Chasing the overlap: Heritage language, multiple grammars, selection and convergence

Kristin Melum Eide, NTNU: Norwegian University of Science and Technology

In this talk, I will demonstrate how a new corpus of heritage Norwegian in the US spanning 70 years and three generations can be utilized as a petri dish to study the effects on one language by another, and how bilingual minds induce incremental language change. In heritage language studies (i.e. studies of *a language non-dominant in society, but available to children, e.g. spoken in the home*; cf. Rothman 2009), it is an important (but mostly empirically inaccessible) issue whether the input of one generation may differ from that of the previous one, and if so, *how* and *why* this happens. I argue that the intergenerational changes we observe in these data can be explained on the assumption that the typical heritage language user will be constantly chasing the overlap, looking for ways to accommodate his two grammars with one construction, one set of features, one paradigm, or one rule, and that this also affects his production in the heritage language, i.e. the language serving as Primary Linguistic Data for the next generation.

Since Chomsky´s famous quote (1965) "Linguistic theory is concerned with an ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogeneous speech community", bilingualism has become an important field of generative linguistic inquiry. Heritage language, "still an uncharted territory for theoretical linguistics" (Benmamoun, Montrul, and Polinsky 2013a), brings still new insights to the field, challenging assumptions residing in P&P that once acquired, grammars are stable objects; as for heritage speakers "one of the languages eventually becomes the primary language and the other weakens"; Benmamoun, Montrul & Polinsky (2012).

This talk follows Amaral and Roeper (2014) in that "L1, L2, bilingual, and heritage grammars all share the core properties of human language". Their *Multiple Grammars* approach states that "Each individual will have a grammar with a unique configuration of rules, and these individual configurations may converge or diverge from what is considered standard in a given language by different social groups." Viewed in this way, grammars are idiosyncratic sets of grammar fragments, on a par with vocabularies, and, like them, subject to *selection* and *accommodation*, depending on the context at hand. Chomsky (1988: 187) alludes to this in responding to a question on bilingualism and the context-dependency of parameters:

> [E]very human being speaks a variety of languages. We sometimes call them different styles or dialects, but they are really different languages, and *somehow we know when to use them, one in one place and another in another place*. Now each of these different languages involves a different switch setting [my emphasis].

The presence of multiple grammars in one mind inevitably leads to "contamination" of one grammar by the other, not only from L1 to L2 ("transfer effects"; Lado 1952), but even from the L2 to L1 ("attrition"; e.g. Cook 2003), and from an L3 to (and from) both L2 and L1 (e.g. Berkes & Flynn 2012; Bardel & Falk 2012; Rothman 2011). Heritage speakers (*persons growing up learning their heritage language (cf. above) and with some proficiency in it*; Benmamoun, Montrul and Polinsky 2013b) are no different in this respect. Studies specifically on heritage speakers show that, similar to L2 interlanguages, these grammars display a great deal of variation, structural reduction and simplification (cf. Lynch 2003, Scontras et al. 2015).

L1 acquirers seem sensitive to the complexity of a structure to be acquired, whereas heritage language speakers seem more sensitive to frequency (e.g. Anderssen & Westergaard 2015). Also, though many studies have shown that heritage speakers, like L2 speakers, display transfer effects from their dominant language (Scontras et al. 2015), other studies show that heritage language speakers are likely to over-use or show an affinity to certain structures that they conceive of as especially typical for their heritage language (*hypercorrection* or *overcorrection*; Kupisch 2014). This latter issue points to a more conscious selection of subgrammars by the heritage speaker. I argue that the concept of linguistic *Convergence,* as developed as a mental

notion e.g. in Matras (2009, 2011) is crucial to understanding the output of bilingual grammars generally, heritage speakers specifically and how bilingualism may affect language change.

The data material used in this study is heritage Norwegian spoken in the American Midwest, specifically in two small, old Norwegian settlements in Wisconsin. This allows us to track changes in the production of heritage speakers over three generations of the same community (in some cases we even have data from more generations of the same family), and we observe intergenerational changes in the morphology and syntax of these varieties, especially in that specific distinctions and operations change or disappear. To probe for the productive inflectional paradigms, we studied how loan verbs from English are inflected in this heritage language. Loan verbs are necessarily assigned to a productive class, and as in Haugen ´s (1953) material, about 95 % of the English loan verbs into heritage Norwegian are inflected according to the paradigm of 1st class weak verbs. The Norwegian dialects spoken in this area originate from two distinct areas in Norway (*Gudbrandsdalen* and *Biri*), and the paradigms for this class are different in these two dialects, with different exponents, but even with different distinctions; cf. systems 1 and 2 in the table below. System 1 is from the *Gudbrandsdalen* dialect and system 2 is from the *Biri* dialect, exemplified here with the loan verb *ketsje* from English *catch*.

Sys 1	+finite	-finite	Sys 2	+finite	-finite	Sys 3	+finite	-finite	ENG	+finite	-finite
+past	Preterit: *ketsj-e*	Participle: *ketsj-e*	+past	Preterit: *ketsj-a*	participle: *ketsj-a*	+past	Preterit: *ketsj-a*	participle: *ketsj-a*	+past	Preterit: *catched*	participle: *catched*
-past	Present: *ketsj-er*	Infinitive: *ketsj-e*	-past	Present: *ketsj-e*	Infinitive: *ketsj-e*	-past	Present: *ketsj-er*	Infinitive: *ketsj-e*	-past	Present: *catch*	Infinitive: *catch*

Stage I: (1940s): Systems 1 and 2 coexist.
Stage II: (1980s—1990s): Systems 1 and 2 merge into hybrid system 3 (convergence #1)
Stage III: (2010—2015): System 3 is replaced by system 2 converging on the productive paradigm for English (convergence #2). English system, Norwegian exponents.

A second case study regards topicalization and verb movement. In homeland Norwegian spoken and written corpora, 30-35 % of clauses have fronted topics, accompanied by verb movement to the verb second position, V2 (in the C-domain; cf. 1a). In our material, the first generation maintains this frequency, in the more recent recordings the frequency drops to around 15% (comparable to the frequency in English). This also affects V2: There is now much less input on and therefore fewer cues to the V-to-C rule in the primary linguistic data for the heritage language learners, and the V2 machinery starts to break down. The original Norwegian dialects have V-to-C but no V-to-I movement, whereas English has V-to-I movement with negation, but only with auxiliaries, and no V-to-C in declaratives. In a third stage of the heritage Norwegian of this area, certain speakers clearly have no V-to-C rule (with topicalization; cf. 1b), although they move the verb across negation (V-to-I movement), without exception (!), as in English; (1c). However, they allow for this movement not only with auxiliaries, as in English, but even with main verbs. Again, this is not just transfer, it is a compromise rule, borrowing features from both underlying languages.

Stage I: (1940s): 30-35% topicalization, V-to-C movement (and across negation)
Stage II: (1980—1990): 15-17 % topicalization, violations of V2 rule (Convergence #1)
Stage III: (2010—2015): 15% topicalization, V-to-C "at random", but movement across negation (V-to-I) of both auxiliaries and main verbs (Convergence #2)

(1) a. Der **lager** dem vin. b. Der dem **lager** vin. c. Je **visste** itte henner.
  There make them wine there they make wine I knew not her
  ´There they make wine.´ ´There they make wine. ´I didn't know her.'

We have known for some time that heritage grammars are subject to transfer from the dominant language and also to several types of reduction and simplification (Scontras et al. 2015). This study clearly demonstrates that another mechanism to be observed in heritage language studies is *merger* of rules and paradigms, here described in terms of *hybrids*, *overlap* and *convergence*.