

The Polish dialect spoken by the inhabitants of Vershina (Irkutsk Oblast in Siberia) as a heritage language. On the example of the young generation's speech

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The village of Vershina (Rus. Вершина) was founded in Russia by voluntary settlers – peasants as well as workers and miners of peasant origin from Lesser Poland – in 1910. It is situated about 130 kilometres north of Irkutsk. Since the moment of the foundation, the inhabitants of Vershina have lived in a language island (i.e. an “internally structured settlement of a linguistic minority on a limited geographical area in the midst of a linguistically different majority”; Rosenberg 2005: 221). Most of the community members are bilingual. Although they acquired the language of the dominant group (Russian), it is still important for them to preserve the language of their ancestors (the Lesser Polish dialect). Their bilingualism is connected with diglossia (Głuszkowski 2011b; 2011a; 2012), which also affects their language choice and the phenomenon of code-switching and code-mixing (Głuszkowski 2012; 2015). Vershina has been attracting the attention of scholars, journalists, film makers, publicists for several decades. In the 21st century it has also been noticed by some celebrities and politicians, especially because of the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the settlement. However, the dialect of the Polish migrants has been thoroughly examined in only one comprehensive linguistic study so far (see Mitrenga-Ulitina 2015).

The Polish community has lost its former ethnocultural homogeneity. The last period in Vershina's history began after *perestroika* and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The political changes helped the inhabitants of Vershina to regain their minority rights: religious, institutional and educational in particular (cf. Masiarz 2016).

Nowadays all inhabitants of Vershina (of Polish origin) may be considered heritage speakers. However, their situation is specific because of several reasons:

- a) their Polish is not the literary language, but the Lesser Polish dialect;
- b) the dialect exists only in its spoken form;
- c) the inhabitants of Vershina write in Polish with the aid of the Russian Cyrillic script;
- d) in the 1990s they acquired the possibility to learn Polish in the local school, but it was the literary variety;
- e) representatives of the youngest generation in mixed families tend to use Russian even in home-related domains.

Thus, the language situation of Vershina as a small language island (a dialect island) cannot be easily compared to the one faced by other heritage-speakers communities, e.g. the youngest generation of Poles in the UK or Turkish immigrants in Germany, not only because of the number of community members, but also because of the dialectal form of their heritage language.

The main aim of the paper is to characterise both the sociolinguistic specificity of young bilingual Vershinians and the structural features of their heritage language – the Polish dialect influenced by the Russian literary variety.

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