Heritage languages in full circle: From the Nordic to the Americas and back again

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1. Introduction

This volume of Bergen Language and Linguistic Studies (BeLLS) marks the first in a series of anticipated volumes on heritage languages. Heritage languages (HLs) are languages that are non-dominant languages in a given setting, often with little local prestige. Speakers of heritage languages are often associated with immigrant groups, and they are often bilingual in the dominant language(s) and the heritage language, although proficiency in the heritage language varies widely. For example, Norwegian is a heritage language in the United States, particularly in certain regions such as the Upper Midwest. While Norwegian obviously holds wide prestige in Norway, its status in the US has always been as a minority, immigrant language associated with certain groups.

The papers in this volume are a collection of those presented at recent annual meetings of the *Workshop on Immigrant Languages in the Americas*, a conference series co-founded by heritage language researchers from Norway and the United States. A founding member of the research network and conference series was the late Professor Janne Bondi Johannessen of the University of Oslo, whose contributions to the study of heritage languages are renowned not only in Norway but throughout the global network of heritage language scholars. As evidenced in this volume, the work she helped to initiate on the Norwegian language in North America continues to flourish and expand to a new generation of researchers who contribute even further to theoretical knowledge about linguistics in general and heritage languages in particular. Traditionally alternating between North America and the Europe, the first WILA conference was held in Madison, Wisconsin, in 2010. The 12th annual conference, hosted virtually by the University of Helsinki, Finland, was the event during which many of the ideas and studies you read about in this volume made their debut.

The papers in this volume demonstrate the sharing of ideas and advancements in the field that occur as an outcome of the research network's annual conference and its dedicated and collaborative research members. For example, four of the 10 papers in the volume make use of various components of the Corpus of American Norwegian Speech, a tool which has been demonstrated at previous WILA events. A further three papers follow-up on a survey on postvernacular heritages languages which was introduced at WILA 11, hosted by University of North Carolina-Asheville. The volume contains papers on Dutch, Frisian and German in the United States, as well as four papers on formal and social aspects of American Norwegian.

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The volume is rounded out by a social investigation of Turkish in the setting of Montréal and the production of Greek restrictive clauses by Greek Americans.

The collection of research showcased in this volume reveals a network that is growing in scope and in terms of theoretical pursuits. While many of the papers represent languages that have traditionally held a central position in the network, others indicate a departure toward locations and speakers outside of the north of Europe. A further observation is that, originating largely with the work of researchers within a formalist paradigm, the research network has proven itself durable and flexible enough to incorporate a variety of perspectives in the years since its origin. This volume, for example, illustrates the openness of the network by showcasing work conducted using various methods – ethnomethodology, experiments, discourse analysis, and surveys – and from perspectives ranging from generative grammar to third wave sociolinguistics.

The 10 papers in this volume discuss heritage languages in various settings and from diverse perspectives. Among these various perspectives, three central linguistic themes can be identified: postvernacular language use, morphology, and variation. The first theme touches on heritage language communities where language shift to a majority language (English in the cases studied in this volume) has already happened or is in the final stages. This process has been termed *postvernacularity.* It has been argued that this phenomenon usually occurs when the community feels a stronger identification with the heritage culture (Hansen 1938), realizing the importance and value of the lost heritage.

2. Postvernacularity

Reporting on the results of the largest survey so far on heritage languages in North American contexts, Rachyl Hietpas and Charlotte Vanhecke identify "hotspots" of Dutch immigrant culture that have a strong local Dutch identity. In these locations, cultural associations promoting local history, heritage, and tourism bring the community together and foreground Dutch heritage. Hietpas and Vanhecke provide evidence for the fact that heritage language maintenance is not essential to cultural identification, while the respondents also express feelings of loss, regret, responsibility, and guilt related to language loss. Nevertheless, the results show that cultural identification is strong across all groups, contrasting with previous studies where language loss and cultural identification correlated.

Rose Fisher's study on Pennsylvania Dutch explores a postvernacular community at the final stages of language shift to English. Fisher's results point towards the importance of sectarian vs. non-sectarian divide. Sectarian, separatist groups maintain their heritage language through bilingualism, and their responses differ from the non-sectarian groups. Fisher highlights the need to consider the various individuals from different groups and amongst them to gain a better understanding of the meanings of the heritage language and culture for individuals.

Maike Rocker's article examines the ongoing language change in the American-East Frisian community from heritage Low German to English, as well as the impact of postvernacular practices on attitudes towards Low German and identity construction. Although the language has lost its communicative purposes and is no longer actively used, the affiliation with cultural heritage, such as Protestant churches and the continuation of East Frisian food and tea ceremony traditions, seems to be important identity markers for many in the American-East Frisian community.

3. Morphology

The articles in the second theme study underexplored areas of heritage language morphology. Taking advantage of the American Norwegian language data covering nearly a century of heritage language samples, David Natvig and Yvonne van Baal study derivational morphology in American Norwegian-English contact. Their findings show largely language-consistent combinations of roots and derivational morphemes in American Norwegian-English language contact, which sets derivational morphology apart from both compounding and inflectional morphology. On the theoretical level, these results point toward a key finding that there are no syntactic principles that disallow language mixing at the level of root and derivation.

Also with data from American Norwegian, Alexander Lykke and Arnstein Hjelde approach diachronic variation and contact influence within a family, by comparing the heritage language grammars, morphology in particular, of a mother and a daughter. The second-generation mother shows Norwegian which is very similar to homeland Norwegian. In contrast, the third-generation daughter's language data show innovations on all the phenomena investigated. Lykke and Hjelde connect these differences with the life trajectories of the individuals studied in a diachronic perspective, connecting innovations both with relearning and contact influence from English.

In the third article on morphology, Alexander Lykke studies tense morphology of American Norwegian with a diachronic corpus. He shows that the tense morphology of earlier generations of speakers of American Norwegian differs from present-day speakers' or third and fourth generation immigrants' tense morphology in that it presents no innovations in comparison with homeland marking. In comparison with previous studies on heritage languages, these results suggests that innovations arose with the second generation of American Norwegian speakers. Lykke argues that studies on the internal diachrony of moribund heritage varieties increase our understanding of such varieties, and, by extension, of multilingual individuals.

4. Variation

Kari Kinn investigates pragmaticalised uses of *sånn* and *slik* 'such (a), like this/that' in American Norwegian. Kinn's results show that the distribution of these pragmaticalized determiners in American Norwegian differs in some respects from that in the homeland; notably, the lexical form *slik* is more used than *sånn*, and that the hedging marker is much more robustly attested than the recognitional determiner. Besides adding to our understanding of these particular markers in Norwegian, these examples put in evidence how studies of phenomena at the syntax-pragmatics interface in heritage languages can shed new light on the development of homeland languages more generally.

Utkan Boyacıoğlu describes the Turkish heritage language community in Montreal. Based on ethnographic studies and interviews, Boyacıoğlu's results show that religious, political and cultural divisions are at the forefront of the community in terms of lexical variation. According to the terms used when referring to sub communities, the results show that different communities of practice use different forms of categorization; political and religious references are most frequently used.

Samatha Litty tests the verticalization model by examining newspaper advertisements in German language newspapers in the turn of the 20th century. By examining two newspapers in South Dakota, Litty shows that there are clear distinctions in advertising locality according to the language of the newspaper, with most national advertisements appearing in the English paper and the majority of local advertisements appearing in the German paper. In addition, the category of an advertisement may impact in which paper and language it appears, with banks, for example, being advertised only in the German-language paper. However, as an indicator of verticalization in this community, her results suggest that external contributors do not appear to have much influence on these local papers.

Artemis Alexiadou and Vasiliki Rizou investigate the production of restrictive relative clauses in two varieties of Greek, namely monolingual Greek and Heritage Greek in contact with American English. Restrictive relative clauses are often problematic for heritage speakers, as they present difficulties in the acquisition of sentential structures with long-distance dependences. The results indeed confirmed these findings, as the declinable relative marker was avoided by the heritage speakers. This was expected, as heritage speakers tend to simplify and reduce morphology. However, no connection of these findings to English influence could be established.

The three main themes in which the articles in this volume can be divided reflect the versatility and richness of heritage language studies. Indeed, both cultural, social and societal, and grammatical aspects are central when trying to explain heritage language use and development. Both historical and contemporary perspectives are needed in order to contribute to our understand heritage languages.

5. Concluding remarks

In many ways, the collaboration between WILA and BeLLS is, if not a homecoming, then the completion of a circle. A conference series founded in part by researchers from Norway has now found a publication home in the country. BeLLS is committed to open access and a timely publication process, generously funded by the University of Bergen. These values are shared with the WILA network. We hope that this new publishing relationship will grant broader access to the fascinating research done on diverse heritage language contexts, also extending to new audiences. While there is a wealth of research on indigenous minorities and historical and contemporary immigrant languages in the Nordic countries, the field of heritage language research is currently taking shape, growing in perspective, gaining new members, and developing. We can expect to see more research in this area in the coming years, enriching and adding to the research done on historic migrant groups in the Nordic Countries and in North American contexts. As migration of people and the languages they speak are by no means relegated to the past, the study of heritage languages will continue to develop and offer ample opportunities for investigation.

References

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