Introduction

Heritage Languages, Heritage Speakers, Heritage Linguistics

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Heritage languages are minority languages learned in a bilingual or multilingual environment.¹ They include languages in diaspora spoken by immigrants and their children, aboriginal or indigenous languages whose role has been diminished by colonizing languages, and historical minority languages that coexist with other standard languages in diverse territories. All these examples indicate that in any given context a heritage language instantiates one of the languages in a bilingual society; thus, heritage languages fall under the rubric of bilingualism. Bilingualism is not a new phenomenon, socially, demographically, or linguistically, but attention to heritage languages has been relatively new in bilingualism research, with first mentions of heritage speakers in English research studies dating back to the 1990s (Cummins 1991).

Throughout this handbook, we will follow this definition of heritage language and heritage speakers:

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. […] An individual qualifies as a heritage speaker if and only if he or she has some command of the heritage language acquired naturalistically […]. (Rothman 2009: 156)

Two comments related to this definition are in order. First, the concept of heritage is extremely broad. In principle, it can include connections to one’s family history, ethnic affiliation, attribution or appropriation, and cultural links. The understanding of cultural and ethnic heritage may include

¹ While we recognize the difference between bilingualism and multilingualism, in the discussion here we use the term “bilingualism” as a shorthand for the sake of brevity.
reference to a language that was at some point spoken by a particular group, and return to that heritage often involves the revival of a language associated with that group or the revival of traditional songs or narratives in that language. Such language revival is typical of heritage groups broadly understood (compare Fishman 2001 and discussion in Polinsky and Kagan 2007). As long as revival efforts involve adult learners of the language associated with a given group, they do not qualify as heritage speakers in the narrow sense, the sense used in this handbook: bilingual speakers who were exposed to the minority language from birth or very early childhood. Thus, while the concept of heritage is wide-ranging, the concept of heritage language is quite specific and well-defined.

Second, research on heritage languages has prompted extensive discussion of the nature of native speakerhood (see Kupisch and Rothman 2018). Are heritage speakers native speakers or should they be treated as a special group? And if yes, what kind of group? Empirical research on heritage speakers often shows they are different from monolingual baseline but even more different from second-language learners. As bilingual speakers become more and more recognized in linguistic research, the need to identify heritage speakers as a special group within native speakers is also becoming more apparent. On the educational side, this kind of recognition is important as it allows us to validate heritage speakers’ and heritage learners’ special needs as language users and removes the stigma of “not speaking right” often associated with these speakers. On the linguistic side of things, the idea that heritage speakers are native speakers springs from the recognition of a heritage language as a coherent linguistic system, with its consistent rules and operations. Differences between a heritage language and a monolingual baseline should thus be accounted for in the same way we account for differences between dialects within a single language.

Heritage language speakers typically grow up in situations of subtractive bilingualism, and by young adulthood they have variable degrees of knowledge and command of their heritage language. They are the second generation of immigrants born in the new society, children of immigrants, and young children who immigrate before puberty (immigrant children). Children of immigrants tend to be simultaneous bilinguals growing up, exposed to the heritage, home language, and the majority language early on. Immigrant children had a period of monolingualism in their homeland and bring knowledge of their native language on immigration, although the degree of acquisition of their native language depends on their age at immigration and whether they received schooling. For example, a four-year old may not have gone to school, but an eight- or nine-year-old most likely did. The linguistic knowledge of an eight- or nine-year-old is more advanced than that of a four-year old, at least in vocabulary, semantics, and
pragmatics. In indigenous or aboriginal populations, migration is from rural areas to big cities, but the processes and outcomes of language contact and change at different ages are very similar to the international situation of immigrants and their children. In cases of historical minority languages, their official or non-official status within their territories determines the level of availability of the language beyond the home sphere and their ultimate survival across generations. For example, competence in Basque varies greatly in Spain where Basque has co-official status with Spanish in its territory, compared to competence in the Basque spoken in France, where the language does not have any status and is not protected (Rodríguez-Ordóñez 2016).

What drew both of us to study heritage languages and heritage speakers we encountered in our own classrooms and in the community were their complex characteristics. When speakers of standard and non-standard national languages migrate and gradually begin to use their language less as they start their life in a new language, their original language shows distinguishing and distinguishable concomitant changes in structure (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics). The amount and degree of changes, the focus of many of the studies in this field, vary by grammatical area, by the age of the speaker, by the age of immigration or extensive exposure to the majority language, by the size of the speech community, by the vitality of the language beyond the home, by access to schooling, by attitudes, and by issues related to identity, among other factors.

There are at least two broad groups of heritage speakers that have attracted the attention of researchers: those in the “wild” and those in the “classroom” (Polinsky and Kagan 2007). Many heritage speakers come to the university language classroom because they are aware that their language is different. They lack vocabulary and expressions beyond the home context. Many cannot read and write, or they have a sense that their grammar needs development. These are the so-called heritage language learners, those who are trying to regain what they feel they have lost if they did not acquire it in a formal classroom environment. Understanding the linguistic needs of heritage language learners, how they differ from those of typical adult second language learners, and how to address them, has been at the forefront of the research agenda around heritage language education and the work of the National Heritage Language Resource Center led by the late Olga Kagan. Heritage language speakers are those in the wild, naturalistic learners and users who are not seeking to learn their heritage language in the classroom.

Heritage languages are precious linguistic, cultural, and personal resources for individuals and for society, but, due to their minority status, many are vulnerable to loss, gradual or imminent. Preserving heritage
languages and transmitting them to future generations is not only of paramount importance for the individuals, families, and communities that speak them, but for scientific research as well. Research has shown that bilingual children with high proficiency in two languages who continue to use the languages along the lifespan enjoy cognitive, cultural, and economic benefits of bilingualism if the home language is maintained. Academically, heritage languages have a great deal to teach us about different languages, cognition, society and culture, language acquisition and bilingualism, linguistic models of human language, and education and language policies. Critical questions we are addressing here are: First, why are heritage languages vulnerable to loss at the cognitive and societal level? Second, how can we prevent language loss? Third, how can we regain a language we have lost? How can we support language maintenance and growth? These questions can be answered from the macro-level by looking at the broader sociolinguistic and sociopolitical factors that drive language status, language attitudes, language identity, and ultimately language use, and from the more micro-level of specific language features, language processing, acquisition, and cognition within individuals.

It is well known that heritage speakers form a very heterogeneous group when we consider the age of acquisition of the majority language, their degree of daily use of the heritage language during the lifespan, and access to the heritage language beyond the home during their lifetime, among other factors. But in the last two decades, our interest has been to map and characterize the universality of heritage languages; that is, when we look at different heritage languages in the same sociopolitical environment or in other environments, what do they have in common? In Montrul (2008, 2016) and Polinsky (2018), among many other sources, we have written about how different heritage languages show structural similarities. Recurrent similarities across different heritage languages can reveal the universality of the underlying cognitive and linguistic processes that shape these grammars (Polinsky 2018). What we know so far is that some aspects of heritage speakers’ grammars (aspects of phonology and syntax) converge with, and do not differ significantly from, the grammars of fluent speakers of the language (in the homeland or in the diaspora); whereas other aspects of their grammar (morphology, long-distance dependencies, syntax-discourse interface) diverge or differ from the grammars of fluent speakers of the language, leading to what appear to be nonnative or non-target effects. Nonnative effects arise for many reasons: insufficient input and use of the heritage language during a formative time in language development, differences in the input due to structural changes present in the input providers (intergenerational transmission), effects of the dominant language, and insufficient proficiency to deploy fast and efficient language processing of the heritage language, among others. Today, we
believe that despite these differences, heritage speakers do not have random grammars; their language follows principles of universal language design, such as propensity for one-to-one mappings, preference for acoustically salient, perceptual material, morphological and syntactic restructuring, and preference for default settings. Yet there are also differences between heritage languages spoken in different sociolinguistic and socio-political contexts that remain to be understood, as well as the role of the majority language in effecting many of the changes seen in heritage language speakers.

As we have already mentioned, the study of heritage languages is not new, but it used to be the concern of sociolinguists, anthropological linguistics, and folklore studies. Not being standard languages, heritage languages were pretty much at the fringe of scientific language research. Much has changed in the last two decades, as heritage languages and their speakers have now become a central focus of different areas of linguistic research, from bilingual language acquisition, education and language policies, to theoretical linguistics. Much of the growth in the field has been propelled by growing recognition that the majority of the world population is bilingual and multilingual, yet our theories of language have been strictly concerned with describing the linguistic competence and language use of standard, idealized native speakers. Although monolingualism and standard languages are well represented in theoretical fields of linguistics in general, there has been an increasing tendency to include heritage languages and their speakers as critical data sources for theoretical linguistics, psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics. A good example of this recent development is the demonstration that Children of Adult Deaf Adults (CODAs), or heritage speakers of American Sign Language, engage in code-blending, a unique linguistic phenomenon afforded to bimodal bilinguals, akin to code-switching in spoken languages bilingualism. Code-blending is different from code-switching, which is also used by bimodal bilinguals, and is produced with varying amounts of overlap between signed components and spoken components (Lillo-Martin et al. 2016: 739). These unique data from heritage speakers of American Sign Language led Lillo-Martin et al. (2016) to propose a language synthesis model that adds a signed dimension to the phonology component of vocabulary insertion. In this way, models of language strictly conceived on the basis of monolingual data can accommodate bilingualism and different manifestations of language (spoken, signed). Another more urgent contributing force to moving heritage languages from the periphery to the center has been the quest for solutions to applied concerns, such as teaching heritage languages in the classroom at the college level and in elementary and high schools. As a result, heritage language teaching and education has also become a central topic in Applied Linguistics more generally.
Along with the theoretical and empirical expansion of the field, we are also seeing rapid expansion of the study of heritage language outside the USA. Although immigrant languages in the United States have been the driving force behind the “new” field since the 1990s, the last ten years have seen exponential growth in the study of heritage languages in Europe and other parts of the world. This is apparent from the widespread acceptance of the term “heritage language” and its use in research work in different languages (compare Spanish lengua de herencia, French la langue d’héritage, German Herkunftssprache), a practice virtually unknown in Europe ten years ago. What has changed is the scientific focus on individuals (cognitive, psycholinguistic, experimental linguistic approaches) and how these relate to society (sociolinguistics, education, language policies), along with the realization that understanding heritage languages and their speakers calls for collaboration and interaction between different areas of linguistics that have been traditionally isolated from each other.

The volume we present here, The Cambridge Handbook of Heritage Languages and Linguistics, aims to provide a state-of-the-art comprehensive view of this emerging area of linguistics from different perspectives: theoretical linguistics, experimental approaches to heritage languages, sociolinguistics, language education, and language policy. The Handbook focuses on issues ranging from individual aspects of heritage language knowledge, acquisition, loss, and maintenance to broader societal, educational, and policy concerns covering global and international contexts. One of the overarching goals of the Handbook is to bring theoretical and applied approaches to heritage language under the same cover in a manner that would allow them to inform each other and pave the way to new research across different subfields. In keeping with this overarching goal, we have brought together a series of chapters that describe heritage languages in different parts of the world, address theoretical and educational aspects of heritage language research, and discuss social aspects of heritage language use.

Part I: Heritage Languages around the World

This part provides sociolinguistic overviews and demographic descriptions of heritage language communities in different parts of the world, covering a wide range of geographical areas, such as immigrant languages in the United States and Europe, minority languages in Europe and Asia, and Indigenous languages in Latin America, Canada, and Australia. The purpose of this part is to showcase the range of variation of heritage languages and heritage language communities, underscoring the fact that heritage speakers are not a homogeneous group, and that even the same language...
can have a different destiny as a heritage language in different parts of the world. The chapters illustrate how heritage languages differ with respect to whether their speakers are literate, functionally literate, or illiterate, depending on the writing system, multilingualism in the homeland, place of a given language in the educational system, and other characteristics.

Heritage languages also differ with respect to the patterns of immigration or length of presence in a given territory, the size of the relevant language community, its sociolinguistic vitality, and the cultural and ideological commitment to a given language. All these characteristics determine to a large extent the ranges of proficiency observed in heritage speakers of different groups.

In an ideal world, it would be desirable to have a chapter on heritage languages in each country, but that goal is still unattainable, and the absence of chapters discussing heritage languages in a particular country or part of the world is a clear indication of areas where future work is needed.

**Part II: Research Approaches to Heritage Languages**

Language is both a grammatical system that develops in the minds of individual speakers and a social construct that allows individual speakers to communicate, form groups on the basis of their communication and use of language, and at the same time, define their own linguistic identities through sociolinguistic and communicative practices. In recent years, heritage languages have increasingly been recognized as a unique source of insight into knowledge of language, and their data have contributed a great deal to the development of linguistic subfields and theory construction. The chapters in this second part of the volume address different approaches to the study of heritage languages, from corpus research to generative linguistics. From an empirical perspective, heritage speakers and heritage languages raise many important questions for research, and this part of the volume also includes chapters outlining the range of research designs and methodologies that have been applied to this population to date and that are related to different approaches and methodologies.

**Part III: Grammatical Aspects of Heritage Languages**

This part focuses on structural aspects of heritage languages and their relevance for theoretical linguistics. The chapters in this part of the handbook discuss phonetics and phonology, semantics, pragmatics, and morphosyntax of heritage languages. Theoretically-grounded studies of heritage
language systems show that heritage language grammars are systematic in many respects. Some elements of these systems are comparable to what is found in the baseline, whereas others can, and must be, accounted for by restructuring of the original system.

The majority of chapters in this part of the handbook rely equally on production and comprehension data from heritage languages, which allows the authors to produce important results, separating issues of online processing that can be grouped under the rubric of the “mapping problem,” along with fundamental changes in the underlying representations in heritage grammars, ones that make these grammars different from the grammar of the baseline language. Another recurrent theme in the chapters of this part of the handbook has to do with differences between baseline speakers (L1s), heritage speakers, and proficiency-matched L2 speakers. A common pattern observed across different linguistic domains is that heritage speakers are different from L1s, while together, L1s and heritage speakers are more similar to each other, to the exclusion of L2 speakers. This recurrent result is important in the way it underscores the affinity between baseline speakers and heritage speakers, especially in comprehension, and a significant advantage that heritage language speakers hold over L2 speakers, even more advanced ones.

Part IV: Heritage Language Education

An increasing trend in many postsecondary foreign language classes worldwide is the presence of heritage language learners. The education of heritage language speakers as adults at the university level has been the driving force behind heritage language education, especially in North America, Europe, and Australia. At the same time, there is a natural relationship between the extent to which heritage languages are taught in elementary and high schools around the world, the availability of bilingual education and community schools to help heritage language children develop, maintain, and use their heritage language to communicate with family members, or to eventually be able to use it in professional contexts. Moreover, the availability of different educational models to promote heritage language education is inextricably linked to attitudes and ideologies about the heritage languages, the political status of the heritage language in the territory or community, and language policies at a national or regional level. The chapters in this part present and discuss different types of educational models promoting heritage language development, as well as language policies that determine the availability of heritage language education in different parts of the world.
In discussing the chapters of Part I, we have already mentioned a great number of blank spots in the description of heritage language. Blank spots are also present in other areas of heritage language analysis, and in that respect, the chapters of this handbook reflect both the state of the field and areas awaiting further inquiry and investigation.

References


Part I

Heritage Languages around the World
1

Slavic Heritage Languages around the Globe

Bernhard Brehmer

1.1 Historical and Social Context

The history of Slavic people has always been shaped by migration and relocation processes. As a result, Slavic-speaking minority communities nowadays form a considerable part of minority communities around the world (see for an overview Sussex 1982, 1984, 1993; Moser and Polinsky 2013; Hill 2014). These Slavic minority communities differ considerably with regard to the time of their establishment in the respective host countries, the geopolitical circumstances and motivations that led to the emigration of Slavs from their countries of origin. In general, three different types of Slavic heritage communities can be distinguished:

1. Communities whose members did not emigrate themselves, but where the political boundaries have been shifted due to wars and other geopolitical cataclysms. These speakers often experienced a rather abrupt change of the political and social status of their mother tongue by turning overnight into speakers of minority languages. For instance, Russian turned into a minority language in most of the successor states after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. Depending on the status of Russian and the sociolinguistic situation in the respective countries (see Pavlenko 2008a, 2008b for an overview), the conditions for the acquisition of Russian and identity formation in the generation that was born after the dissolution of the Soviet Union differ greatly (Laitin 1998). This has obvious consequences for the maintenance of Russian by heritage speakers in these states. Other Slavic heritage communities emerged due to an earlier reshifting of boundaries in Europe. Thus, Polish minority communities exist in many Eastern European countries where speakers of Polish have been living for centuries (e.g., as part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) but
were turned into an autochthonous minority after the post–World War II border changes. The sociolinguistic and linguistic situation in these Polish language islands and autochthonous communities in the Czech Republic (Teschen Silesia, Zaolzie), Slovakia (Spisz, Orawa), Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine have been the object of extensive research by (mostly) Polish linguists in recent decades (see Rieger 2001 for an overview).

2. Diaspora communities that emerged due to the deportation of Slavs from their homelands. In the period between the two world wars or during/after World War II, Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians were deported as forced laborers to Germany, and Polish settlers were displaced by Soviet authorities from Poland mainly to Kazakhstan and Siberia. Most of them repatriated to their countries of origin when the political circumstances changed, but some of them moved to other countries (esp. Canada and the United States) or stayed in their new homeland, giving rise to new generations of Slavic heritage speakers. More recently, the civil wars surrounding the collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s brought about the evacuation and expulsion of people from Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Serbia-Montenegro. Some of them gained political asylum or were accepted as war refugees in Western European countries, and others joined relatives who were already living in Western Europe or overseas (for Australia see Hlavac 2003: 14).

3. Heritage communities that emerged following a (more or less) voluntary and active emigration of Slavs from their homeland due to (i) religious, (ii) political, or (iii) economic reasons, or a mixture of motivations.

Religious reasons have been the driving force for the emigration of the Russian Old Believers, i.e., splinter groups from the Russian Orthodox Church such as the molokane or doukhobortsy, who were persecuted by the official state and church authorities and therefore fled from tsarist Russia to various destinations, including Canada (Schaarschmidt 2000), Poland (Zielińska 2017), or Bulgaria and Romania (Steinke 1990), in the eighteenth century. They formed groups within themselves, which gave them the feeling of a strong connection to their homeland, and tried to keep isolated from the host communities in fear of losing their own religious and cultural identity, which had obvious consequences for language transmission to the next generation. Similarly, Catholic Bulgarians (the so-called Paulicians) left Northern Bulgaria when it became part of the Ottoman Empire. First they fled to Siebenbürgen, but later settled in the Banat region (Star Bišnov and Vinga), which was then under Austrian rule. These chain migrations were also typical for the groups of Russian Old Believers (Steinke 2013). A more recent example is the emigration of Jews from the former...