

Heritage Languages as new dialects

NAOMI NAGY

University of Toronto

Members of Toronto's Heritage Language Variation and Change Project collaboratively designed a multilingual corpus to allow inter-generational, cross-linguistic, and diatopic (heritage vs. homeland varieties) comparisons in order to develop generalizations about the types of variable features, structures or rules that are borrowed earlier and more often in contact contexts, using consistent methods across studies of different languages and variables. While it is debatable whether these heritage varieties constitute new and distinctive dialects of Cantonese, Faetar, Italian, Korean, Russian and Ukrainian, it is certain that we have needed to implement innovative methods in order to efficiently compare heritage varieties and their potential input languages. Innovations include:

integrating transcription, coding and extraction of sociolinguistic variables in ELAN;

automated forced alignment of transcription and audio at the phonemic level for languages beyond English;

use of online formant extractors, again for languages beyond English;

an interactive web map with animated voice clips;

multivariate regression techniques for comparing across variables, languages, locations, and speakers spanning three generations since immigration;

integration of research conducted at many levels: in undergraduate and graduate courses, by paid and volunteer research assistants, and by students and professors in (so far) nine countries;

online, public sharing of our methods, tools, instruments and controlled sharing of data.

It is hoped that this work may help predict the future of (these) dialects and advance the study of dialects.