

Linguistic repertoires: Modeling variation in input and production. A case study on American speakers of Heritage Norwegian

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Heritage Norwegian in the American Midwest is documented through a corpus of recordings collected and compiled over a timespan of 80 years, from Einar Haugen's recordings in the 1940s via the CANS corpus up to the present day in the authors' own recordings. This gives an unprecedented opportunity to study how a minority language changes in a language contact situation, over several generations and under gradually changing circumstances. Since we also have thorough historical knowledge of the institutions and societal texture of these communities, this privileged situation allows us to trace the various sources of input available to the heritage speakers in these communities in different relevant time slots.

We investigate how the quality and quantity of input at different times are reflected in the syntactic production of heritage speakers of the corresponding generational cohorts, focusing on relative ratios of specific word orders (topicalization and verb second, prenominal and postnominal possessive noun phrases) and productive morphosyntactic paradigms (tense suffixes of loan verbs).

Utilizing a novel model of relations between input and output, receptive and productive competence, to show how input-output effects will accumulate throughout the cohorts, we explain the observed linguistic change in individual and society.

The study reveals quite visible effects on the Heritage Language production of different types of input, evidenced most clearly in the impact of differing availability of written sources. Because written and spoken registers differ to a great extent with respect to some of the selected features, the effects of this input is quite readily observed.

However, we also find cross-linguistic effects of other dialects in the heritage community. As such the study corroborates the hypothesis that quality of input is quite important, since the access to different types of Norwegian, including several different written standards, clearly effects, and most likely supports and maintains, the Norwegian Heritage in these communities.