**The Dynamics and Importance of Individual Differences in Heritage Language Bilingualism**

While there are clear commonalities in the grammars of individuals speakers of any given language, there is also a spectrum of individual differences (IDs) that defines linguistic performance and competence outcomes across all types of speakers. Perhaps the IDs spectrum is more profound in bi-/multilinguals, but even so IDs should not be random. In principle, they are governed by a set of (dynamic) variables we do not quite yet fully understand.

Herein, I will focus on heritage language (HL) bilinguals—individuals who acquire the home/minority HL naturalistically in early childhood. Research demonstrates not only that HL aggregates typically display differences to L1-dominant homeland user groups (Montrul, 2008; 2016; Polinsky, 2018), but also that significant HL IDs are ubiquitious (Kupisch & Rothman, 2018; Paradis, 2023) as evidenced by reported ranges, standard deviations, and participant-level random effects in multilevel modelling. In this talk, I will present a landscape of HL studies that endeavors to contextualize, investigate and capitalize on the theoretical value of diving deeply into charting and understanding HL ID correlations.

Showcasing research from our lab that captures our historical and current approach to investigating IDs in HL bilingualism, I will review data from two projects: (i) one on Turkish as a HL in Germany with older children (8-13 years old) and another, especially large-scale, study (n=400+) on Japanese-English and Japanese-German HL bilinguals from 4-18 years old. Indeed, we observe significant IDs and analyses show that they are not random. Yet, as we might expect, there is no one-size-fits-all (set of) variable(s) that is explanatory for everything. Rather, the (weighting and/or interaction of) variables that regress to cover IDs depend on ***what*** (the domain of language), ***when*** (timing/age), ***who*** (the profiles of HL bilinguals) and ***where*** (e.g., important differences of location that delimit exposure/usage) we are investigating. With this backdrop, we will discuss the implications of delving into HL IDs has for theoretical questions/discussions/debates as well as methodological and practical issues (e.g. the appriorateness of baselines, how to interpret differences, querying default aggregate comparisons as the norm, how to capitalize on revealing sources of IDs for HL maintainence, etc.)