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**ONCE A NATIVE, ALWAYS A NATIVE? LANGUAGE ATTRITION
AND CONSTRAINTS ON BILINGUAL DEVELOPMENT**

Vortrag am 08.06.16 um 18 Uhr c.t.
in Raum S005 / Schellingstraße 3 (VG)

Bilinguals are not, as François Grosjean so famously pointed out, “two monolinguals in one person”. They use language differently from monolinguals, they differ from them in terms of processing, of acquisition, in their performance on controlled tasks and so on. We know this to be true, and yet it does not seem to have informed our research to the degree that it should: When we try to assess proficiency levels, probe underlying representations, investigate language production or processing, and so on, among L2 users – we still tend to compare them, as far as possible, to a monolingual reference group. Does it make sense to compare two groups that we know *a priori* to be different in order to find out that they are indeed different?

I will argue that in order to answer some of the most pressing questions in bilingualism research nowadays, such as whether language acquisition in childhood is qualitatively or merely quantitatively different from language acquisition later in life, we should invoke L1 attrition as part of the bilingual equation. We can thus put the populations that we compare on an equal footing with respect to their being bilinguals. In other words, we should not compare monolinguals and bilinguals, but dominant and non-dominant languages. In the case of L1 attriters, the non-dominant language is the one which was acquired as the first and only language in childhood (and was thus not subject to any maturational constraints). In the case of L2 learners, the non-dominant language (i.e., the language that we are interested in) was acquired later in life, after the first language had been established.

Such a comparison has the potential of separating those linguistic factors that are vulnerable to cross-linguistic interference in both early- and late-learned languages (and on which both populations differ from monolingual controls) from those that might indeed have been affected by some kind of a Critical Period (which are stable in attriters but variable in L2 speakers).

I will illustrate this argument with data from a number of ongoing investigations, using behavioral measures, free speech data and evidence from neuroimaging studies.

