CASE MARKING VARIATION IN HERITAGE SLAVIC LANGUAGES IN TORONTO

As part of a project to understand how heritage languages vary and evolve in Toronto, we examine case marking variation in Heritage Russian and Polish. In spite of widely held beliefs within minority language communities that heritage speakers speak a simplified or defective version of their languages, and results of experimental studies (Benmamoun et al. 2010) we find only a few types and few instances of systematic distinction between heritage and homeland varieties.

Our data comes from conversational speech recordings. 100 nominal tokens were extracted for each speaker, excluding tokens with prescribed nominative case. 48 speakers are sampled, producing 4,800 tokens of case-marked nouns and pronouns.

Generational group	Polish	Russian
Homeland	12	*No data*
Generation 1 (born and raised in homeland; in Toronto 20+ years)	3	8
Generation 2 (children of Gen 1, born in Toronto)	10	12
Generation 3 (children of Gen 2, born in Toronto)	*No data*	3
TOTAL	25	23

We compare prescribed and observed case forms in multivariate regression analyses to determine what factors contribute to the likelihood of speakers using the prescribed case endings. Predictors tested are linguistic (case selector, declension type, prescribed case) and social (generation, age and sex of speaker).

The majority of the data show cross-generational consistency: < 7% mismatch between prescribed and observed case in the Heritage data. In Homeland Polish, 1% of tokens were mismatched. Two key patterns of difference account for the mismatches. Most mismatches are due to the replacement of all cases with the nominative form. This is not seen in Homeland Polish. The second pattern is found only in Polish. It concerns a few verbs (ex: *szukać* 'to search'; *potrzebować* 'to need') in which genitive-accusative mismatch takes place in very specific contexts, in both Heritage and Homeland data. Mismatch is not attested in Heritage Russian as both variants have been considered grammatical for some time (Kagan 2010). We suggest that Heritage Polish is undergoing a change in this direction.

The case systems in Russian and Polish are similar, but not identical, and the same is true for the mismatch patterns observed. The much lower rate of mismatch for pronouns than nouns complies with cross-linguistic patterns of case retention (Blake 1994) but also suggests that heritage speakers retain the concept of case fully, even if there is minor confusion about exact forms in a complex declension system.

	Mismatch rate	
	Heritage Polish	Heritage Russian
Nouns	8%	4%
Pronouns	3%	2%

Generation was the only significant social factor in Russian. No social factors showed significant effects in Polish. Our findings are consistent with the concept of simplification of heritage varieties (Polinsky 2008), but it is noteworthy that mismatch rates are extremely low and restricted to narrow contexts – we do not see a breakdown of the system but perhaps a restructuring.