Phonological and Lexical Maintenance of Swiss German in Ohio and Misiones (Argentina)

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 Northeastern 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. Even though MSG consists of various Swiss dialects (e.g. Zürich German, Bernese and Basel German) that have undergone some degree of leveling. However, for the sake of this presentation, I focus on three Bernese-area speakers. This selection allows for a direct comparison to the OSG speakers, who are likewise 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) found 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. The principle aim of this presentation is to test the validity of this claim by comparing the two speech islands with each other and also with the continental variety of Bernese. This presentation documents the maintenance of specific Bernese features in the two dialects.

Working hypothesis. Based on previous findings, we probe whether these phonological features, as well as the lexical items, are influenced by the surrounding dominant languages. Measurements of the speech MSG and OSG speakers are conducted to reflect on potential phonetic transfer from Spanish or English.

Analysis. Three MSG-Spanish as well as seven OSG-English bilinguals were recruited and a picture-naming as well as semi-structured elicitation tasks were conducted. The preliminary results, as seen in Table 1, suggest that there is transfer from the dominant language. Impressionistically, these speakers maintain a distinction between fortis and lenis stop consonants; however, further analyses are needed to ascertain the size of the effect.

Results. Preliminary results suggest influence not only from the surrounding dominant languages but also from other German dialects, as it is the case in Misiones. 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 MSG.
- However, 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 dialects.
- With respect to lexical items, MSG seems to resemble the contemporary Bernese more closely than OSG. This is unsurprising considering that the Swiss immigration to Misiones occurred much more recently (at the beginning of the 20th century) than to Ohio (beginning of the 19th century).

Table 1: Preliminary overview of results of phonological features and lexical items in MSG and OSG

	Misionero Swiss German	Ohio Swiss German
l-vocalization	Esel ✓	Esel ✓
velarization of -nd to [ŋ]	Hund ✗	Hund ✓
Word-medial Geminate	glette closure ✓	Ratte closure geminate ✓
"to iron"/"glette" Std. Bernese	glette	biegele/baggele
"to knit"/"lisme" Std. Bernese	lisme	strickre

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.