

Who are heritage speakers and what do they know?

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In this talk, I first consider some definitions of a heritage speaker in recent research, and focus on the concept of a heritage speaker as a bilingual speaker with different degrees of command of the two languages. I will then discuss in particular the case of 2nd generation heritage speakers, those born in raised in the majority-speaking environment because these are the speakers that exhibit clear signs of language shift and language loss in progress. Moreover, these speakers tend to enroll in classes to (re)gain skill in their family language. By focusing on psycholinguistic studies of Spanish heritage speakers and Spanish L2 acquisition, in the third part of the talk I will discuss the results of recent research documenting the type of linguistic knowledge these speakers possess as well as some gaps that could potentially be addressed in language classrooms.