

The nascent development of an indefinite article in heritage varieties of Croatian

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Abstract:

Typologically, some languages possess articles as a category while others don't. Traditional descriptions of Slavic languages typically view them as 'article-less', except for Macedonian and Bulgarian due to long-standing contact with languages of the Balkan Sprachbund. Similarly, Upper Sorbian and Molise Croatian (Breu 2012), developed an indefinite article due to intense contact with German and Italian, respectively.

Some descriptions of Slavic languages point to the use of the numeral 'one' performing a role that goes beyond that of quantification, i.e. presentative marker (Polish, Russian), specific marker (Czech), sometimes also non-specific marker (Macedonian, Bulgarian), but not yet that of generalized article. Studies of contemporary homeland Croatian show that *jedan* 'one' is used as a specific and even non-specific marker (Silić 1992, and Belaj and Martovac 2015)

Grammaticalization of forms such as *one* as an indefinite article has been observed to occur over centuries (Heine and Kuteva 2005), but Błaszczuk (2015) reports that within one generation, Polish-German bilinguals regularly use *ten* 'this' and *jeden* 'one' when speaking Polish as a feature of definiteness/indefiniteness based on German.

This paper examines the speech of heritage speakers of Croatian in Argentina, Austria, Australia, Canada and Italy in contact with Spanish, German, English and Italian. We examine whether cross-linguistic influence is apparent in the speech of heritage speakers. A corpus of recorded semi-structured interviews/interactions was subjected to analysis in relation to lexical and morphosyntactic features including indefinite determiner marking via *jedan*. This paper reports on its occurrence in speakers' speech and its function as a specific, non-specific marker and even as a generalizable article that can occur with abstract nouns amongst some Spanish-Croatian bilinguals. The paper concludes by matching changes occurring in the homeland and in the diaspora in relation to rapidity and degree of innovation.

References:

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