

## Predicate nouns in Latin American Norwegian and what they can tell us about cross-linguistic influence

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There is by now a rich literature on Norwegian as a heritage language (HL) in North America (NorAmNo) (e.g. Haugen 1953; Hjelde 1992; Johannessen 2018). Certain structural innovations in NorAmNo resemble English and have been analysed as (more or less direct) cross-linguistic influence (CLI) from the majority language (Kinn 2020, Westergaard et al. 2021). However, in some cases, independent processes of change, such as grammaticalization or extension of patterns already present in the HL, may yield the same result as CLI. To decide whether an innovation is primarily due to CLI or more general processes of change is a challenge in HL research. An approach that can help tease apart the different factors is to compare the same linguistic phenomenon in HLs with different majority languages (Polinsky 2018:21). In this paper I test this approach on a phenomenon previously described in NorAmNo, namely *classifying predicate constructions* (Kinn 2020), with novel data from an understudied HL, namely Norwegian in Latin America (LatAmNo), with Spanish as the majority language.

Classifying predicate constructions denote, e.g., professions. In homeland Norwegian (EurNo), bare nouns are generally used in these constructions, whereas English requires an indefinite article (1).

- (1) a. *Han er lærer* (EurNo)  
he is teacher  
b. *He is a teacher* (Eng)

In NorAmNo, some speakers use the Norwegian indefinite article in a pattern that resembles English; see (2) and Table 1 (from Kinn 2020).

- (2) *Han er (en) lærer* (NorAmNo)  
he is (a) teacher

Bare noun	Indefinite article	Total
152 (86.4%)	24 (13.6%)	176 (100%)

Table 1. Bare nouns vs. nouns with an indefinite article in classifying predicate constructions i NorAmNo. Number of occurrences in spontaneous speech, 47 speakers.

This use of the indefinite article may look like CLI from the majority language English, but it could also be an independent extension, a phenomenon which has been observed in Bavarian (Kupisch & Polinsky 2021).

Spanish, like EurNo, but unlike English, uses bare nouns in classifying predicate constructions, cf. (3).

- (3) *Es maestro* (Sp)  
is teacher

This implies that if speakers of *LatAmNo* use the indefinite article in classifying predicate constructions, this cannot be due to transfer from the majority language. This could support a hypothesis of independent change rather than CLI, potentially also in NorAmNo.

Preliminary results based on spontaneous speech data from 19 heritage speakers in Argentina, Ecuador and Chile, collected in 2021–2022, suggest that bare nouns are predominant also in LatAmNo. It is, however, not categorical – indefinite articles do occur, cf. (4) and Table 2.

- (4) a. *NN var mekaniker* (LatAmNo, bare noun)  
 NN was mechanic  
 ‘NN was a mechanic’
- b. *ja så hun var en lærer der* (LatAmNo, noun with indefinite article)  
 yes so she was a teacher there  
 ‘Yes, so she was a teacher there’

Bare noun	Indefinite article	Total
99 (92.5%)	8 (7.5%)	107 (100%)

Table 2. Bare nouns vs. nouns with an indefinite article in classifying predicate constructions i LatAmNo. Number of occurrences in spontaneous speech, 19 speakers.

I will show that there is substantial inter and intra-individual variation in the distribution of the indefinite article in LatAmNo. I then argue that, upon closer inspection, the results from LatAmNo are not incompatible with a CLI analysis of the indefinite article in predicate constructions NorAmNo, as there are certain differences between the contact situations: Firstly, most LatAmNo speakers are familiar with English as an L3. Secondly, the LatAmNo speakers descend from emigrants who left Norway more recently than the NorAmNo ancestors. Recent studies suggest an ongoing change in younger speakers of present-day EurNo involving extension of the indefinite article even here (Norli 2017); this may imply that the input for the LatAmNo speakers already included some variation/incipient change (Polinsky 2018:33), a scenario which is less likely for NorAmNo. I propose that the *convergence* of these factors (incipient change in the input and the presence of indefinite articles with predicate nouns in the L3) could promote the indefinite article in LatAmNo predicate constructions (Matras 2009:238:ff).

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