

Transmission of complex variation in a heritage language context: American Norwegian argument shift across generations

Norwegian exhibits variation with respect to how arguments are placed relatively to negation and verbal particles. NP objects generally follow negation (ex. 1). Pronominal objects, on the other hand, have a strong tendency to precede negation; this is referred to as Object Shift (OS) (Holmberg 1986, ex. 2). OS only applies when the verb has left the VP (Holmberg's Generalisation), thus, it is restricted to main clauses with a single, lexical verb; moreover, OS does not apply if the object is focused (ex. 3) or has a non-nominal or non-individuated antecedent (i.a. Andréasson 2013).

- | | | | | | |
|-----|---|-----|--|-----|--|
| (1) | Han likte ikke boka .
he liked not book.DEF
'He didn't like the book.' | (2) | Han likte den ikke .
he liked it not
'He didn't like it.' | (3) | Han likte ikke DEN .
he liked not it
'He didn't like that.' |
|-----|---|-----|--|-----|--|

Pronominal subjects (when not fronted to Spec-CP) tend to precede negation; this is referred to as Subject Shift (SS, ex. 4). NP subjects show more variation (see ex. 5). Subject placement is influenced by factors such as clause type and information structure (focused subjects generally follow negation even when pronominal; see Westergaard 2011).

- | | | | |
|-----|--|-----|--|
| (4) | Derfor likte han ikke boka
therefore liked he not book.DEF
'Therefore he didn't like the book.' | (5) | Derfor likte { gutten } ikke {gutten} boka.
Therefore liked boy.DEF not boy.DEF book.DEF
'Therefore the boy didn't like the book.' |
|-----|--|-----|--|

Pronominal objects generally precede verbal particles (though not categorically in all dialects), while NP objects can either precede or follow the particle (ex. 7–8) (Larsson & Lundquist 2014).

- | | | | |
|-----|---|-----|---|
| (7) | Vi kastet { det } ut {%det}
we threw it out it
'We threw it out.' | (8) | Vi kastet { søppelet } ut {søppelet}
we threw rubbish.DEF out rubbish.def
'We threw out the rubbish.' |
|-----|---|-----|---|

In this paper we investigate how this complex variation is transmitted across generations in American Norwegian (AmNo), a heritage language spoken in the USA/Canada.¹ We use novel data from the speech corpora LIA (homeland Norwegian dialect speakers born in the 19th and (early) 20th century), and CANS (Norw. heritage speakers in North America).² The data set is unique in two ways: First, LIA gives us a hitherto unprecedented degree of access to spoken dialects from the time around which many of the first emigrants (the ancestors of today's AmNo speakers) left Norway. Second, the latest version of CANS includes, in addition to recent recordings of AmNo, older recordings made by E.Haugen in the 1930s/40s; we can thus trace the developments that have taken place in America via the intermediate stage of the generation of AmNo speakers that provided linguistic input to today's speakers.³ This strongly contributes to a solution of the baseline problem that has been acknowledged in many studies of heritage Norw. (e.g. Johannessen & Larsson 2015) and in heritage languages more widely (e.g. Montrul 2016:168ff): although it is common to use the contemporary homeland variety as baseline for comparison for the heritage language; this practice has certain pitfalls: To trace diachronic developments over generations in a heritage language, one should ideally start with the language of the first emigrants; moreover, one should ideally consider the input that today's heritage language speakers received.

We compare 3 groups of speakers: 1) Speakers in LIA, limited to the county of Oppland (i.e. homeland Norw. speakers who lived in a time and an area characterised by large-scale emigration). 2) AmNo speakers in CANS, recordings from the 1930s/40s (fewer metadata are available, but these speakers generally have a dialect background similar to group 1). 3) AmNo speakers in CANS, recorded in 2010, limited to speakers whose ancestors came from Oppland.

1 A heritage language is acquired in the home, but is not the dominant language of the larger society (Rothman 2009).

2 <https://tekstlab.uio.no/glossa2/lia>, <https://tekstlab.uio.no/glossa2/cans3>.

3 See also Riksem (2017), who, however, relies on Haugen's transcriptions and not the original recordings.

Key results are the following (we focus on pronominal arguments): Pronominal objects shift in a fairly similar way in all three groups.⁴ OS does not apply to focussed objects or objects with non-nominal/non-individuated antecedents (e.g. propositions or types). Both of the AmNo samples include individual cases of unshifted objects that apparently fulfil the normal conditions for shift; however, this is also attested in LIA (compare ...*så han såg ikke meg da* ‘so he didn’t see me then’ (LIA) vs. ... *og så ikke meg* ‘and didn’t see me’ (CANS, 1930s/40s)). Pronominal subjects exhibit two developments: First, fronting of subjects to Spec-CP increases incrementally in AmNo (Table 1) (see also Westergaard & Lohndal 2019). Second, out of the subjects in the middle field (i.e. those that are *not* fronted to Spec-CP), incrementally fewer are shifted (Table 2). A decline of SS in today’s AmNo is also observed by Anderssen & Westergaard (forthc.), who propose an account based on cross-linguistic transfer, since many of the unshifted subjects in their study occur in questions with auxiliaries or *be*, similar to English tags (e.g. *er ikke det?* ‘isn’t it?’). Such tags are common in the CANS 2010 data too; however, in the recordings from the 1930s/1940s, they are not found, and thus cannot be responsible for the lower proportion of SS (73.6% vs. 87.6% in LIA). It seems, then, that a decline in SS was incipient in the input data to which today’s AmNo speakers were exposed, independently of English-style tags. Moreover, many of the unshifted subjects in CANS 2010 occur in contexts known to favour the post-negation position in homeland Norw. too; e.g. in non-factive subordinate clauses. Relatively to verbal particles, pronominal objects exhibit variable placement in LIA; 7/38 (18%) are placed after the particle (e.g. ...*han åt opp dei* ‘he ate them up’).⁵ In CANS 1930s/1940s and 2010, the figures are 3/25 (12%) and 5/41 (12%), thus, post-particle objects are still clearly attested, though somewhat less frequently.

The overall picture is that the complex variation in argument shift is retained across generations. We argue that the developments wrt. subject placement can be explained as quantitative fluctuations produced by an unchanged grammar, in combination with a preference for avoiding complexity. The increase of fronted subjects follows from a reluctance to front other constituents, which would entail more complex movement operations. Similarly, the decrease in SS is a strategy to avoid moving a middle field subject further than necessary. On the face of it, the placement of objects relatively to particles appears to be undergoing a different development (AmNo speakers have slightly more objects preceding the particle). However, it is not immediately clear if the word order obj-part is more complex than part-obj, on the assumption that the latter involves movement of the particle (Ramchand & Svenonius 2002). On a more general level, our findings suggest that the acquisition of heritage languages, and thus their diachronic development, is not crucially determined by frequencies or the patterns found in the dominant language; instead, universal principles and sensitivity to information structure and prosodic patterns are key, like in other natural languages (Westergaard 2013, Erteschic-Shir & Josefsson 2017).

Table 1	Spec-CP	Middle field
LIA	400/592 (67,6%)	192/592 (32,4%)
CANS, 1930s/40s	230/306 (75,2%)	76/306 (24,8%)
CANS, 2010	679/811 (83,7%)	132/811 (16,3%)

Table 2	Sub-neg (=SS)	Neg-sub
LIA	177/202 (87,6%)	25/202 (12,4%)
CANS, 1930s/40s	56/76 (73,6%)	20/76 (26,4%)
CANS, 2010	66/132 (50%)	66/132 (50%)

Selected references: Anderssen, M. & Westergaard, A. *Forthc.* Word order variation in heritage lang.: Subject shift and Object shift in Norw. Andréasson, M. 2013. Obj. shift in Scand. lang.: The impact of contrasted elements. *Nordic J. of Ling.* 36(2). 187–217. Holmberg, A. 1986. *Word order and syntactic features in the Scandinavian lang. and English.* Stockholm University. Lundquist, B. 2014. Verb-particles: active verbs. *Nordic Atlas of Language Structures (NALS) Journal* 1: 110–118. Lundquist, B. & Larsson, I. 2014. Objektplacering vid partikelverb i norska dialekter och äldre svenska. In *Språk i Norge og nabolanda.* Novus. Montrul, S. 2016. *The acquisition of heritage languages.* CUP. Westergaard, M. 2011. Subject position and information structure. *Studia Linguistica* 65(3). 299–332. Westergaard, M. 2013. The acquisition of ling. variation. In Lohndal, T. (ed.): *In Search of Univ. Grammar.* Benjamins.

4 Anderssen & Westergaard (forthc.) report a decline of OS in AmNo as compared to contemporary homeland Norw. We currently do not have enough data from each speaker group to make quantitative generalisations about OS, since the potential contexts for OS are infrequent.

5 We queried for the particles *in*, *out*, *up* and *down*.