

Maintenance and change of Bernese in Ohio and Misiones (Argentina)

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Overview. Misionero Swiss German (hereafter: MSG) and Ohio Swiss German (hereafter: OSG) are two moribund heritage Swiss German varieties spoken in the Misiones Province of North-eastern Argentina and in Ohio, USA respectively. While OSG has been subject to limited investigations, MSG has not been the subject to any known linguistic investigations. For the sake of this presentation, I focus on three MSG and seven OSG speakers of Bernese descent. The current study investigates three phonological features, namely (i) l-vocalization, (ii) velarization of -nd to [ŋ], and (iii) singleton-geminate distinction as well as the lexicon to shed light at potential transfer or the lack thereof from the surrounding languages, i.e. English and Spanish. A previous study by Hoffman and Klosinski (2018) identified that the singleton-geminate distinction common in various Swiss dialects is maintained in OSG while contact with English has triggered a phonetic change. Importantly, Polinsky (2018) argues, that transfer by itself “cannot fully account for all the changes in the weaker language”, i.e. the heritage language (here: Bernese).

Research questions. i) Is there change in the speech of heritage Bernese in comparison with the continental variety and with respect to each other? ii) if a change in heritage Bernese is found, can this be attributed to transfer or to other internal developments?

Method. Three MSG-Spanish as well as seven OSG-English bilinguals were recruited in their home area and a picture-naming as well as semi-structured elicitation tasks were conducted.

Results. The preliminary results suggest that there is transfer but also other contributing factors independent of the dominant language. Additionally, influence not only from the surrounding dominant languages but also from other German dialects, as it is the case in Misiones, can be seen. More specifically, MSG speakers are in contact with Hunsrik and Palatinate speakers which could be a contributing factor to the preliminary results. At this point, the generalizations attained from this study are the following:

Velarization of -nd to [ŋ] occurs in OSG, but not in the youngest generation of MSG. l-vocalization, which is part of the continental variety of Bernese is maintained in both varieties. Impressionistically, the distinction between singleton and geminates is preserved in MSG and OSG. Further analyses are needed to ascertain the degree of singleton-geminate contrast found in the dialect.

References: Hoffman, A. & Klosinski, R. (2018). Resisting Contact-Induced Sound Change in Heritage Swiss German. Paper presented at the The Eight Annual Workshop on Immigrant Languages in the Americas (WILA 8), Copenhagen, Denmark. Polinsky, M. (2018). *Heritage Languages and their Speakers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.