An interview with…

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Naomi L. Shin is an Associate Professor of Linguistics and Hispanic Linguistics at the University of New Mexico. Her primary interests include child language acquisition, bilingualism, language contact, and sociolinguistics. Her research focuses on patterns of morphosyntactic variation, examining how these patterns are acquired during childhood and how they change in situations of language contact. Her articles have appeared in journals such as *Journal of Child Language, Cognitive Linguistics, International Journal of Bilingualism, Language Acquisition, Language Variation and Change, Language in Society, Foreign Language Annals, Spanish in Context, Studies in Hispanic and Lusophone Linguistics*, and *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*. She is the co-author of *Gramática Española: Variación Social*, which explores grammar in a way that emphasizes the social underpinnings of language.

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***Isogloss*: What do you think is the status of Romance linguistics at the moment?**

NS: I see the field of Linguistics as a whole and Romance linguistics more specifically shifting in terms of what data we rely on to inform our understanding of linguistic phenomena. When I started studying Linguistics in the late 1990's, many linguists still tended to rely solely on grammaticality judgments (often their own judgments). In the "Age of Big Data" more and more linguists are embracing corpus data and natural language use. For example, at the recent *Linguistic Symposium on Romance Linguistics* (LSRL 50), one of the three keynote talks was by a computational linguist, Thamar Solorio, another one was by Zsuzsanna Fagyal, whose work is prominent among variationist sociolinguists, and Jacqueline Serigos ran a data science workshop. The move towards usage data creates a common ground among linguists who hail from different theoretical backgrounds. In the field of child language acquisition, for example, usage-based acquisitionists like Elena Lieven and generative acquisitionists like Charles Yang rely on corpus data to investigate the relationship between the input that children are exposed to and how children's grammars develop. Even though the conclusions reached by usage-based and generative acquisitionists may diverge, any

study that includes language usage will be of interest to scholars who subscribe to either tradition.

Another important and ongoing shift is the attention paid to sociolinguistic variation. While language variation has long been of interest to all linguists (e.g., see interviews with Cornips and Cinque in this journal), the increasing reliance on language use amplifies the central importance of what is typically called "sociolinguistic variation". Labov (1997: 23) writes that he "resisted the term sociolinguistics for many years, since it implies that there can be a successful linguistic theory or practice which is not social." In other words, sociolinguistics is linguistics. In a similar vein, sociolinguistic variation is linguistic variation. In fact, numerous scholars of Romance Linguistics use Labovian variationist tools to discover the nature of grammar, how grammar develops during language acquisition, and whether/how it changes in situations of language contact (e.g., Carvalho 2016, Erker & Otheguy 2016, Geeslin 2018, Guy 2018, Nagy et al. 2011, Otheguy & Zentella 2012, Poplack & Levey 2010, Poplack & Torres Cacoullos 2015, Poplack et al. 2018, Requena & Dracos 2018, Schwenter 2011, Shin 2016, Torres Cacoullos & Travis 2018, Travis & Torres Cacoullos 2012).

Finally, several scholars of Romance linguistics who study bilingualism and minority languages continue to challenge the concept of the monolingual variety as the norm and the bilingual varieties as incomplete versions of the monolingual one. As Otheguy (2016: 301) writes "what we observe in second-generation bilingual Latinos [in the U.S.] is not errors, as they are frequently described in the literature, but rather points of divergence between their Spanish and that of the previous generation, due to normal intergenerational language change accelerated by conditions of language contact". With the ongoing efforts to diversify the field of Linguistics, we will likely (and hopefully) see more research that eschews the concept of the monolingual speaker as the norm or default.

Isogloss: **What are the big questions we should be tackling?**

NS: How can we incorporate morphosyntactic variation into theories of how grammar is represented in the mind and how it develops during childhood? By morphosyntactic variation, I mean probabilistic grammatical patterning. Consider the age-old, but still useful, example of grammatical subject expression and omission. In the past, linguists were concerned with how children learn whether their language allows subject pronoun omission (e.g., Hyams 1986, Valian, 1991). But there is far more to learn than whether the insertion of a pronoun is an option. For example, over 50 variationist studies of when Spanish-speaking adults omit or express subject pronouns have revealed highly systematic patterns across individuals and across communities, with numerous linguistic factors probabilistically constraining usage (e.g., Carvalho et al. 2015). As Poplack (2018: 30) writes, "the evidence we have been accruing from years of systematic confrontation with the data of morphosyntactic variation in spontaneous speech … reveals robust [and highly systematic] variability." Given the systematicity of the probabilistic patterns of morphosyntactic variation, one can argue that these patterns are part of speakers' mental grammars, or put more simply, part of what a speaker knows when she knows a language. Thus, we can ask: how are such patterns represented in the mind and how are they acquired? As Guy (2018: 46) puts it, "the

linguistic system that the child learns is not invariant and discrete, but rather is one that recognizes, incorporates, manipulates, and generates variability." How do children learn such a system? I believe usage-based, associative models are well-equipped to handle such variability (see Kapatsinski 2018). From these models, we can derive testable hypotheses regarding how morphosyntactic variation develops during childhood. Karen Miller and I have recently outlined hypothesized stages of development of morphosyntactic variation (Shin & Miller, forthcoming). We hope our proposal will generate exciting research in this area.

Isogloss: **What are the most important achievements in our field in the last 20 years?**

NS: Usage-based and sociolinguistic approaches have been gaining ground during the past 20 years, and this has set the stage for a strong commitment to the reliance on language use as the primary source of data. With that shift comes an increased attention to language users, that is, speakers and communities. Observing and documenting what people do with language forces us to adjust our theories of how language works. For expository purposes, consider subject expression again. For a long time, linguists were content to box languages into discrete categories like "pro-drop" and "non-pro-drop". But extensive empirical research has rendered such a categorical view untenable; subject expression is a gradient phenomenon across languages and varieties (Torres Cacoullos & Travis 2018).

   The field of phonology also illustrates how studies of language use have changed our understanding of language itself. In the late 1990's I was taught that phonetics was irrelevant to the study of phonology (see Diehl's 1981 description of this view). But Laboratory phonology has completely upended the field and has raised important questions about traditional ideas about phonemes. For example, laboratory-based research on coda –s in Spanish has shown that speakers do not produce coda –s as one of three discrete categories (typically described as [s, h, Ø]); instead coda –s realization is best described as a gradient phenomenon (Erker 2012, File-Muriel & Brown 2011), and it is only by treating it as such that its patterning is fully revealed. The ubiquity of linguistic variation and the gradience of linguistic phenomena present serious problems for traditional models that rely on overly categorical notions and increase the appeal of usage-based models (e.g., Bybee 1985, 2007, Kapatsinski 2018).

Isogloss: **What do you think are the most important contributions of Romance linguistics to linguistic theory in general?**

NS: There is a wealth of diachronic and synchronic data available for Romance languages. This enables us to study language variation and change in depth. For example, Romance languages have played a central role in furthering our understanding grammaticalization paths (Bybee 2015, Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994). Romance languages have also been in contact with many languages across the globe, providing abundant opportunities to study bilingualism and the outcomes of language contact. Studies of bilingual children who speak at least one Romance language abound in the fields of bilingual and child heritage language acquisition, and

have informed our understanding of how factors such as input, language dominance, and cross-linguistic influence shape the development of grammar during childhood (e.g., Castilla-Earls et al. 2020, Cuza 2016, Cuza & Pérez-Tattam 2016, Fernández Fuertes & Liceras 2018, Montrul & Potowski 2007, Pérez-Leroux et al. 2018, Pirvulescu et al. 2014, Sánchez 2019, Serratrice 2018, Shin et al. 2019, Silva-Corvalán 2014, among many others). Research on Spanish in Latin America continues to generate new knowledge regarding the ways in which language contact results in innovative grammatical constructions and innovations in language use patterns (e.g., Escobar 2018, Mayer & Sánchez 2017, Vallejos 2019).

Isogloss: **How do you see experimental methods contributing to theoretical issues?**

NS: I'm a strong proponent of multi-pronged approaches to research. There are many situations in which experimental methods are indispensable. Consider, for example, relatively infrequent grammatical constructions. Whereas corpus studies of frequent phenomena like subject pronoun expression or subject-verb word order will include at least 1,000 tokens, less frequent constructions like second person singular preterit forms are harder to find 'in the wild', that is, in natural language production. As such, we need to employ elicitation tasks to study infrequent constructions.

Experimental methods are crucial for studying language processing. For example, there is now abundant evidence that both languages remain activated during bilingual language processing (Kroll, Bobb, & Hoshino 2014, Morford et al. 2017). Eye-tracking studies have shown that bilinguals' experiences with code-switching influences how they process language (Valdés Kroff et al. 2017). Such findings are crucial for models of language representation and processing and may help explain bilingual language acquisition and contact-induced language change.
Experimental studies also inform our understanding of specific linguistic phenomena. Research on the processing of gender has informed debates regarding the status of grammatical gender itself; for example, experimental studies lend strong support for the view that masculine is the default gender in Spanish (Beatty-Martínez & Dussias 2019).

Isogloss: **What are the challenges that lie ahead, for the field of Romance linguistics?**

NS: An important challenge for Romance linguistics and for Linguistics in general is to diversify our field. Scholars of Hispanic Linguistics in the United States are in a good position to help advance this goal by addressing Ana Celia Zentella's (2018: 192-193) call to action; she writes:

> "When members of racial/ethnic and language minorities clarify and draw upon the difficulties they face in an increasingly English-only nation in their analyses, they enhance our ability to address questions regarding language acquisition, proficiency levels and loss, as well as language reclamation, language education, and language policy. But the disturbing figures regarding educational achievement in our communities reveal a major hurdle that must

be overcome before the ranks of LatinU [cf. Latino/a/e/x] linguists can increase: although 86% of Hispanic students were born in the US, and the vast majority are fluent in English, their high school graduation rates are low (76.3 % in 2013-14) (US Department of Education, 2015), only 13% have a bachelor degree, and only 4% have completed a graduate or professional degree (Díaz-Campos, 2016). … I take these data to be a call to action. One part of the solution involves the recruitment and training of future linguists who can teach and work with educators and professionals in the legal, health, and social service fields to ensure that LatinUs succeed in school and on the job, and live healthy lives. And encouraging LatinUs to become excited about the study of language can help ensure their academic success."

Here at UNM we recently set up a fund called the Latinx Linguists' Fund, which aims to address Zentella's (2018) call to action.

We can also diversify our field by increasing our knowledge about languages that are being displaced by Romance languages. For example, scholars whose research involves fieldwork among indigenous communities in Latin America can increase the representation of indigenous peoples in our field, clarify the role that indigenous languages have in shaping Romance language varieties, and advance our general understanding of linguistic typology and diversity (e.g., Vallejos 2014).

Isogloss: **What would you do if you had an unlimited budget for your research?**

NS: I enjoy collaborative research, and I think it's the best way to advance our understanding of language. As such, I would hire a posse of graduate students and post-docs and would endow a professorship of Linguistics here at the University of New Mexico. I would also further develop our newly-established Lobo Language Acquisition Lab and would buy us excellent lab space and more equipment. I would provide myriad ways to give back to the communities we study (e.g., outreach programs to support minority language development and bilingualism, participant incentives). I would fund not only my own work related to our Minority Language Acquisition project, but also the work of my colleagues, including those who do research on child language, as well those who focus on Hispanic Linguistics, and other areas of Linguistics that are well represented at UNM.

Isogloss: **What is the most important paper you have read, the one that shaped your research and career?**

NS: I can't name just one, as my research interests span several subfields (primarily child language acquisition, bilingualism, and sociolinguistics), so instead, here are several that I have found very inspiring, with some succinct comments about why.

Childhood Bilingualism

When I read Lanza 1992 and Zentella 1997 as a PhD student I became convinced that I wanted to study childhood bilingualism. I remember reading Lanza's study of a bilingual 2-year-old's code-switching and thinking wow! How can a 2-year-old manage this?! How remarkable! Zentella's gem of book continues to inspire me, and

I have always found Silva-Corvalán's work detailed, rich, and a constant source of ideas that generate testable hypotheses.

> Lanza, Elizabeth. 1992. Can bilingual 2-year-olds code-switch? Journal of Child Language 19(3):633-58.

> Silva-Corvalán, Carmen. 2014. Bilingual Language Acquisition: Spanish and English in the First Six Years. New York: Cambridge University Press.

> Zentella, Ana Celia. 1997. Growing up bilingual: Puerto Rican children in New York. Wiley-Blackwell.

Frequency effects

The following three papers have shaped my thinking on frequency effects in language, which in turn has helped me develop ideas about the role frequency plays in the development of morphosyntactic variation during childhood.

> Ambridge, Ben, Evan Kidd, Caroline Rowland, & Anna Theakson. 2015. The ubiquity of frequency effects in first language acquisition. Journal of Child Language 42, 239-273.

> Bybee, Joan. 2002. Word frequency and context of use in the lexical diffusion of phonetically conditioned sound change. Language Variation and Change, 14(3), 261-290.

> Erker, Daniel & Gregory Guy. 2012. The role of lexical frequency in syntactic variability: Variable subject personal pronoun expression in Spanish. Language 88(3):526-557.

Usage-based approaches to child language acquisition

> Gathercole, Virginia C. Mueller, Eugenia Sebastián, & Pilar Soto. 1999. The early acquisition of Spanish verb morphology: Across-the-board or piecemeal knowledge? International Journal of Bilingualism, 3, 133-182.

> Tomasello, Michael. 2003. Constructing a language. A usage-based theory of language acquisition. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Sociolinguistic studies of child language acquisition

> Miller, Karen. 2013. Acquisition of variable rules: /s/-lenition in the speech of Chilean Spanish-speaking children and their caregivers. Language Variation and Change 25, 311–340.

> Smith, Jennifer & Mercedes Durham. 2019. Sociolinguistic variation in children's language. Acquiring community norms. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ricardo Otheguy & Spanish in the United States

Ricardo Otheguy was my professor when I did my PhD in Linguistics at the City of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center. Since then we have continued to collaborate on numerous research endeavors. He never ceases to both challenge and support me. His thinking has shaped my thinking. He approaches every paper and even every email exchange with his rigorous and sharp intellect. It is thus no surprise that my work on Spanish in the United States has been inspired by Ricardo and his work, as well as our joint collaborations. Here are some of Ricardo's 'greatest hits', which have impacted the field of Spanish in the United States as well as Romance Linguistics more generally:

> Otheguy, Ricardo. 1993. A reconsideration of the notion of loan translation in the analysis of U.S. Spanish. In Ana Roca & John Lipski (Eds.), Spanish in the United States: Linguistic contact and diversity, 21-41. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

> Otheguy, Ricardo. 2016. The linguistic competence of second-generation bilinguals: A critique of "incomplete acquisition." In Cristina Tortora, Marcel den Dikken, Ignacio Montoya & Teresa O'Neill (Eds.), Romance Linguistics 2013, 301–320. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

> Otheguy, Ricardo, Ofelia García, & Wallis Reid. 2015. Clarifying translanguaging and deconstructing named languages: A perspective on linguistics. Applied Linguistics Review 6(3), 281-307.

> Otheguy, Ricardo & Nancy Stern. 2011. On so-called Spanglish. International Journal of Bilingualism 15, 85-100.

> Otheguy, Ricardo & Ana Celia Zentella. 2012. Spanish in New York: Language contact, dialectal leveling, and structural continuity. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Isogloss: **What was the linguistic landscape like when you started your studies?**

NS: I started studying Linguistics in the late 1990's at the CUNY Graduate Center. The Department was almost entirely a generative one. Among the graduate students at CUNY at the time, there was little doubt that studying Linguistics meant studying generative linguistics. Syntax I covered Principles and Parameters; Syntax II covered the Minimalist Program. Although I later moved away from generative approaches, back in the late 1990's I fell in love with the theory because I had outstanding professors whose careful argumentation was inspiring and convincing. CUNY had four terrific scholars of generative approaches to language acquisition, including Helen Cairns, who was my dissertation supervisor, as well as Gita Martohardjono, Elaine Klein, and Virginia Valian. Thus, even though I later grew more interested in usage-based approaches to child language, my original excitement for the topic was fostered

by studying and reading about generative approaches to language acquisition and the idea that child language could provide a window into the very nature of language. I still believe that child language provides that window, but my thinking has evolved as to what lies beyond the window.

It is also worth noting that in the 1990's there were many fewer programs in Hispanic Linguistics specifically. When I was a PhD student there was no such program at the CUNY Graduate Center; now there is. It has been exciting to see the field of Hispanic Linguistics flourish over the past 20 years.

Isogloss: **What got you interested in linguistics?**

NS: I have always been interested in grammar. Latin was my favorite subject in high school, primarily because I enjoyed learning about inflectional morphology. Later I became excited about how people learn grammar because of my experiences learning Spanish and teaching English while living in Barcelona and in Peru. In fact, I initially planned on studying Second Language Acquisition (I even did my PhD comps in this area), but then child language stole my heart because it seemed to provide a more direct and a bit less messy window into the representation of language in the mind.

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Carvalho, Ana Maria. 2016. The analysis of languages in contact: A case study through a variationist lens. *Cadernos de Estudos Linguísticos* 58:3, 1-23.

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