

A new approach to heritage Norwegian: Norwegian in Latin America

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Up until now, research on heritage Norwegian has focused exclusively on the variety spoken in North America (hence *NorAmNo*), where the majority language is English (e.g., Johannessen 2018). This has been a highly productive line of research; however, for certain questions, especially concerning the role of cross-linguistic transfer, it is crucial to compare *NorAmNo* to heritage varieties of Norwegian spoken in societies with a different majority language (Polinsky 2018:21).

This talk reports ongoing research that takes a new approach by investigating the language of a different group of Norwegian heritage speakers, namely speakers in Latin America, whose dominant language is Spanish (*LatAmNo*). We focus on methodology, and some preliminary observations of *LatAmNo* and its speakers, in comparison to *NorAmNo*.

More than 20,000 people emigrated from Norway to Latin America between 1820 and the 1950s, particularly to Argentina (Furuseth 2013; Sæther 2015). This figure is far lower than for North America; however, through Argentinian contacts and a recruitment video that was shared in social media, we have identified a non-trivial number of descendants of these emigrants who still speak Norwegian as a heritage language. These speakers in Argentina constitute one of our main groups of participants. Importantly, however, the recruitment video has also enabled us to reach speakers in other Latin American countries, including a small community in Ecuador. In some ways, the identified speakers of *LatAmNo* differ from the prototypical *NorAmNo* speakers represented in CANS (Johannessen 2015). The *LatAmNo* speakers are often more mobile, some of them are younger (in their 20s), some of them only have one Norwegian-speaking parent, and some of them seem to exhibit signs of L3 influence. It is particularly the speakers from other places than Argentina that show these features.

Thus far, data collection has been conducted online, using Zoom. We argue that this method, although it cannot completely replace in-person field trips, has certain advantages, at least for speakers who are comfortable with technology: one can reach people in more places, it is easy to schedule more than one meeting with each participant, and it is a time-efficient way to do both interviews and semi-structured elicitation tasks. Equipped with data from online meetings, and future data from field trips, a priority for our research will be to identify structural similarities and differences between *LatAmNo* and *NorAmNo*, and to tease apart the factors that shape Norwegian as a heritage language (majority language vs. other factors).

References

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