



BOOK REVIEWS

РЕЦЕНЗИИ

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Book Review / Рецензия

Review of Silvina Montrul. 2023. *Native Speakers, Interrupted: Differential Object Marking and Language Change in Heritage Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Susanto SUSANTO  *University of Bandar Lampung, Indonesia* susanto@ubl.ac.id

In the intricate tapestry of human societies, linguistic diversity stands as a normative and dynamic facet intricately woven into the fabric of countless communities worldwide. The coexistence of multiple languages within multilingual societies forms a captivating mosaic, offering fertile ground for linguistic research to investigate the nuanced realms of language contact, acquisition, and evolution (Isurin 2021, Kumar & Yunus 2014, Maher 2017, Roziņa 2015, Wu 2020, Zabrodskaia & Ivanova 2021). The interconnectedness of languages in these diverse environments creates a complex interplay, where each linguistic thread contributes to the vibrancy of the overarching linguistic landscape. Linguistic diversity is not a mere peripheral feature but an integral part of human experience, reflecting the rich cultural, historical, and geographical tapestry of societies. Multilingual societies present an intriguing milieu for linguistic exploration, offering researchers a captivating panorama to study the intricate dynamics that unfold when languages come into contact (Aronin & Singleton 2008, Karpava et al. 2021, Tameryan et al. 2022). Language contact, a phenomenon inherent in these diverse environments, leads to a fusion of linguistic elements, resulting in the emergence of hybrid forms, creoles, or the adaptation of certain linguistic features.

Furthermore, the evolution of languages within multilingual societies reflects not only linguistic changes but also socio-cultural transformations that communities



undergo (Aronin & Laoire 2013, Evans 2017, Protassova et al. 2021). The ebb and flow of languages within these environments mirror societal shifts, migrations, and cultural exchanges, providing linguists with valuable insights into the interconnected nature of language and society. As languages adapt and transform, they become living entities shaped by the experiences and interactions of the people who use them (Abbasi et al. 2023, Kravchenko 2019, Lupyan & Dale 2016). In essence, the exploration of linguistic diversity within the tapestry of human societies is a journey that unveils the intricate connections between language, culture, and societal dynamics. The study of language contact, acquisition, and evolution in multilingual settings offers profound insights into the adaptive nature of languages, highlighting their resilience and capacity to evolve in response to the ever-changing landscapes of human interaction and cultural exchange. Silvina Montrul's book, "Native Speakers, Interrupted: Differential Object Marking and Language Change in Heritage Languages", published in 2023, strides into this complex linguistic terrain. It invites readers to unravel the intricacies of mature heritage languages and presents a paradigm shift by steering the discourse away from conventional narratives of heritage languages centered on vulnerability and loss. Instead, the book offers a dynamic understanding of how these languages undergo structural changes.

The book spans twelve chapters, delving into heritage languages, their structural changes, and Differential Object Marking (DOM). The introduction underscores linguistic diversity's normative nature, framing discussions in the context of language contact, acquisition, and evolution.

Chapter 1 addresses characterizing heritage speakers, challenging assumptions about their proficiency. The chapter explores diverse measures—language use patterns, self-ratings, tests—evaluating grammatical accuracy, fluency, vocabulary, and discourse competence. Challenging linguistic norms, a typology includes heritage speakers as native speakers due to early exposure. This foundational chapter sets the stage for exploring heritage languages, emphasizing complexities in heritage speakers' linguistic journey.

In Chapter 2 Montrul examines structural changes in heritage language grammars, focusing on bilingual or multilingual native speakers with early exposure to the heritage language. Highlighting variability in linguistic proficiency among heritage speakers in early adulthood, she emphasizes differences from monolingual native speakers. The chapter investigates alterations in heritage language grammars, drawing comparisons with first-generation immigrants as a baseline. Factors contributing to linguistic transformations include both internal (influence of dominant language, challenges in language processing) and external (linguistic exposure, input factors). The chapter introduces a typology of changes in heritage language grammars, covering various linguistic aspects. Comparing heritage speakers to first-generation immigrants aids in understanding continuity and discontinuity in language transmission. In the chapter, the author advocates for the ecological validity of this comparison, recognizing first-generation immigrants

as primary input providers. This approach provides insight into the structural nature of heritage languages and potential changes transmitted across generations.

Chapter 3 discusses Differential Object Marking (DOM), a linguistic phenomenon observed worldwide in which certain direct objects receive overt marking, rendering them semantically or pragmatically salient. DOM in Spanish, Romanian, and Hindi is introduced in this chapter, with these languages depicted as having two-dimensional systems triggered by animacy and referentiality. Syntactic synchronic analyses and the diachronic evolution of DOM in language contact are examined. While DOM is found in languages such as Turkish, Finnish, Hebrew, Spanish, Romanian, Hindi, Mongolian, Guaraní, and Amharic, it is absent in English, German, Japanese, and French. Diverse means of morphological marking in DOM languages are explained, and triggering factors such as animacy and referentiality are highlighted. Examples in Spanish, Romanian, Hindi, Turkish, and Basque are provided to illustrate differentiation based on animacy and referentiality. Variability across languages is underscored, with restrictive and extensive DOM systems noted.

The relationship between individual language acquisition and macro-linguistic change is analyzed, in Chapter 4, with a focus on Differential Object Marking (DOM). The chapter explores the psycholinguistic aspects of DOM acquisition and its impact on sociolinguistic and diachronic shifts. The author summarizes key parameters defining DOM across languages and reviews research contributing to its understanding in typology, synchrony, and diachrony. The chapter addresses the semantic and pragmatic complexity of DOM and examines its acquisition by monolingual children. The question is raised as to whether principles guiding diachronic DOM developments also constrain individual language development. Emphasizing the role of language contact and bilingualism in macro-sociolinguistic change, the chapter reviews DOM studies in first (L1) and second (L2) language acquisition, alongside sociohistorical language change. Recent research extends beyond Spanish, broadening the scope to include other languages.

In Chapter 5 the author looks into the vulnerability of Differential Object Marking (DOM) in Spanish, Hindi, and Romanian heritage languages. The susceptibility of DOM to language change, particularly in contact situations, is investigated. The chapter notes a diachronic trend in some monolingual Spanish varieties, expanding DOM to include inanimate objects. Conversely, bilingual Spanish varieties exhibit variation and notable omission rates in heritage speakers, possibly influenced by the low acoustic salience of the Spanish DOM marker “a”. A cross-linguistic and cross-generational study on DOM in these languages is introduced, aiming to clarify the linguistic and situational factors contributing to DOM erosion. Key questions address the influence of perceptual salience and childhood language use on DOM vulnerability. Two hypotheses navigate the acoustic salience of DOM markers and the impact of input factors on heritage speakers’ DOM vulnerability. The chapter outlines research questions, hypotheses, and methodology, with main results promised in subsequent chapters. The study, comparing heritage languages using a shared grammatical domain and diverse

bilingual onset ages, offers innovative insights. The cross-generational aspect involves adult first-generation immigrants, heritage speakers, and homeland native speakers.

Chapter 6 examines Differential Object Marking (DOM) in Spanish heritage language, aiming to confirm DOM omission in bilingual individuals. It assesses prior findings on potential DOM omission in Spanish–English bilinguals and young adult heritage speakers, testing the consistency of DOM erosion across various heritage speaker groups. While hypotheses regarding parental influence on heritage language existed, there were no studies on DOM attrition in adult immigrants during the conception of the Spanish study. Including first-generation immigrants tests the language transmission hypothesis. Referring to Chamorro et al.’s (2016) study on adult Spanish immigrants to the UK, the chapter finds no attrition effects in offline and eye-tracking tasks. The conclusion challenges DOM attrition in Spanish and examines factors like bilingualism onset age for a comprehensive understanding of DOM in Spanish heritage speakers.

In Chapter 7 Montrul explores Differential Object Marking (DOM) in Hindi as a heritage language, investigating its vulnerability in Hindi heritage speakers. The study contributes to the book’s argument by showing that some Hindi heritage speakers omit DOM in linguistic tasks. In contrast to Spanish-speaking Mexican immigrants in the previous chapter, there’s no evidence of ongoing language change or DOM attrition in Hindi in the homeland or among adult immigrants. The chapter briefly outlines sociolinguistic characteristics of the Hindi/Urdu-speaking population in the U.S. for context.

Chapter 8 investigates Differential Object Marking (DOM) and clitic doubling in Romanian as a heritage language. It investigates if DOM, vulnerable in Spanish and Hindi heritage speakers, follows similar patterns in Romanian heritage speakers. The chapter notes the smaller Romanian-speaking population in the US compared to Spanish and Hindi speakers but highlights their relatively strong language skills. Results show first-generation Romanian immigrants’ linguistic accuracy comparable to Romanian speakers in Romania. Like the Hindi study, there’s no evidence of language change in the homeland or attrition in sampled immigrants. However, the chapter observes DOM and accusative clitic doubling vulnerability in Romanian heritage speakers, especially those exposed to English since birth. Sociolinguistic characteristics and linguistic tasks provide a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic environment and study results.

In Chapter 9 Montrul compares findings from studies on Differential Object Marking (DOM) in Spanish, Hindi, and Romanian heritage languages, exploring DOM vulnerability influenced by English. The author reveals DOM vulnerability in Spanish, Hindi, and Romanian, with variations in omission degrees, often influenced by DOM properties and situational factors. Notably, language-specific markers (Spanish “a”, Hindi “-ko”, Romanian “pe”) are more omitted in DOM contexts. DOM vulnerability appears linked to syntactic, semantic, and morphological complexity, not acoustic salience. Differences are examined, such as DOM expansion in Mexican Spanish but not in Hindi and Romanian homeland

varieties. The chapter examines these distinctions, considering bilingual onset age, and discusses trends in heritage speakers and first-generation immigrants. Evidence of L1 attrition is found in Spanish-speaking Mexican immigrants, contrasting with the absence of DOM attrition in first-generation Hindi and Romanian immigrants. Background variables related to language use patterns are compared between heritage and immigrant groups. A follow-up study confirms attrition in Mexican immigrants and suggests stable dialectal features in Spanish in the United States.

Chapter 10 scrutinizes Differential Object Marking (DOM) intergenerational transmission in Spanish, Hindi, and Romanian heritage languages in the U.S. It scrutinizes DOM patterns in second-generation immigrants, revealing notable variations. Spanish, having more speakers, shows significant variability and potential change, linked to the Linguistic Niche Hypothesis proposing more speakers lead to morphological simplification. The study analyses Spanish DOM erosion compared to Hindi and Romanian, attributing it to the larger, diverse speaker base. It provides a nuanced analysis, emphasizing DOM vulnerability in Spanish at the individual level. The chapter presents evidence of ongoing language change, with diverse DOM accuracy among speakers and potential shifts observed in the first-generation immigrant group. The implications chapter discusses the intricate link between synchronic variability in heritage language grammars and diachronic language change. The study's implications extend to theoretical linguistic models, understanding language acquisition mechanisms, transmission processes, and diachronic language change. Furthermore, the findings hold broader significance for language policies and the education of minority language speakers in the United States.

The book extensively explores Spanish, Hindi, and Romanian heritage languages in the United States, particularly focusing on Differential Object Marking (DOM) for insights into structural changes. It challenges traditional views on heritage languages, shifting from narratives of vulnerability to a dynamic understanding of their evolution. Employing innovative methods like linguistic questionnaires and tasks, it includes diverse speakers, varying bilingual onset ages, and comparison groups, providing nuanced insights. The cross-linguistic study of DOM in three languages enriches understanding within a shared grammatical domain. The interdisciplinary approach integrates linguistics, language acquisition, and sociolinguistics, enhancing the exploration of heritage languages and their role in language change.

However, the book's emphasis on specific heritage languages and the grammatical phenomenon DOM may limit generalizability to other languages or features. Acknowledging potential variations across linguistic contexts would enhance its applicability. While implications for language policies and minority education are mentioned, a more detailed exploration of recommendations would enrich discussions. The technical nature and linguistic terminology might be challenging for non-linguists; a more accessible presentation of key concepts could broaden the audience. The book primarily focuses on linguistic aspects, lacking exploration of broader socio-cultural dimensions influencing heritage language

dynamics. A more comprehensive examination of these factors would enhance its holistic perspective. Relying heavily on linguistic tasks and questionnaires may limit capturing the full complexity of language use and proficiency. Incorporating qualitative methods or real-world language observations could strengthen the empirical basis.

In conclusion, Silvina Montrul's "Native Speakers, Interrupted: Differential Object Marking and Language Change in Heritage Languages" studies heritage language dynamics, especially Differential Object Marking (DOM), challenging conventional narratives and enriching our view of linguistic diversity. While insightful for specific languages, its generalizability may be limited, necessitating acknowledgment of potential variations across linguistic contexts. The book's implications for language policies and minority education, though mentioned, could be more detailed. The technical language may challenge non-linguists; hence, a more accessible presentation could broaden its audience. The focus on linguistic aspects, with limited exploration of broader socio-cultural dimensions, warrants a more comprehensive examination. Strengthening empirical basis through qualitative methods would better capture language complexity. Despite these, Montrul's interdisciplinary work offers nuanced insights into heritage languages, challenging traditional views and contributing to our understanding of language change.

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Susanto SUSANTO is Associate Professor at the English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Bandar Lampung (UBL), Indonesia. He is also the Head of the Centre for Studies in Linguistics UBL. He obtained a PhD degree in Linguistics and Phonetics from the English and Foreign Languages University, India. His research interests include phonetics, phonology, language variation, and language change.

e-mail: susanto@ubl.ac.id

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4551-0760>

Сведения об авторе:

Сусанто СУСАНТО – доцент кафедры преподавания английского языка факультета педагогики и образования Университета Бандар-Лампунг (UBL), Индонезия. Руководит Центром лингвистических исследований в UBL. Получил степень PhD по лингвистике и фонетике в Университете английского языка и иностранных языков (Индия). Его научные интересы включают фонетику, фонологию, языковые вариации и языковые изменения.

e-mail: susanto@ubl.ac.id

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4551-0760>