
 understand-PST-2SG CONN/DM a couple exist-PST.3SG ball-COM
 ‘You understood {that/well} there was a couple with a ball.’
- (6) Turkish, in the U.S., bilingual speaker 74FT, formal-spoken
top=la [*işte* *gid-er-ken*] *oynu-yo-du*
 ball=with CONN/DM go-AOR-CVB play-PROG-PST.3SG
 ‘S/he was playing with the ball as he went.’

¹² All examples from the RUEG Corpus (Lüdeling et al. 2024).

Thus, in Turkish as a non-dominant language in Germany and in the U.S. we also find examples of “transient structures”, hybrid structures between the Turkish and the Indo-European type of subordination, instable as they may be. By way of relating structures of Turkish as a non-dominant language in contact in Germany and the U.S. to structures of Turkic languages in other contact scenarios, Keskin et al. (2024) succeed in reinterpreting a phenomenon within the framework of contact-induced dynamics. In the sole focus on the “heritage language”, these structures are either overlooked or somehow set aside as “non-standard” or “unconventional”.

4 Conclusion

The term “heritage language” describes a sociolinguistically specific constellation of language contact – a non-dominant language that exists in close contact with another language, which is the socially dominant language of the respective society. Speakers of this language are native speakers which become bilingual at the latest when they enter the societal institutions, where the dominant language prevails. The term, however is problematic, not only because of the semantics of the word “heritage” and the application of the term “heritage language” exclusively to migrant languages, but also because it creates the impression of some independent area of research. The term blurs the fact that research on these languages and their speakers contributes substantially to bilingualism research, and to language contact research. I propose to use the term “non-dominant language” instead, in order to highlight the particular sociolinguistic relation, which is an issue here (with the other attributes of the non-dominant language – native language, early bilingualism of the speakers prevailing). I have discussed three examples from our research on Turkish as a non-dominant language in contact with German and English. I argue that the examples show how acknowledging the specific sociolinguistic constellation of the non-dominant language Turkish in Western societies contributes to and benefits from language contact research.

Abbreviations

ABL	ablative
ACC	accusative
AOR	aorist
COM	comitative
CONN	connector

CVB	converb
DAT	dative
DIST	deictic form (distal)
DM	discourse marker
EVID	evidential
NOM	nominalizer
PASS	passive
PL	plural
PROG	progressive
PROX	deictic form (proximal)
PST	past tense (preterite)
SG	singular

References

- Antonova-Unlu, Elena, Fatih Bayram. 2023. The role of external factors on the reactivation of the heritage language of Turkish-German returnees. *Frontiers in Psychology* 14. 1156779. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1156779.
- Bárány, András, Irina Nikolaeva. 2020. Possessive and non-identity relations in Turkic switch-reference. *Studies in Language* 44 (3). 606–658. DOI: 10.1075/sl.19061.bar.
- Bayram, Fatih. 2013. *Acquisition of Turkish by heritage speakers. A Processability Approach*. PhD Dissertation. Newcastle University. URI: <http://hdl.handle.net/10443/1905>.
- Bohnacker, Ute & Birsel Karakoç. 2020. Subordination in children acquiring Turkish as a heritage language in Sweden. In Fatih Bayram (ed.), *Studies in Turkish as a Heritage Language*, 155–204. (Studies in Bilingualism 60). Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Cummins, Jim. 1991. Introduction. *Canadian Modern Language Review* 47 (4). 601–605.
- Cummins, Jim. 2005. A proposal for action. Strategies for recognizing heritage language competence as a learning resource within the mainstream classroom. *Modern Language Journal* 89 (4). 585–592.
- Dollnick, Meral. 2013. *Konnektoren in türkischen und deutschen Texten bilingualer Schüler*. Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang.
- Ennsner-Kananen, Johanna & Kendall A. King. 2013. Heritage languages and language policy. In Carol A. Chapelle (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*, 1–6. Wiley. DOI: 10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal0500.pub2.
- Gagarina, Natalia. 2014. Die Erstsprache bei Mehrsprachigen im Migrationskontext. In Solveig Chilla & Stefanie Haberzettl (eds.), *Handbuch Spracherwerb und Sprachentwicklungsstörungen. Mehrsprachigkeit. 1. Auflage*, 19–37. München: Urban & Fischer.
- Givón, Talmy. 1979. *On understanding grammar* (Perspectives in neurolinguistics and psycholinguistics). New York: Academic Press.
- Göksel, Aslı & Celia Kerslake. 2005. *Turkish. A comprehensive grammar* (Routledge comprehensive grammars). London: Routledge.
- Grosjean, François. 1989. Neurolinguists, beware! The bilingual is not two monolinguals in one person. *Brain and Language* 36 (1). 3–15. DOI: 10.1016/0093-934X(89)90048-5.

- Haliloğlu, Neşe. 2017. *Zavet köyü Türk ağızı* [The Turkish dialect of Zavet village]. Ahi Evran University, Kırşehir. MA thesis.
- Iefremenko, Kateryna, Martin Klotz & Christoph Schroeder. 2024. *RUEG subcorpus of Kurmanji Kurdish and Turkish data*. (0.1). Data set. Zenodo. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10810768
- Iefremenko, Kateryna & Christoph Schroeder. 2024. Language Contact. Preprint. *Reference Module in Social Sciences*. DOI: 10.1016/B978-0-323-95504-1.00134-4.
- Iefremenko, Kateryna, Onur Özsoy & Christoph Schroeder. 2024. Paratactic clause combining in heritage Turkish in Germany and the U.S. In Fatma Hülya, Özcan Önder, Tuncay Karalık, Bayram Çibik, İlknur Civan Biçer & Samet Deniz (eds.), *Selected Essays on Turkish Linguistics. The Anadolu Meeting. Proceedings of the 20th International Conference on Turkish Linguistics*, 303–321. (Turcologica 127). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Iefremenko, Kateryna, Christoph Schroeder & Jaklin Kornfilt. 2021. Converbs in heritage Turkish: A contrastive approach. *Nordic Journal of Linguistics* 44(2). 130–154. DOI: 10.1017/S0332586521000160.
- Johanson, Lars. 1995. On Turkish converb clauses. In Martin Haspelmath & Ekkehard König (eds.), *Converbs in cross-linguistic perspective. Structure and meaning of adverbial verb forms-- adverbial participles, gerunds*, 313–348. (Empirical Approaches to Language Typology 13). Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Johanson, Lars. 2021. *Turkic*. (Cambridge Language Surveys). Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kerslake, Celia. 2007. Alternative subordination strategies in Turkish. In Jochen Rehbein, Christiane Hohenstein & Lukas Pietsch (eds.), *Connectivity in Grammar and Discourse*, 231–258. (Hamburg Studies on Multilingualism 5). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins.
- Keskin, Cem. 2023. Transient subordinate clauses in Balkan Turkic in its shift to Standard Average European subordination. Dialectal and historical evidence. *Folia Linguistica* 57(s44-s1). 155–197. DOI: 10.1515/flin-2023-2001.
- Keskin, Cem, Kateryna Iefremenko, Jaklin Kornfilt & Christoph Schroeder. 2024. Hybrid clause combining strategies in Turkish language contacts. *Studia Linguistica*, early view, 1–44. DOI: 10.1111/stul.12256.
- König, Ekkehard & Volker Gast. 2018. *Understanding English-German contrasts*, 4th edn. (ESV Basics 29). Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag.
- Kornfilt, Jaklin. 1997. *Turkish*. (Descriptive Grammars). London: Routledge.
- Labrenz, Annika, Kateryna Iefremenko, Kalliopi Katsika, Christoph Schroeder, Heike Wiese. accepted. Dynamics of discourse markers in language contact. In Mareike Keller, Shanley Allen, Artemis Alexiadou & Heike Wiese (eds.), *Linguistic dynamics in heritage speakers*. (Current Issues in Bilingualism). Berlin: Language Science Press.
- Lüdeling, Anke; Artemis Alexiadou, Shanley Allen, Oliver Bunk, Natalia Gagarina, Sofia Grigoriadou, Rahel Gajaneh Hartz, Kateryna Iefremenko, Esther Jahns, Kalliopi Katsika, Mareike Keller, Martin Klotz, Thomas Krause, Annika Labrenz; Maria Martynova, Onur Özsoy, Tatiana Pashkova, Maria Pohle, Judith Purkharthofer, Vicky Rizou, Christoph Schroeder, Anna Shadrova, Luka Szucsich, Rosemarie Tracy, Wintai Tsehaye, Heike Wiese, Sabine Zerbian, Yulia Zuban & Nadine Zürn. 2024. *RUEG Corpus*. Data set. Zenodo. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.11234583.
- McCarty, Teresa L. 2008. Native American languages as heritage mother tongues. *Language, Culture and Curriculum* 21 (3). 201–225. DOI: 10.1080/07908310802385881.
- Miller, James Edward & Regina Weinert. 2009. *Spontaneous spoken language. Syntax and discourse*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

- Mulík, Stanislav, Mark Amengual, Ricardo Maldonado & Haydée Carrasco-Ortíz. 2022. Hablantes de herencia: ¿una noción aplicable para los indígenas de México? *ELA* 73. 7–37. DOI: 10.22201/enallt.01852647p.2021.73.970.
- Murtaza, Durguyul Metin. 2016. *Razgrad ili Kubrat ilçesi Alevi-Bektaşî köyleri ağızı* [The dialect of the Alevi-Bektaşî villages in Razgrad province Kubrat county]. Trakya University, Edirne. MA thesis.
- Özsoy, Onur, Kateryna Iefremenko & Christoph Schroeder. 2022. Shifting and expanding clause combining strategies in heritage Turkish varieties. *Languages* 7(3). 242. DOI: 10.3390/languages7030242.
- Polinsky, Maria. 1995. Cross-linguistic parallels in language loss. *Southwest Journal of Linguistics* 14. 88–123.
- Polinsky, Maria, Asya Pereltsvaig. 2003. Book Review: E.A. Zemskaja (Ed.) *Jazyk russkogo zarubež'ja* [The Language of the Russian Diaspora]. Moscow/Vienna: Wiener slawistischer Almanach, 2001. (Wiener slawistischer Almanach 53.). *Heritage Language Journal* 1(1). 135–143. DOI: 10.46538/hlj.1.1.7.
- Rothman, Jason. 2009. Understanding the nature and outcomes of early bilingualism: Romance languages as heritage languages. *International Journal of Bilingualism* 13(2). 155–163. DOI: 10.1177/1367006909339814.
- Rothman, Jason, Fatih Bayram, Vincent DeLuca, Grazia Di Pisa, Jon Andoni Duñabeitia, Khadij Gharibi, Jiuzhou Hao, Nadine Kolb, Maki Kubota, Tanja Kupisch, Tim Laméris, Alicia Luque, Brechje van Osch, Sergio Miguel Pereira Soares, Yanina Prystauka, Deniz Tat, Aleksandra Tomić, Tom Voits & Stefanie Wulff. 2022. Monolingual comparative normativity in bilingualism research is out of “control”: Arguments and alternatives. *Applied Psycholinguistics* 44(3). 1–14. DOI: 10.1017/S0142716422000315.
- Rothman, Jason, Fatih Bayram, Vincent DeLuca, Jorge González Alonso, Maki Kubota & Eloi Puig-Mayenco. 2023. Defining bilingualism as a continuum. In Gigi Luk, John A. E. Anderson & John G. Grundy (eds.), *Understanding language and cognition through bilingualism. In honor of Ellen Bialystok*, 38–67. (Studies in Bilingualism, Volume 64). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Şan, Nebiye Hilal. 2023. Subordination in Turkish heritage children with and without developmental language impairment. *Languages* 8(4). 239. DOI: 10.3390/languages8040239.
- Schroeder, Christoph. 2002. On the structure of spoken Turkish. *Essener Linguistische Skripte – elektronisch* 2. 73–90. https://www.uni-due.de/imperia/md/content/elise/ausgabe_1_2002_schroeder.pdf (accessed 6th March 2025)
- Schroeder, Christoph. 2016. Clause combining in Turkish as a minority language in Germany. In Didar Akar, Mine Güven, Meltem Keleşir & Balkız Öztürk (eds.), *Exploring the Turkish linguistic landscape. Essays in honor of Eser Erguvanlı-Taylan*, 81–102. (Studies in language companion series 175). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins.
- Schroeder, Christoph, Kateryna Iefremenko, Kalliopi Katsika, Annika Labrenz & Shanley Allen. accepted. Clause combining in narrative discourse: A contrastive approach. In Mareike Keller, Shanley Allen, Artemis Alexiadou & Heike Wiese (eds.): *Linguistic dynamics in heritage speakers*. (Current Issues in Bilingualism). Berlin: Language Science Press.
- Shadrova, Anna, Pia Linscheid, Julia Lukassek, Anke Lüdeling & Sarah Schneider. 2021. A Challenge for contrastive L1/L2 corpus studies. Large inter- and intra-individual variation across morphological, but not global syntactic categories in task-based corpus data of a homogeneous L1 German group. *Frontiers in Psychology* 12. 716485. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.716485.
- Shah, Sheena, Theresa Biberauer & Erika Herrmann. 2024. *Sixth-generation contact German in South Africa. The case of Kroondal German*. London: EL Publishing.

- Sulçevsi, İsa. 2019. *Kosova Türkçesi ve fiil yapıları* [Kosovar Turkish and its verb forms]. Istanbul University. PhD diss.
- Tagliamonte, Sali. 2016. *Teen talk: The language of adolescents*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tracy, Rosemarie. 2014. Mehrsprachigkeit: Vom Störfall zum Glücksfall. In Manfred Krifka, Joanna Błaszczak, Annette Leßmöllmann, André Meinunger, Barbara Stiebels, Rosemarie Tracy & Hubert Truckenbrodt (eds.), *Das mehrsprachige Klassenzimmer*, 13–33. Berlin/Heidelberg: Springer.
- Treffers-Daller, Jeanine, Sumru A. Özsoy & Roeland van Hout. 2006. Oral language proficiency of Turkish-German bilinguals in Germany and Turkey: An analysis of complex embeddings in Turkish picture descriptions. In Hendrik E. Boeschoten & Lars Johanson (eds.), with the editorial assistance of Sevgi Ağacagül & Vildan Milani. *Turkic languages in contact*, 203–219. (Turcologica 61). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Turan, Dilek, Elena Antonova-Ünlü, Çiğdem Sağın-Şimşek, Mehmet Akkuş. 2020. Looking for contact-induced language change: Converbs in heritage Turkish. *International Journal of Bilingualism* 24 (5–6). 1035–1048. DOI: 10.1177/1367006920926263.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. 2001. *International Round Table “Intangible Cultural Heritage” – Working definitions. Piedmont, Italy, 14 to 17 March 2001. Consultation with member states on “Identification (inventory) and documentation of folklore”*. UNESCO. New York. <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/05303.pdf> (accessed 29th November 2024)
- Wiese, Heike. 2020. Language situations. A method for capturing variation within speakers’ repertoires. In Yoshiyuki Asahi (ed.), *Proceedings of Methods XVI. Papers from the Sixteenth International Conference on Methods in Dialectology 2017*, 105–117. (Bamberger Beiträge zur Englischen Sprachwissenschaft / Bamberg Studies in English Linguistics 59). Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang.
- Wiese, Heike, Artemis Alexiadou, Shanley Allen, Oliver Bunk, Natalia Gagarina, Kateryna Iefremenko, Maria Martynova, Tatiana Pashkova, Vicky Rizou, Christoph Schroeder, Anna Shadrova, Luka Szucsich, Rosemarie Tracy, Wintai Tsehay, Sabine Zerbian & Yulia Zuban. 2022. Heritage speakers as part of the native language continuum. *Frontiers in Psychology* 12. 717973. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.717973.

