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Remy van Rijswijk

The strength of a weaker first language



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The strength of a weaker first language

Language production and comprehension by Turkish heritage speakers in the Netherlands

When people immigrate to another society, new interactions between languages arise. The children of immigrants are referred to as heritage speakers: they are bilinguals who inherited their first language (L1) from their parents. Yet, the second language (L2) of heritage speakers often becomes their dominant language, because it is the official language of the society they live in. Whereas most previous studies in linguistics involved the L1 of heritage speakers, the present doctoral thesis focused on the L2, by making a comparison between the Dutch of adult second-generation Turkish heritage speakers and the Dutch of Dutch L1 speakers. Specifically, the thesis examined whether a weaker heritage language affects the dominant L2. This central question was investigated by answering the following sub-questions: Which characteristics define typical heritage speakers and how can we describe their L1 and their L2?; How do Turkish heritage speakers (prosodically) mark focus while speaking in Dutch?; How do Turkish heritage speakers interpret focus while reading in Dutch?; and: How do Turkish heritage speakers process Turkish-Dutch cognates with varying word stress positions while listening in Turkish and Dutch? To answer these questions, various linguistic and psycholinguistic research techniques were used, such as acoustic analyses of speech, eye-tracking, reaction time measurements, and EEG. The thesis reports on a thrilling competition between the strength of the L1 versus the dominance of the L2, and demonstrates that the way in which Turkish heritage speakers in the Netherlands speak, read, and listen in their dominant L2 is affected by the weaker L1. These findings have theoretical consequences for models of bilingualism as well as more practical implications for the language acquisition process of immigrant children.

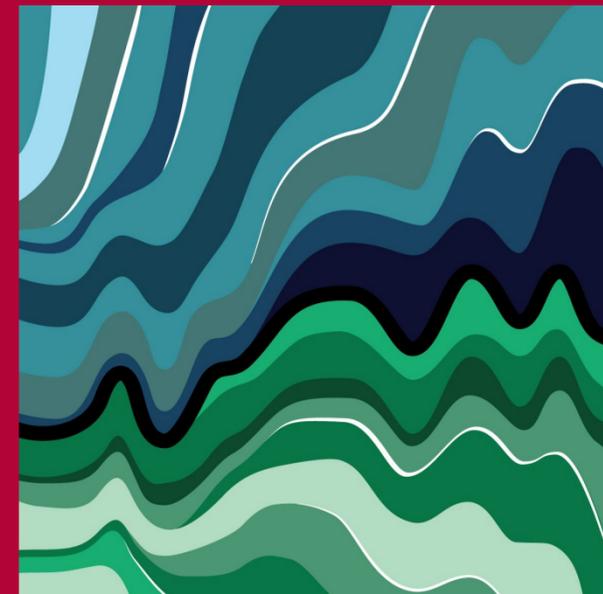
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CLS | Centre for Language Studies
Radboud University



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