Convergence and Hybrid Rules: Verb Movement in Heritage Norwegian of the American Midwest

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1. Introduction

This paper utilizes a corpus of Heritage Norwegian in the US spanning 75 years to show how bilingual minds induce incremental language change. The gradual diachronic changes observed is explained by assuming that the typical heritage language user (like any bilingual) will be constantly seeking convergence; i.e. looking for ways to accommodate their two grammars with one construction, one set of features, or one rule. This also affects their production in the heritage language, i.e. the language serving as primary linguistic data for the next generation. The affinity to choose converging structures often results in the system of one (usually the dominant) language winning out. However, this paper gives examples of hybrid rules incorporating features from both underlying languages (here, English and Norwegian). The data is Heritage Norwegian spoken in two small settlements in Wisconsin, displaying changes in the production of speakers over three generations of the same community, specifically in the syntax of these varieties in that specific operations change. The operation under consideration is the placement of finite verbs in constructions requiring the verb second rule (V2) in homeland Norwegian; main clause declaratives containing either topicalization or a sentence adverb/negation. The V2 rule is known as vulnerable to change in language contact1 hence is an intriguing feature to trace in this material.

In this paper I introduce preliminaries in section 2, I present the data and the linguistic community in section 3 and present the structure under scrutiny (V2) in section 4. V2 in main clause declaratives in Heritage Norwegian is the topic of section 5, and section 6 contains the discussion and sums up the paper.

2. Preliminaries

Studies on the grammars of heritage languages constitute a branch of language contact research, as heritage speakers are always bi- or multilingual. Typically, heritage language speakers are unbalanced (simultaneous or sequential) bilinguals who shifted in early childhood from their heritage language to another language prevalent in their (new) linguistic community (their dominant language).2 The trigger of language shift is usually the speaker attending school, where the dominant language is spoken. This causes intraspeaker language contact, and as always “If two or more languages are in contact, with *

speakers of one language having some knowledge of the other, they come to borrow, or copy […] linguistic features and forms of all kinds” as pointed out by Aikhenwald (2013: 24).

Multilingualism on any level is characterized by the presence of multiple languages and hence multiple grammars in one mind, inevitably leading to “contamination” of one grammar by the other, not only from L1 to L2, but from L2 to L1, and from an L3 to (and from) both L2 and L1. The results of features of one grammar seeping into the other are often described as transfer or cross-linguistic influence. Other authors use the term convergence, which does not imply one particular direction of the influence. Matras (2009) discusses how any bilingual will look for ways to avoid having to keep their two linguistic systems apart, as maintaining a strict separation between two linguistic systems requires an elaborate selection procedure in properly matching the language to the context. Lowering the bar between the two languages and “allowing patterns to converge” thus maximizes “the efficiency of speech production in a bilingual situation” (Matras 2009: 151, 237; cf. also Wald 1987, an early proponent of these ideas). Convergence also captures the principle of L1/L2 Non-interference in Roper (2016: 3): rules from L1 may apply in L2 as long as no obligatory module from either language is violated or ignored.

Simplification is a different trait observed in the output of heritage language speakers, reminiscent of processes found in L2 acquisition. This is familiar from other language contact situations, e.g. Lynch (2003: 2) notes that “Several language contact researchers have been explicit about the impact of L2 acquisition processes in the linguistic practices of bilingual speech communities” and simplification is discussed as one of these L2 processes. Topicalization, (cf. below) is subject to pragmatic restrictions for its felicitous use. Hence, avoiding this structure, replacing it with SVO, may be a simplification.

Certain traits may result from either simplification or cross-linguistic influence, cf. Scontras et al (2015: 3). Several “simplified characteristics” could be instead transfer from the dominant language, “because the contact language in most of the heritage speakers tested to date is English, a language which does not […] have rich […] morphology.” Likewise, the authors mention the preference for SVO word order over topicalization as a possible effect of transfer, mirroring the English word order (ibid.).

Language users choosing converging structures and rules over non-converging ones will lead to simplification over time as the languages in contact become more similar (e.g Sprachbund) because many non-shared features of the two grammars are confined to the linguistic attic of language users. This in turn affects the primary linguistic data of the next generation of heritage speakers as the most exotic (non-converging) rules of the heritage language will never be part of the input for these speakers. Hence, convergence does not equal simplification, but convergence often leads to simplification, unless the languages involved share the same complex structure.3

Working in the opposite direction is hypercorrection (cf. e.g Kupisch 2014). Heritage language speakers tend to over-use certain features conceived of as especially typical for their heritage language (cf. e.g. Eide & Hjelde 2015; Kühl & Heegård Petersen 2018). This suggests a conscious selection of certain linguistic features by the heritage speaker, but it may also be a subconscious choice determined by a context-stimulus determined reflex.

3. The linguistic community and the data

This study utilizes five existing sets of recordings spanning 70 years and three generations, all recorded in two Norwegian communities in Wisconsin, settlements dating back to the mid-1800s and located in the two counties in Wisconsin with the highest percentage of inhabitants of Norwegian background. Coon Valley/Westby is in Vernon County, where 36% of the population identified as being of Norwegian origin, and Blair in Trempealeau County, where the corresponding number is 40%. 3-5 % of these report that they sometimes speak Norwegian at home (2000 US Census). Given their age, the number of informants is probably lower today.

Blair and Coon Valley/Westby are both farming communities, and like many Midwestern Norwegian settlements, people from a Norwegian region formed and dominated a settlement, thus one local dialect would prevail for a long time. Coon Valley/Westby was dominated by immigrants from Gudbrandsdalen

3 Counterexamples exist. The French-Cree contact-induced mixed language Michif is described as more complex than either source language, incorporating structures not shared by the two source languages; cf. Thomason (2008).
(South Norway), as was Blair, where a high proportion of the immigrants originated from Solør (Haugen 1953: 610–613). As Einar Haugen visited here in the early 1940s, Norwegian was widely spoken, even by the young generation (ibid.).

The oldest data used for this study are Haugen’s recordings of fieldwork in Coon Valley/Westby and Blair in 1942. The second data set was collected in Coon Valley/Westby by Arnstein Hjelde in 1992/1996 and the third data set was collected in 2010, consisting in 10 hours of recordings by Hjelde in Coon Valley/Westby, and recordings collected in Blair, partly by NorAmDiaSyn, partly by myself. The fourth set of data is The Corpus of American Norwegian Speech (CANS) (Johannessen, 2015), where data from 50 informants have been transcribed and digitalized so far, and the final set is from Hjelde’s field work in Coon Valley/Westby in 2015, 2017 and 2018.

Table 1: The recordings providing the data material

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Blair</th>
<th>Coon Valley/Westby</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1942: Haugen</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992/96: Hjelde</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>75-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010: Eide &amp; Hjelde</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-14: CANS: Johannessen</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>10 (transcribed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-18: Hjelde</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. The selected morphosyntactic feature: the verb second rule “V2”

A V2 clause has the finite verb occupying the second position, preceded by exactly one constituent, as in (1a). However, the linguistic literature acknowledges that potentially two different types of operations give rise to this word order. One type is the “short verb movement” where the finite verb does not move across the subject position, the other is “long verb movement” where the finite verb moves across the subject position. Short movement is usually analyzed as “V-to-I” and long verb movement is analyzed as “V-to C”. Mainland Scandinavian languages, including Norwegian, are analyzed as employing long movement only, applying in declarative main clauses (cf. 1ab). No verb movement occurs in subordinate clauses (finite verb “in situ”; cf. (1c)). Insular Scandinavian, e.g. Icelandic, in contrast displays short verb movement in subordinate clauses (cf. (1d)). For classical proposals, cf. Holmberg & Platzack (1995: 78 ff;) and Vikner (1995: 139 ff.)

(1) a. Jon kjøpte ikke mer land i går.
    John bought not more land in.yesterday
    ‘John didn’t buy more land yesterday.’

b. I går kjøpte Jon litt mer land.
    in.yesterday bought John little more land
    ‘Yesterday bought John some more land.’

c. … fordi Jon ikke kjøpte mer land i går.
    because John not bought more land in.yesterday
    ‘…because John didn’t buy more land yesterday.’

d. Hann så efter að hann havði ekki sungið.
    he saw after that he had not sung
    ‘He regretted that he hadn’t sung.’

4 (1a) features vacuous verb movement: After the verb moves, the subject moves from the subject position to the leftmost phrasal position of the clause. Cf. van Craenenbroeck & Haegeman (2007) for an informative overview over the longstanding debate on whether or not subject-initial and non-subject initial declarative main clauses give rise to the same structure.
English has short verb movement, but only with copulas and auxiliaries; main verbs never move and appear to the right of low adverbs like never (cf. (2ab)). English also has long verb movement in main clause (not subordinate) interrogatives; cf. (2bc). Subject-initial V2 in negated main clause declaratives (VFINITE > negation) as in (1a) has a clear parallel in modern English syntax in that an auxiliary (but never a main verb, unlike in Norwegian) must occur to the left of sentential negation (cf. 2d). This belongs to the cluster of phenomena discussed as “residual V2” in English, cf. Rizzi (1996). In contrast, the type of V2 found with topicalization (cf. (1b)), i.e. fronting of a non-subject, usually does not trigger V2 (long verb movement) in English, cf. (2e). Thus, we might expect topicalization-triggered V2 to be more vulnerable than subject-initial V2 in a Norwegian-English contact situation as the latter has some support even in the dominant language.

(2) a. John never bought any land.
b. ...why John is never buying any land?
c. Why is John never buying any land?
d. John did not buy any land.
e. Yesterday John did buy some Land.

5. Verb second rule “V2” in Heritage Norwegian spoken in the Midwest

On examining Haugen’s recordings from Blair and Coon Valley/Westby, no instances of non-V2 substituting for subject-initial V2 (1a) were found, and very few violations of the V2 rule with topicalization (1b). The Coon Valley/Westby recordings feature one possible violation, (3a); the recordings from Blair featured two such violations, both involving topicalization of adverbials (cf. 3b). Similar violations also appear in Norwegian homeland data of recorded speech (cf. Eide and Sollid 2011). Thus, the V2 rule was very robust at Haugen’s time.

(3) a. En syndagsmårå e skull gå åt kjørkja, e kom nedpå brua
   ‘One Sunday morning I was going to church, I came down onto the bridge.’
   b. For det meste dem bruker å ha juletre
   ‘For the most part they usually have a Christmas tree.

In the 1990 material (lacking recordings from Blair) the V2 structure is still robust, but with scattered examples of topicalization-V2 violations. However, even in the 1990s recordings, instances of obvious V2 violations occur less frequently than once per hour.

(4) a. I Nårge dom avle itte felt mykje mais.
   in Norway they grow not terribly much corn
   ‘In Norway they don’t grow a lot of corn.’
   b. I Texas det e digert alt
   in Texas it is big everything
   ‘In Texas everything is big.’

The most recent material was collected in 2010 – 2018, cf. table 1. Here I use Hjelde’s 2010 material from Coon Valley/Westby; approximately 10 hours of sound recordings of informants born 1940 or later. I complement Hjelde’s data from Blair with two video recorded conversations of four informants (CANS; Johannessen 2015) and my own sound recording of one informant, the informant “Lena”.

Even in the 2010 material informants mostly have the V2 structure intact; (5a) is representative, and only scattered examples of topicalization-V2 violations occur (5b). However, by now there is great individual variation. Next, we turn to “Lena”, an atypical informant whose language reveals a disintegration of the V2 structure.

(5) a. Ja, å da **likte** dem itte kattlikken.
   yes and then **liked** they not Catholic.DEF
   ‘Yes, and then they didn’t like the Catholics.’

   b. Nå **je** flotte **nerri** her.
   now I move down here,
   ‘Now I’m moving down here.’

5.1. Lena’s mixed grammar

“Lena” is a third generation immigrant born in 1929 outside Blair, with ancestors from Solør in Norway (near the Swedish border). Lena still uses Norwegian regularly, communicating with family and friends in Norway. There are two recordings of Lena, a monologue (4 minutes) welcoming the NorAmDiaSyn field workers, and a 20-minute dialogue where Lena speaks Norwegian with a local male informant from Blair. The monologue contains 43 main clause declaratives, 21 (49 %) of which feature topicalization. This seems like hypercorrection indexing the ethnic Norwegian, compared to homeland Norwegian featuring topicalization in 35 % of main clause declaratives (cf. Eide & Sollid 2011). 62% of Lena’s topicalization structures show violations of the topicalization V2 rule . (6a) illustrates Lena’s topicalization structures with V2, and (6b) is a V2 violation. The structure is usually Topic (= adverbial) + pronominal subject + finite verb.

(6) a. Nå **går** vi ferbi **hår** je vaks opp
   now walk we past where I grew up
   ‘Now we walk past the place where I grew up’

   b. Og der **dem** lager **vin.**
   and there they make wine
   ‘And there they make wine’

In the video recorded dialogue Lena talks to an older male informant from Blair, both speak Norwegian with roughly the same fluency. Out of Lena’s 115 declaratives, 98 (85 %) are SVO-structures and 17 (15 %) are topicalization structures. Unlike the monologue, where the proportion of topicalizations is 49 %, hence higher than typical homeland Norwegian (35%), in her on-line production the proportion is much lower than in the corresponding homeland Norwegian structures (15%). Fronting is infrequent in English as compared to Norwegian. Jensen et al. (2019: 7) attest that the proportion of English declaratives featuring topicalization and other fronting structures in spoken corpora is less than 7%. Hence, it seems likely that Lena’s frequency of topicalizations in online production mirrors that of her English grammar. Her topicalization structures are mostly collocations, exclamations and fixed phrases, hardly candidates for true V2 violations. However, some V2 violations exist, and slightly more frequent if the topicalized phrase is a heavy constituent or a subordinate clause (cf. Eide & Hjelde 2015 for a detailed discussion).

Lena’s utters 115 declaratives in this online dialogue, and 23 of these are subject-initial, but containing negation, allowing us to investigate if Lena moves the verb across the negation as in homeland Norwegian (cf. (1a)). Remarkably, though V2 violations occur with other sentence adverbs (cf. below), there is not one single V2 violation with negation; all 23 subject-initial declaratives feature the V2 rule exactly as in homeland Norwegian. Examples are given in (7ab).
5.2. The bigger picture

Judging from the CANS corpus, all Heritage Norwegian speakers seemingly move the finite verb across negation. In Eide & Hjelde (2015) we examined 1800 tokens of sentential negation ikke ‘not’ in main clause declaratives and found not one single instance where the finite verb is not moved across the negation. However, we did find instances of non-movement across other types of sentence adverbs, like aldri ‘never’ and nettopp ‘just’, cf. (8):

(8) a. je aldri fann plassen og je aldri fann noe skyldfolk
‘I never found Place-DEF and I never found any family.’

b. Vi nettopp kom tilbake i går
‘We just came back yesterday.’

This type of verb movement, (short) movement across negation, is hence suspiciously robust over time. In contrast, both the type of V2 triggered by topicalization and the topicalization structure itself is obviously susceptible to change: Though the numbers in table 2 fail to match Lena’s staggering 62% non-V2 in topicalization structures, the frequency of topicalization decreases, and that the percentage of V2-violations in the same structures increases over time, indicating a correlation between these two features. The percentages are calculated from ca. 500 main clause declaratives from each data batch.5

Table 2: The trends across generations (cf. Eide & Hjelde, forthcoming)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data source</td>
<td>Haugen 40s</td>
<td>Haugen 40s</td>
<td>Haugen 40s</td>
<td>CANS</td>
<td>Hjelde 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topicalizations, %</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2-violations, %</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 The declaratives are excerpted from 4 informants in the Haugen material, from 4 informants in Hjelde’s 1990-material, 6 in the CANS material and from the informant “Ole”, born in 1961 in the 2017-2018 material.
6. Discussion: A mixed grammar of verb movement

The phenomenon known as V2, traditionally seen as a monolithic operation, seems to amount to a number of different operations in Heritage Norwegian spoken the American Midwest. Firstly, the verb always moves across negation. I argue that this particular movement is augmented in this contact variety by support from an operation in the dominant language English, V-to-I movement, non-existing in Norwegian (cf. section 4 above). English sentential negation requires a finite auxiliary to its left, but crucially does not allow for lexical verbs in this position. Moreover, the fact that some speakers\(^6\) distinguish between negation and other sentence adverbs (like *aldri* ‘never’ and *nettop* ‘just’) in that they always move the verb across negation, but not always across other sentence adverbs, shows another trait from the dominating English language. English makes the same distinction, homeland Norwegian does not. In Mainland Scandinavian the finite verb moves across all sentence adverbs, negation or not. One crucial trait comes from Norwegian, though: As mentioned above, English sentential negation requires an auxiliary to its left, but in Norwegian all verbs are created equal in the sense that any verb, lexical verb or auxiliary, occurs to the left of sentential negation. We sum up the features of the relevant movement rule (V2 in subject-initial main cause declaratives) and their source language in (9) below.

(9)

a. Always move a finite auxiliary across negation (Norwegian (V-to-C) and English (V-to-I))
b. Move any verb, lexical or auxiliary, across negation (Norwegian)
c. Distinguish negation from (other) sentence adverbs (English)

It seems wrong to analyze this composite rule as “simplification”, as it seems more complex than the corresponding rules in either source language. Calling this transfer from English also does not suffice, as some of the features of this rule stem from Norwegian. I conclude that this is a hybrid rule, hence the term *convergence* (cf. section 2) is the most fitting description.

The V2 triggered by non-subject topicalization seems more vulnerable (cf. table 2, note 1 and also Arnbjörnsdóttir et al. 2018), and is used by certain speakers, like Lena, seemingly at random. However, there is clearly a correlation between the frequency of topicalization structures and the percentage of topicalization V2 violations, as illustrated by table 2 above; cf. also Eide & Hjelde (2015). Other authors have also pointed to a similar correlation in the development in the diachronic development of English. Whereas Speyer (2008) suggests that the loss of V2 causes a reduction in non-subject-initial declaratives, van Kemenade & Westergaard (2012) claim instead that the loss of V2 is due to information structure effects and that reduction of non-subject-initial clauses precede loss of syntax. They explain this by the assumption that fewer contexts for topicalization-triggered V2 in the input leads to unclear cues in the primary linguistic data for the next generation. I tentatively adopt this explanation for the trajectory illustrated in table 2 as well. I assume that the development takes place in stages, where each stage is characterized by a convergence between features of the two underlying languages, each convergence resulting in potentially substantial changes in the input for the next generation.

(10)  

**Stage I:** (1940s): 30-35% topicalization, robust V-to-C movement, no V2 violations  
**Stage II:** (1980—1990): 15-17 % topicalization (Convergence #1), certain violations of V2 rule  
**Stage III:** (2010—2018): 10 % topicalization, V-to-C “at random” (convergence #2)

Convergence number 1 is a convergence qualifying as transfer from English, as the proportion of topicalizations drops to a level resembling English although the proportion of topicalizations is still higher than that in English declaratives. Convergence number 2 is less easily explained as transfer and resembles again a hybrid rule. If the English verb movement rule were transferred into Heritage Norwegian, one would expect V2 to be banished in these structures, but instead we find that it seems to

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\(^6\) One reviewer asks if this concerns any speakers except Lena. We found many V2-violations with non-negation sentence adverbs in the CANS corpus, and not one single V2-violation with negation. The CANS corpus contains a large number of speakers, evidently including many who make a distinction between negation and sentence adverbs.  
\(^7\) Cf. Also Abgh (2015); a monograph on the emergence of hybrid grammars (focusing on creoles).
be more or less optional. Again this is better described as convergence; the V2 rule triggered by topicalization applies in some cases (as in homeland Norwegian) and in some cases not (as in English).

We have known for some time that heritage grammars are subject to transfer from the dominant language and also to several types of simplification (Scontras et al. 2015). This study demonstrates that another mechanism to be observed in heritage language studies is merger of rules and paradigms, here described in terms of hybrid rules and convergence.7

References


