

Reviews

Maria Polinsky. *Heritage languages and their speakers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. 410 p. [Cambridge Studies in Linguistics.] ISBN 978-1-107-04764-8. <http://doi.org/10.1017/9781107252349>.

Reviewed by Danko Šipka

The present book is penned by Maria Polinsky of the University of Maryland, an established syntactician, scholar of language universals, and, most importantly, student of heritage languages and their speakers. Professor Polinsky is one of the pioneers in the field of heritage languages, an emerging avenue of linguistic research. While this work reflects its author's broad interest in a wide range of languages, being a study in general linguistics it still exhibits some connections specifically with Slavic linguistics, as it contains numerous Russian and some Polish examples.

One can identify two grand linguistic narratives about heritage speakers. One is applied, and it is concerned with organizing heritage language classes and incorporating such learners into general language courses. The other is more theoretically minded, and it looks into specific linguistic properties of heritage speakers, often with an eye toward exploring broader linguistic principles. The present monograph is about the latter research direction only (as its title correctly suggests).

The field of heritage-speaker research has grown exponentially in recent years (as evidenced, among other things, by numerous papers of Polinsky's), which creates the need to summarize its achievements, reflect upon its challenges, and chart directions for further research. This is precisely what this monograph does for theoretically-oriented heritage-speaker research, being thus a welcome reaction to real-life needs.

The monograph features a logical architecture. Main concepts are defined first, the myth that languages like English cannot be heritage languages is dispelled next, followed by a review of methodology and approaches in the field. The next four chapters review research on heritage languages and their speakers in the areas of phonetics and phonology, morphology and morpho-syntax, syntax, and, finally, semantics and pragmatics. At the very end, the author broadens the perspective somewhat by linking heritage speakers to endangered languages, and ends by concisely presenting the main findings of the monograph. The book is equipped with a list of references, general index, language index, preface, acknowledgements, and a list of abbreviations. I will briefly review the eight chapters of the book.

The first chapter, “Introduction” (1–37), defines the main concepts in the field. The key concept is that of heritage speaker, defined as “a simultaneous or sequential (successive) bilingual whose weaker language is the minority language of their society and whose stronger language is the dominant language of that society” (9). What is of particular importance in building a methodologically sound approach is that the author establishes the notion of baseline speakers as the ground against which one should view the performance of heritage speakers: “The notion of the ‘baseline’—the language of adult first-generation immigrants that serves as the input to heritage learners—is critical for understanding what heritage speakers learn” (12). Additionally, the parameter of homeland speakers is established for non-indigenous minority languages: “For a number of languages, we can compare the *diaspora baseline*, that is the language of (first-generation) immigrants, with the language spoken somewhere in the ‘old country’: the *homeland language variety*” (13). Having established these main players in the process, the author discusses the main outcomes in heritage grammars (transfer from the dominant language, attrition, divergent attainment) and the main sources of divergence in heritage grammars (amount and type of input, incipient changes in the input, resource constraints, and universal principles of language structure).

The second chapter, “Heritage English” (38–75), serves to dispel the myth that the notion of heritage languages does not encompass English. Following a brief historical overview, the author presents current production data to then generalize linguistic properties of heritage English.

The next logical step in the architecture of this monograph is the discussion of methodology, which is presented in the chapter titled “How to study heritage speakers: Some observations on the methodologies and approaches” (76–113). The chapter discusses methodological considerations specific to heritage populations as well as assessment methodologies pertinent to research in this field. This chapter prepares the ground for the following four chapters (the core of this monograph), where research data gathered within the parameters of methodologies and approaches discussed here is presented.

The fourth chapter, “Phonetics and phonology” (114–63), introduces the idea of “heritage accent”. It discusses phonological features of heritage speakers in production (in the heritage and the dominant language) as well as in reception. The fifth chapter, “Morphology and morphosyntax” (164–221), addresses the issues of the fate of paradigms and structural indeterminacy and ambiguity as well as morphology-encoding relationships between two constituents such as case marking and agreement. The discussion in this chapter is closely related to that in the next chapter, “Syntax” (222–90), where the issues of dependencies, binding, and word order are discussed. This core section of the present monograph concludes with the chapter titled “Semantics and pragmatics” (291–328), which contains a rather limited discussion of lexical systems and word meaning, followed by a presentation of data on prop-

ositional semantics, information structure and pragmatics, as well as social pragmatics.

The eighth chapter of this book, "Heritage speakers in unexpected places" (329–48), discusses the connection between the notion of heritage speakers and that of endangered languages. The main findings of the monograph are succinctly summarized in "Conclusions".

Heritage languages and their speakers is an important and welcome contribution to the study of heritage speakers primarily in that it gathers and systematizes various hitherto dispersed studies. The way in which this systematization is done is logical; all points are amply documented with empirical data and all claims are stated clearly.

Returning to the content that may be particularly of interest to Slavic linguists, one should mention Polinsky's analysis of the fate of the case system in heritage Russian. Discussing various changes in the case endings in heritage Russian as compared with baseline emigrant Russian, the author notes the intriguing fact that, despite the fact that heritage speakers use the endings differently than those in the baseline variety (and standard Russian), they still mark the roles in the sentence with case endings. Thus, for example, instead of (1) they will use (2), where the direct object is identical with the subject case form (i.e., it is not marked), whereas what would be the dative of recipient in baseline Russian shows up with an accusative ending *-u*.

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|--|-------------------------|
| (1) Pokazal devočke mařinku.
showed girl _{DAT} toy.car _{ACC}
'showed the girl a toy car' | <i>Baseline Russian</i> |
| (2) Pokazal devočku mařinka.
showed girl _{ACC} toy.car _{DEFAULT} | <i>Heritage Russian</i> |

In the author's words: "Leaving the other changes in the heritage Russian case system aside, the resulting system shows one-to-one mapping between the marked case form and the semantic role recipient, even though the relevant case form is different from the form used in the baseline" (186).

Slavist readers may regret the absence from the bibliography of works by L'ubomír Ďurovič, truly indispensable for Slavic heritage-language studies: see particularly "Lingua in diaspora. Studies in the language of the second generation of Yugoslav immigrant children in Sweden" (*Slavica Lundensia* 9, 1983) and other issues of the same journal.

What is evident even from this brief review is that this field of study is dominated by those areas that are most prominent in North American linguistics at large: syntax and morphosyntax, phonetics and phonology, morphology, semantics and pragmatics (listed here in the order of prominence). What is conspicuously absent is the study of the lexicon. The author recog-

nizes this disproportion: “In comparison with other linguistic domains, heritage speakers’ lexical knowledge has not received much attention, in part because it is difficult to operationalize and quantify this kind of knowledge” (292). Perhaps, along with continued research in traditional areas, a bold future direction of research on heritage speakers will be opened in the field of lexicon, where researchers would decide to do things “not because they are easy, but because they are hard”. In that case, the present monograph would become extremely important not only because of what it displays (that part of its importance is evident) but also due to the lacunae to which it points.

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