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Title: Diglossia in Polish Heritage Speakers

Abstract:

Unlike early immigrants from the Polish lands, who spoke distinct Polish regional varieties (Gruchmanowa, 1988), the language of more recent Polish immigrants from different regions is very similar (Kamusella, 2016). There are, however, some Polish dialects that have resisted the nationwide tendency of dialectal disappearance, for example, the Oravian and Podhale dialects. Nevertheless, due to postwar mass migrations and government education policy, even these dialects are used alongside standard Polish, and the linguistic situation in these regions can be described as diglossia (Karaś, 2009). The results of the present study show that this diglossia is not only preserved in the first generation of immigrants but also occurs among heritage speakers.

This paper focuses on the Polish language of two heritage speakers, one each of the Oravian and Podhale dialects. Both participated in a large-scale study conducted in Chicago that investigated the Polish language of 25 heritage speakers and 15 first-generation immigrants. In addition to providing a general overview of Polish, the study examined the knowledge of Polish cases in the two generations of speakers. Despite having grown up in households where the Oravian and Podhale dialects were spoken, the two participants were assessed as advanced speakers of standard Polish, and on average exhibited better knowledge of grammatical structures (92%) than the study's other heritage-speaker participants (72%). The Polish Saturday school and frequent contacts with other Polish speakers are credited as the main factors that helped them acquire standard Polish.

Featuring the largest Polish population in the US (Paral, 2004), the city of Chicago provides optimal conditions for Polish heritage-language maintenance. The great number of speakers of the language affords opportunities for everyday use. Moreover, the city's numerous Polish Saturday schools offer a chance to learn the language in formal settings (Nowicka McLees & Dziwirek, 2010).