Janne Bondi Johannessen and Joseph C. Salmons (eds.)

This anthology contains a collection of papers focused on issues in Germanic languages spoken by immigrant communities (and their descendants) in North America. The volume, edited by Janne Bondi Johannessen and Joseph C. Salmons, is organized into five thematic sections, and contains 17 articles. It also includes an introductory essay by the editors, and index material at the end of the book. The volume makes an excellent contribution both to the study of heritage languages and language contact, and to Germanic linguistics. While each of the articles could easily stand alone as a valuable scholarly contribution in another forum, a synergy is created from bringing them together in a single volume. The foci and methodologies of the articles are quite distinct, yet from the totality of the collection the reader emerges with a deeper understanding of the larger picture of the dynamics and the nuts-and-bolts of heritage languages in North America, focusing on “the critical issues that underlie the notion of ‘heritage language’: acquisition, attrition and change” (editors’ essay, p. 2). The five thematic sections are: Part i. Acquisition and attrition; Part ii. Phonetic and Phonological change; Part iii. (Morpho-)syntactic and pragmatic change; Part iv. Lexical change; Part v. Variation and real-time change.

The editors’ introductory essay situates the larger object of study—Germanic heritage languages in North America—within scholarly and historical contexts, as well as provides basic backgrounds of the languages under study in the anthology, as pertains to their existence in North America: Dutch, German, Icelandic, Norwegian, Pennsylvania Dutch, Swedish, West Frisian, and Yiddish. The editors note that this volume is a result of several years of collaboration among scholars, including workshops held at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, the University of Oslo, Pennsylvania State University, University of Iceland, and University of California Los Angeles, and that additional volumes are in preparation.

Part i. Acquisition and attrition, contains three articles. The first article, “Word order variation in Norwegian possessive constructions: Bilingual acquisition and attrition,” by Marit Westergaard and Merete Anderssen, looks at the acquisition of possessive constructions among bilingual children in Norway and the United States. The two possessive constructions permitted—prenominal (e.g., min bil ‘my car’) vs. postnominal (e.g., bilen min ‘my car’, lit.
car-the-my) involve different syntactic structures with presumed different levels of complexity. The authors look at expected vs. unexpected orders of acquisition among the bilingual children in Norway and in the United States, and conclude that both linguistic complexity and frequency of occurrence play a role in acquisition orders of the test group. The second article, “Attrition in an American Norwegian heritage language speaker,” by Janne Bondi Johannessen, focuses on one “elderly bilingual lady”, a speaker of Heritage Norwegian and English. The author uses the speech production of this woman as a test case for testing Jakobson’s (1941) regression hypothesis, namely, that what is learned first (in childhood) is retained longest, and that what is learned later is lost earlier in attrition. The author provides background discussion on the order of grammatical acquisition in Norwegian, which sets the stage for her in-depth examination of the informant’s speech. Johannessen looks at issues in NP definiteness, as well as several issues related to V2, e.g., topicalization, negation, target V3 in subordinate clauses, as well as other topics. The third article, “Reexamining Icelandic as a heritage language in North America,” by Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, provides a general overview of the situation of Icelandic in North America, the history, geography, and demographics of this heritage language, and to scholarship on this topic. Additionally, the author gives the reader several interesting points to ponder, such as that North American Icelandic shows “surprisingly little attrition in its morphology” (p. 82), and also that proper names typically do not show the expected inflections. The author goes on to provide examples and discussion from other areas of grammar, such as anaphoric binding, subjunctive, syntax, as well as from the phonetics and phonology.

Part II. Phonetic and phonological change, contains two articles. The first article, “Heritage language obstruent phonetics and phonology,” by Brent Allen and Joseph Salmons, focuses on a comparative examination of voicing distinctions in consonants in American English and Norwegian, and then looks in-depth at American bilinguals in Norwegian and English. The paper offers meticulous acoustic discussion of the phonological issues under examination. Among many others, one particularly nice point is made in the discussion on vowel length before final fortis vs. lenis consonant, comparing Norwegian, English, and the English of Norwegian heritage speakers (p. 111). The second article, “The history of front rounded vowels in New Braunfels German,” by Marc Pierce, Hans Boas and Karen Roesch, looks at the maintenance and/or loss of front rounded vowels in this variety of Texas German from several perspectives, including dialect history, markedness, language contact, as well as the sociolinguistics within the community. The authors provide background