Chapter 9

Minimizing (Interface) Domains: The Loss of Long-Distance Binding in North American Icelandic*

Michael T. Putnam and Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir

1 Introduction

As has been discussed in the literature on heritage grammars from formal, functional, and experimental perspectives, heritage grammars often display significant divergence from monolingual control grammars with respect to interface properties, i.e., grammatical properties that involve the interplay and activation of two (and sometimes more) modules of grammatical knowledge (e.g., morphology, syntax, semantics, phonology, etc.) (see, e.g., Sorace 2004, 2011; Schmid and Köpke 2007; Montrul 2009, 2011). The culprit of these divergent aspects of heritage grammar, where "divergence" is only applied when establishing a direct comparison with a monolingual control group, has been attributed to a number of potential factors, such as the incomplete acquisition of certain grammatical features (Polinsky 1997, 2006; Larsson and Johannessen this volume; and Montrul 2002, 2004, 2008, 2009, 2011), the lack of activation of a grammar throughout the course of a lifespan, or a combination of these factors (Rothman 2009, Pascual y Cabo 2012, Putnam and Sánchez 2013). Within this growing literature on heritage grammars and language attrition, one point of consent in this research program is the acknowledgment that heritage grammars appear to be “simplified” when compared with their monolingual counterparts.1

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1 Invoking any notion of “simplicity” when comparing bi/multilingual grammars with monolingual control groups should be done with extremely caution, mainly due to the warning
In this chapter, we take a closer look at pilot data from North American Icelandic (hereafter NA Icelandic) with respect to its anaphoric binding properties. NA Icelandic is predominantly spoken today in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, North Dakota, and areas of the West Coast of North America. Icelandic immigrants came to North America with the intention of forming a “New Iceland.” Approximately 15,000 Icelanders settled in the US and Canada between 1873–1914 (Kristinsson 1983). The variety of Icelandic still spoken as a heritage language in these aforementioned settlements appears to be in the final stages of attrition. Informants for this study were 34 English-dominant bilinguals, who acquired Icelandic as children and did not receive formal instruction in Icelandic. As pointed out by Arnbjörnsdóttir (2006), and as has been pointed out in the literature on heritage grammars to date, NA Icelandic diverges in many ways from its European counterpart (hereafter, European Icelandic). As we discuss in more detail in this chapter, one characteristic lacking in NA Icelandic (but still available to European Icelandic speakers) is long-distance binding; i.e., although (short/normal) anaphoric binding continues to exist in NA Icelandic, the long-distance variant appears to no longer exist in the heritage variant of this grammar.

As established by previous research in this area, binding interpretations can be affected under L1 attrition in first-generation immigrants who move to the L2 environment as adults (Gürel 2002, 2004). Gürel's tested adult L1 Turkish speakers who resided in an English-speaking country for more than 10 years. Her results demonstrate that cross-linguistic transfer in binding relations involving pronouns (Principle B) is due to extended contact with English.1 Kim et al. (2009), who base their study primarily on seminal research conducted by Song et al. (1997) and Cole, Hermon and Sung (1990), test the long-distance and local interpretations of three different Korean anaphors (e.g., caki, casin, and caki-casin). In this study, 51 Korean-English bilinguals raised in Korean-speaking families in the US (22 early bilinguals and 29 late bilinguals) together w/ a control group of 34 monolingual Korean speakers raised in Korean. According to their results, overall bilinguals maintain the long-distance vs. local distinction. There was also a tendency among early bilinguals to choose more local binding overall compared to the late bilinguals and Korean monolinguals. At the individual level, many early bilinguals failed to differentiate

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1 Gürel (2007) failed to find a similar loss in binding interpretations for English speakers residing in Turkey for an extended period of time. She hypothesizes that L1 attrition could affect the domain of syntax (binding) to some extent under extensive L2 input and limited L1 input.