

## Heritage Swedish across the Lifespan in a Minnesota Family

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During the “Age of Mass Migration”, roughly 1850–1913 (e.g. Hatton & Williamson 1998), many people from different countries in Europe left for the United States. The timing of the mass migration meant that immigrants settled places where another language was dominant. In time, their mother tongues existed alongside English and were passed on to later generations to varying degrees. The resultant language is termed a “heritage language” (Polinsky 2018), and over the last few decades, research into heritage language issues has rapidly intensified. While heritage language research has indeed received considerable attention, “the field is still relatively new and continues to develop its theoretical focus”, as Van Deusen-Scholl (2014: 77) points out. Until recently, few studies have considered historical sociolinguistics as a potential framework for this new and expanding research area, especially to track how a heritage language is used across the lifespan and across generations of a family (e.g. Johannessen & Salmons eds. 2015; Hoffman & Kytö 2019; Brown ed. forthcoming).

The aim of the present study is to understand the lifespan of Heritage Swedish and its perceptible movement into postvernacularity. We analyze heritage language ego-documents and ethnographic data from generations of a Minnesota family from the time of their immigration to the United States in the late nineteenth century to the present. Lorens Fredrick Victor Johansson (name changed later to Fred Larson) was born in Kalmar County, Sweden in 1872 and immigrated to Minnesota in his early 20s. His wife-to-be, Esther Ida Josephine Delen (name changed later to Sophie Peterson), was born in Sweden in 1884 and immigrated to Minnesota as an infant. The family has since continued living near Scandia, Minnesota through the present day. Using a range of many ego-documents preserved by the family, we can trace the life of Heritage Swedish through the writings of Fred and Sophie, their later writings to their daughter Esther, her husband David, and granddaughter Miriam, the writings of Esther and David, and their letters to each other. Our analysis focuses on orthography (chiefly, the Swedish graphemes *å*, *ä*, and *ö* often being rendered as *a* and *o*), lexis, and the semantic shift apparent in Heritage Swedish. We also survey how Heritage Swedish has been used in Scandia, as well as how it is used today in a postvernacular stage of life. In other words, the many decades of the extant ego-documents teamed with the ethnographic work in the community enable us to track the long arc of immigrant Swedish, heritage Swedish and post-vernacular Swedish.

### References

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