1 *Who Are These Speakers, Where Do They Come From, and How Did They Get to Be the Way They Are?*

1.1 Setting the Stage

In his classic if somewhat forgotten paper, "Literate and Illiterate Speech" (1927), Leonard Bloomfield describes speakers of the Algonquian language Menominee (Menomini, Menomenee). He worked with these people over the course of his fieldwork in Wisconsin and categorized them into six linguistic portraits:

> Red-Cloud-Woman, a woman in the sixties, speaks a beautiful and highly idiomatic Menomini. She knows only a few words of English, but speaks Ojibwa and Potawatomi fluently, and . . . a little Winnebago. Linguistically, she would correspond to a highly educated American woman who spoke, say, French and Italian in addition to the very best type of . . . English.
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> . . . Stands-Close, a man in the fifties, speaks only Menomini. His speech, though less supple and perfect than Red-Cloud-Woman's, is well up to standard. It is interlaced with words and constructions that are felt to be archaic, and are doubtless in part really so, for his father was known as an oracle of old traditions.
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> Bird-Hawk, a very old man, who has since died, spoke only Menomini, possibly also a little Ojibwa. As soon as he departed from ordinary conversation, he spoke with bad syntax and meagre, often inept vocabulary, yet with occasional archaisms.
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> White-Thunder, a man round forty, speaks less English than Menomini, and that is a strong indictment, for his Menomini is atrocious. His vocabulary is small; his inflections are often barbarous; he constructs sentences on a few threadbare models. He may be said to speak no language tolerably. His case is not uncommon among younger men, even when they speak but little English. Perhaps it is due, in some indirect way, to the impact of the conquering language.

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> Little-Doctor, a half-breed, who died recently in his sixties, spoke English with some Menomini faults, but with a huge vocabulary and a passion for piling up synonyms. In Menomini, too, his vocabulary was vast; often he would explain rare words to his fellow-speakers. In both languages his love of words would sometimes upset his syntax, and in both languages he was given to over-emphatic diction, of the type of spelling pronunciation.
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> Little-Jerome, a half-breed, now in his fifties, is a true bilingual. He speaks both English . . . and Menomini with racy idiom, which he does not lose even when translating in either direction. He contrasts strikingly with men (usually somewhat younger) who speak little English and yet bad Menomini.   (Bloomfield 1927: 437)

Bloomfield's text, which was written in the 1920s, exudes a strikingly unmodern attitude toward the speakers, but someone writing nearly a century ago could hardly be expected to anticipate changes in attitude or language, so it behooves us to judge him on his turf, not ours. Not only is this passage the description of an intriguing linguistic situation, but it is also revealing with respect to the attitudes on the part of the linguist whose desire was to target some idealized version of language, usually associated with the archaic variety.

We do not know exactly what criteria determined Bloomfield's consultants' judgments of "good" and "bad" speech. Based on this passage, the criteria primarily included aspects of pronunciation and grammar, such as the distinction between short and long vowels and the use of appropriate grammatical forms (inflections). Bloomfield's description of his main speakers is essentially a snapshot of a speech community on the wane, where fluent monolingual speakers coexist with bilinguals who are not all the same (of course, there are complex issues of identity and survival involved here, but I am setting those aside for the purposes of the present discussion).[1]

Little-Jerome is "a true bilingual," Little-Doctor has some deficiencies, and White-Thunder is at the low extreme of the bilingualism scale. Little-Doctor and White-Thunder instantiate *heritage speakers*: unbalanced bilinguals, who are often recessive, with few receptive skills. Their Menominee is less fluent

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[1] It appears that Bloomfield and his contemporaries thought that native languages of different locales would be gone in a generation or so from their time. They were correct to predict the demise of many such languages but wrong in terms of the number of generations it would take. For instance, Monica Macaulay tells me that she started working with the Menominee in 1998, seventy some years after Bloomfield passed judgment on these speakers, and the first-language-fluent speakers she worked with were still very fluent, although in a variety of the language that Bloomfield probably would have called "atrocious." The time frame that Bloomfield and his contemporaries had in mind was overly pessimistic, but unfortunately, the general outcome they foresaw – that a number of smaller languages would disappear – was accurate.

than that of monolingual speakers, and although Bloomfield does not discuss their linguistic biography in detail, it is possible that their paths to lesser fluency were different as well, since they belong to two different generations. Sadly, Little-Doctor may have been ahead of his peers in terms of reduced Menominee fluency. And White-Thunder, the youngest in the cohort described by Bloomfield, may represent the growing trend of moving away from the ancestral language and toward an increased use of English, even if that English may not have been to Bloomfield's standards.

Crucially, Bloomfield compares speakers such as Little-Doctor and White-Thunder with what he sees as the more competent speakers, such as Red-Cloud-Woman, Bird-Hawk, and Stands-Close.[2] Bloomfield also likely relied on the speakers' judgments of who was a good or a bad speaker of Menominee. His description suggests that he probably held Red-Cloud-Woman's opinion in highest regard. But the language of these fluent and "idiomatic" speakers themselves may have already undergone a number of innovations, as attested to by references to "archaic language" and "old oral traditions," which ostensibly had been lost by Bloomfield's time. It is therefore reasonable to expect that some of the changes or "distortions" that are observed in the language of Menominee bilinguals started in the language of the monolingual generation – the language spoken by those whom Bloomfield celebrated. It is possible that the language of the baseline speakers at Bloomfield's time might already have been characterized by different properties than "perfect Menominee" – if such a language ever existed. And whatever changes were incipient in the baseline might have then become amplified in the language of younger Menominee bilinguals.

The *Ethnologue* currently lists Menominee as moribund, with the number of fluent speakers, all elderly, estimated at a couple dozen (Lewis, Simons, and Fennig 2016). Lewis, Simons, and Fennig (2016) cite Golla (2007), who distinguishes between *fluent speakers* and *semi-speakers* (the term commonly used in relation to speakers of endangered languages; I will return to it later in this chapter). Most of the mentions of Menominee these days concern the revitalization of the language. This outcome is typical. As the "conquering language," or the dominant language of society, takes over, only a generation or two need to pass before a language disappears. Often the first step toward losing a language is the development of heritage language, whereby a generation of speakers who grew up hearing and possibly speaking a home language are

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[2] The notion of the baseline is actually more complex. I will return to a more accurate characterization of baseline in Section 1.2 of this chapter as well as in Chapter 3.

more comfortable with the conquering language.[3] To expand on this notion, consider the following definition:

> A language qualifies as a heritage language if it is a language spoken at home or otherwise readily available to young children, and crucially this language is not a dominant language of the larger (national) society ... [A]n individual qualifies as a heritage speaker if and only if he or she has some command of the heritage language acquired naturalistically ... although it is equally expected that such competence will differ from that of native monolinguals of comparable age.   (Rothman 2009: 156)

Various aspects of this definition will play a role in the subsequent discussion, but for our current purposes, it is critical to define heritage speakers as unbalanced bilinguals whose heritage (weaker) language is their first language. In the narrow sense of the word, the definition of heritage speakers includes those who were exposed to the minority language from birth (Polinsky and Kagan 2007). It is important to distinguish this understanding of heritage speakers from the broader sense of the word: speakers who have some family, ethnic, or emotional connection to a given language but who were not exposed to it during childhood and who may choose to relearn, revive, or revitalize that language as adults. The latter definition, espoused by Joshua Fishman (2001; see also McCarty 2002), is more all-encompassing, counting as heritage learners all those who may have a cultural connection to a given language. Such people have been at the forefront of language revival, whether that language be Breton, Hebrew, Hawaiian, or Wampanoag.

Language revitalization is possible, and it has become more frequent in modern societies. However, when such revitalization occurs, it is not uncommon for the language transmitted from one generation to another to change in a dramatic way. Whether we consider childhood second-language (L2) learners who are put in language immersion schools or highly motivated adults who take evening classes in Chinook, learning an ancestral language can result in one of two things: excellent L2 acquisition or, in the case of Hebrew, the emergence of a new language that is only related to its precursor diachronically. If we apply the criterion of ethnic or cultural connection, most of us are heritage speakers of some language. Furthermore, those who take it upon themselves to learn the language of their ancestors in adulthood, as their second, third, or *n*th language, deserve a great deal of admiration. Yet, linguistically, such people are

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[3]   It is always possible that heritage speakers somehow become disconnected from the conquering language, or perhaps come from different dominant languages, and through some fluke of history and demography may all come together. This could lead to the emergence of a new language, related to but not sufficiently similar to the language of their monolingual predecessors.

no different from L2 learners of the same language; the only difference lies in the motivation for learning.[4]

There are heritage learners of Menominee and also some heritage learners in the broad sense of the word, people for whom the revival of Menominee is very important. At the time of this writing, the fluency goal is to get Menominee learners (not speakers), who probably have some family history of a connection to Menominee, to use the language – however limited this use may be. In that cohort of L2 learners, even the best L2 speaker would be missing big chunks of inflection or would have English-like pronunciation. By Bloomfield's standards, their Menominee would be "atrocious." But, for such learners, the study of Menominee is wrapped up in identity. The world of language revival, however, is not going to play a prominent role in this book because my focus is on *heritage speakers narrowly defined*.

Returning to such speakers in the Menominee quote at the beginning of this chapter, Bloomfield does not tell us about the language history of Little-Jerome, Little-Doctor, and White-Thunder. We do not know whether these speakers were first monolingual in Menominee and learned English later or learned both languages at the same time. This difference would indicate the divide between sequential and simultaneous bilinguals. Both types of bilinguals are found among heritage speakers, but the two groups may differ in terms of competence in their first language. Sequential bilinguals are usually slightly more proficient in the minority language than their simultaneous counterparts (Kupisch 2008, 2013; Kupisch and van de Weijer 2016; Montrul 2016).

Bilinguals are not all alike. Some are relatively balanced, such as Little-Jerome in Bloomfield's description, whereas others show significant gaps in their weaker (home) language, such as Bloomfield's White-Thunder. Many observable differences across bilinguals have to do with the age of acquisition (simultaneous bilinguals acquire both languages from birth; sequential bilinguals add the second language later) and range of proficiency, which may or may not correlate with the order of acquisition or use. In recognition of the rather bewildering variation in proficiency, researchers have proposed scales, or continua, representing the heritage speaker's competence in his or her home language. Such a continuum, shown in (1), follows the model of language mastery proposed by Haugen (1987: 15) and also patterns after the well-known creole continua (see Polinsky and Kagan 2007 for that comparison).

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[4] See also van Deusen-Scholl (1998, 2003) for a distinction between heritage learners (heritage speakers in the narrow sense) and learners with a heritage motivation (heritage speakers in the broad sense).

6   *Heritage Languages and Their Speakers*

The crucial assumption behind the continuum is that we have a set of measures that allow us to gauge how similar the bilinguals are to the baseline language that serves as their input. Assuming the availability of such criteria (not an uncontroversial assumption), *acrolectal* speakers in this continuum are those who produce and understand the language in the manner that makes them closest to the baseline. *Basilectal* speakers are those whose language knowledge shows significant divergence and is least like that of the baseline. *Mesolectal* speakers are in the middle. This is, of course, an idealization, and a coarse-grained one too, because speakers may vary across a number of dimensions, which may not always align in the same way. Furthermore, while continua are comforting because they allow us to represent the overpowering variance across heritage speakers in an efficient way, it is important to remember that they represent differences without explaining them.

(1)   *Bilingual Continuum*
         Acrolectal speakers   >   Mesolectal speakers   >   Basilectal speakers
         Baseline

In addition to separating speakers by degree of proficiency, it is important to recognize differences between productive and receptive bilinguals. The former are comprised of speakers who are more actively engaged in using the home language, are often integrated in their speech community, and on occasion are almost indistinguishable from native speakers. The latter are comprised of speakers who did not have sufficient linguistic experience in a given language.[2] They may understand aspects of the language, but they are not able to produce it. Receptive bilinguals constitute an important group in heritage populations, and for some languages, they may be in the majority. In the emerging field of heritage linguistics, such receptive bilinguals are referred to as *overhearers* (Au et al. 2002). Some authors underscore that these speakers need to be distinguished from "(fully) proficient HL1 [home/ heritage language] speakers" (Flores, Kupisch, and Rinke 2016; Pires and Rothman 2009).

In placing different groups of speakers across the continuum, we assume a static representation of these speakers, according to which speakers achieve a certain level of proficiency and maintain it throughout their life. But this is yet another idealization. There is an ebb and flow of language across the lifespan of a HL1 speaker. Maximal exposure and use occurs during childhood, when the speaker is still surrounded by caretakers who provide the main source of input in the home language. This exposure subsides as the heritage speaker grows

older and is more immersed in the dominant language of their society. The speaker's exposure may increase again in adulthood if, for example, they move to a location where their heritage language is spoken monolingually. Speakers of this type are known as *returnees* (Flores 2012, 2015a; Potowski in press; Treffers-Daller 2015; Treffers-Daller et al. 2016; among others). The speaker's language is not the same as the language in the homeland, but over time it might grow more similar to it.[5] Another example is heritage speakers who choose to relearn their home language in the instructed setting of a language classroom, which turns them from heritage language speakers into *heritage language (re-)learners*.[6] This trend has been growing in a number of countries, and language educators, who recognize the different needs of this group, have been working at developing materials that are appropriate to heritage language relearning (Au et al. 2008). These cases represent what may be thought of as the upward trajectory in acquiring and reacquiring the language of one's childhood.

At the other extreme, we find speakers whose home language undergoes significant attrition and loss. This can be due to displacement, when no other speakers of that language are available, or a decrease in the societal importance of the language. The case of East Sutherland Gaelic, in the Highland area of Scotland, as described by Nancy Dorian (1981), is probably the most famous instance of loss by decrease in importance. East Sutherland Gaelic was preserved relatively well in a small community of Scottish fishermen, but young speakers with whom Dorian worked were already English-dominant. They could speak Gaelic, but they did not speak it often, and the return to fluency would have required significant effort. These young speakers, whom Dorian dubbed *semi-speakers*, illustrate yet another trajectory in the development of heritage language across the lifespan. (Older speakers, some of whom may not have used their childhood language for decades, also provide the added dimension of aging as a factor in an individual's language change and overall attrition. However important that factor is, though, I will concentrate here on speakers who are younger than forty. I will return to older speakers in Chapter 8, where I explore parallels between heritage languages and endangered languages.)

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[5] More often than not, returnees are studied for their retention of the dominant language of the society they left behind, not for their original heritage language. I discuss several such cases in Chapter 2. What matters here is their knowledge of their home language, which, on return to the home country, is expected to become dominant for them.

[6] Note that these relearners are different from heritage speakers in the broad sense of the term, who may choose to learn the language of their ancestors as L2; see above.

In discussing bilingualism and heritage speakers in the narrow sense, I have assumed that the two languages in the bilingual dyad are sufficiently distinct. But this does not have to be the case; the two languages may be quite similar, to the extent that it may not be clear if they are separate languages or two dialects of the same language. In the latter case, a bilingual may actually be a *bidialectal* speaker. It is conceivable that such a speaker grew up exposed to dialect A in the home but as an adult is more comfortable in the dominant dialect of their society. Such a speaker is still a heritage speaker of dialect A. As far as I know, bidialectal situations where one of the dialects is much weaker, supplanted by a different dialect, have not been compared with bilingualism in less proximate languages. This is clearly an area where new work is needed, and such explorations can build on the existing research in heritage languages.

So far I have discussed bilingualism without reference to yet another relevant factor: the context in which the bilingual's languages are used. Balanced bilingualism is often associated with diglossia (the speakers know which language to use with whom, when, and where). Such bilingualism is more common in places where "the majority of the population is bilingual (often with the same combination of languages) and used to switching between their languages on a daily basis (e.g., Hyderabad, Singapore, or Barcelona)" (Bak 2016a: 716). As Bak notes, the context of language use has played "an increasingly important role in current theoretical models of bilingualism and cognition . . . and has been implicated as a possible explanation for conflicting results concerning possible effects of multilingualism" (Bak 2016a: 715).

Because heritage speakers are typically unbalanced bilinguals, the standard expectation is that they would not speak their home language unless under special circumstances. Being part of a majority that does not share their home language, the context of their language use, at least in adulthood, is quite restricted. In other words, they are "at home" in the majority language. But what is their mastery of that majority language?

Let us go back to Bloomfield's White-Thunder and Little-Jerome. Bloomfield tells us that they both speak little English and that White-Thunder's English is subpar. There are no data on what exactly their English was like or whether Bloomfield was appalled by their pronunciation problems, lexical gaps, grammatical blunders, or all of the above. No matter what grabbed his attention, the very fact that he heard linguistic differences is indicative of the influence heritage language has on a heritage speaker's dominant language. A bilingual's interaction of two languages is a two-way street, and in fact, the interaction between two languages in late sequential bilinguals has been studied quite a bit (Cook 1991, 1992, 1997, 2003; Pavlenko 2000, and further references therein). By contrast,

the effect of a heritage language on the dominant language has received little attention in heritage language research. It is my hope to offer observations on this issue that will serve as the starting point for future studies.

1.2 The Main Players

As with all emerging fields, the study of heritage languages has to establish its own terminology, and this terminology is associated with growing pains, soul-searching, and disagreements. In this section, I will review the main groups of speakers addressed in heritage language research: *heritage speakers*, *baseline comparison speakers*, and *speakers in the homeland*. While the terms may be relatively new, the phenomena behind them are long standing.

1.2.1 Heritage Language Speakers

A heritage language speaker (for short, heritage speaker) is a simultaneous or sequential (successive) bilingual whose weaker language corresponds to the minority language of their society and whose stronger language is the dominant language of that society. This definition ties together several dimensions that underlie our understanding of heritage languages: early bilingualism, simultaneous and sequential alike, the unbalanced relationship between the two languages, and the dominance of what Bloomfield called the *conquering language*. This definition does not specify whether a heritage speaker received their input from all childhood caretakers or just from one person; the latter are called *50 percent minority speakers* (Kupisch 2013: 204).

The weaker language of heritage speakers corresponds to the home/minority language. When early definitions of heritage speakers and heritage languages were proposed (cf. Valdés 2000, 2001 and much work following her definition), the emphasis was placed on the difference between the language knowledge of monolinguals and that of heritage speakers, often at the expense of noticing and understanding the similarities between them. The initial excitement about the newly named population of heritage speakers, whose dominant language was American English, allowed researchers to make several important discoveries but also obscured some parallels with child bilinguals in a number of societies, particularly in Europe (de Houwer 1990; Kupisch 2008, 2012, 2013; Kupisch et al. 2014b). As the field of heritage linguistics began to mature, researchers realized that "the fact that the term 'heritage speaker' has not been used in Europe – at least not until recently – should not be taken to imply that Europeans only have a vague idea of that concept" (Kupisch 2013: 206–7).

The term has since caught on, on both sides of the Atlantic, and it is now possible to relate the findings from early bilingualism in Europe to the research agenda concerning heritage speakers, thus expanding the heritage speaker population. A *heritage language* is therefore the home/minority language of a bilingual who is dominant in the main societal language.

A heritage speaker's knowledge of their weaker language may develop or diminish throughout the course of their life, but we can still obtain a reasonably accurate representation of a heritage language as a whole based on two kinds of data: mass observations of large groups of heritage speakers and longitudinal studies. The two types of studies, which constitute the core empirical sources of heritage linguistics, need each other; one cannot be sufficient without the other, and they can enrich each other in significant ways. Additionally, by expanding the definition of a heritage language to include simultaneous and sequential bilinguals, we can expand our empirical database to include "an impressive number of studies [that] have been conducted in Europe ever since the late 1980s, and even earlier" (Kupisch 2013: 206).

Depending on the general outlook, there has been a tendency to emphasize the ways in which heritage speakers are different and the ways in which their language is more or less the same as the comparison language. This raises two important questions. First, what is the appropriate comparison group for a study of heritage language? Second, what is the outcome of heritage language acquisition – do heritage speakers qualify as native or as nonnative speakers?

1.2.2   Baseline Speakers

In finding answers to the above-mentioned questions, we must first determine the appropriate baseline. In other words, with whom should we compare heritage speakers?

Given that the input for heritage language acquisition may come from speakers who are themselves outside their monolingual milieu (consider the precious few remaining "good" Menominee speakers in Bloomfield's example or many immigrant speakers in modern societies), a direct comparison between heritage speakers and monolinguals is less appropriate. This is particularly important if one's goal is to arrive at a global assessment of heritage language attainment, trying to understand whether heritage language is different from the input language and asking the question of whether the bilingual child has successfully learned the language to which he or she was exposed. In this