

# Piecing together the history of change: A diachronic study of moribund heritage Norwegian tense morphology

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This historical study of the tense morphology of moribund North American heritage Norwegian (AmNo) provides new diachronic insight into the language change of this variety. Change has been found in present-day (post-2010) AmNo tense morphology. Previous work argues that the observed changes have arisen with the present generation of speakers. However, this has not been proven with a systematic study of early AmNo data. AmNo presents a unique opportunity to explore the diachrony of old (moribund) heritage varieties since historical data have recently become available in the Corpus of American Nordic Speech (CANS). The present work uses such data from CANS, specifically a subcorpus of selected speakers from Coon Valley and Westby (WI) from 1942, which is supplemented by targeted searches in both a subcorpus of all speakers of CANS recorded in 1942 and a subcorpus of all speakers recorded from 1987 to 1992. The study found no evidence of change in the older stages of AmNo. This lack of evidence for change supports the claim that the change in the present-day tense morphology of AmNo has arisen with the present generation of speakers. A probable cause for the lack of change in early AmNo is that the AmNo language communities, to a large degree, functioned in Norwegian up until the 1940s. Thus, Norwegian was available to speakers to a much higher degree than it has been for the present generation. This study provides novel insight into language change in moribund heritage varieties, but it also argues that the study of further grammatical variables and heritage varieties is needed to increase our understanding of the language and grammar of the last multilingual speakers of moribund varieties.

Keywords: heritage language, tense morphology, language change, diachronic study, corpus

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

This study examines diachronic data to study the tense morphology of North American heritage Norwegian (henceforth AmNo), a moribund heritage variety. The study of moribund heritage varieties is an important part of understanding multilingualism, as argued by D'Alessandro et al. (2021). A significant methodological challenge in the study of such varieties is that the quantity and quality of our data differs from studies using methodologies allowing for more

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rigorous analysis (e.g. experimental methodologies using statistical analysis). In order to compensate for our more limited data, D'Alessandro et al. (2021: 7) call for more detailed, descriptive work on moribund heritage varieties. The present study contributes a concrete methodology for how this can be achieved and an example of what can be gained by descriptive studies of moribund heritage varieties.

The present work provides novel insight into the language history of AmNo, examining its tense morphology in particular. Previous work on the tense morphology of AmNo studies the language of the predominantly third and fourth generation immigrant speakers of the present day (recorded after 2010, see Lykke 2020: 39-41).<sup>2</sup> Studying third and fourth generation immigrant speakers is common in the study of AmNo and similar heritage varieties (D'Alessandro et al. 2021: 2; see e.g. Hopp & Putnam 2015; Larsson et al. 2015; Lohndal & Westergaard 2016; van Baal 2020a). Without knowledge of the language of earlier generations of immigrants, it is often difficult to address whether change has arisen in the studied generation of speakers, or in earlier generations. Previous work on AmNo tense morphology is no exception, and argues that innovations arise in the present generation, although with a minimum of empirical substantiation (Lykke 2020: 102-107, 219-226).

Change in the morphological marking of tense, however, has been observed with, for instance, young second-generation heritage speakers of English (Polinsky, 2018: 38–41, 49–50). There is thus a priori no reason why such change should not have arisen in early AmNo, and been passed on down to the third and fourth generation immigrants who speak the language today. The possibility that change may be older naturally calls into question whether the change seen with the speakers of moribund heritage varieties such as AmNo can be attributed to the present generation of speakers. In the case of tense morphology, Lykke (2020) argues that change observed in present-day AmNo is related to the decreased access to and use of Norwegian during language acquisition and/or across the lifespan of present-day speakers (depending on the change). If changes arose as innovations that spread in earlier generations of speakers, however, the causes of change may be different.

To determine when change begins, I use data from the 1940s, 1980s and 1990s, which have recently been made available in the Corpus of American Nordic Speech (CANS, Johannessen 2015). I show that no change can be found in the tense morphology of earlier stages of AmNo. This finding implies that the change found in present-day AmNo has arisen in the present generation. The data from the 1940s are particularly interesting for comparison with the present-day speakers. This is because these data form a much closer approximation of the input language of the present-day speakers than what has previously been available.

Along with van Baal (2022), I argue that the sociolinguistic context of AmNo in the period preceding the 1940s is the main reason why we see little change in its

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<sup>2</sup> I refer to the language stage recorded between 2010 and 2016 as “present-day” throughout the article.

early period (see also Hjelde, 2015). For the sake of comparison with earlier work on AmNo tense morphology, I have chosen to mainly study the language of speakers from the Coon Valley / Westby settlement of Wisconsin, recorded in 1942. The insight thus gained is one step towards piecing together the history of language change in AmNo, and thereby a more complete understanding of the grammar of the variety. As such, this work enters into the context of the previous historical work on American Norwegian by Hjelde (2015), Riksem (2017), Larsson and Kinn (2022) and van Baal (2022).

The remainder of the article starts with a background section containing information about Norwegian tense morphology and the change found in present-day AmNo. This is followed by a methodology section focused on the selection and extraction of data. In the following section, I move on to present the data from early AmNo. Subsequently, I give a discussion of the findings, using the sociolinguistic history of AmNo to explain why early AmNo is different from present-day AmNo and heritage English. Lastly, some concluding, summarizing remarks are provided.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Norwegian tense morphology

I outline the morphology under discussion by presenting data from the homeland Norwegian dialects relevant to the analysis that follows. The baseline for comparison in this study is homeland Eastern Norwegian rural dialects, specifically the dialects of the Gudbrandsdal area, and Biri, a dialect of the Eastern Lowlands.<sup>3</sup>

Common to all Norwegian dialects is an inflectional system with four inflectional categories: the infinitive, present, preterit and participle. Furthermore, Norwegian tense morphology has weak and strong classes of verbal inflection, like other Germanic languages. The established view is that Norwegian has two weak classes of inflection (Faarlund et al. 1998: 492–500), which I call the *a*-class and *Te*-class.<sup>4</sup> The *a*-class is the largest and most productive class, both in homeland and American Norwegian (Faarlund et al. 1998: 493–494; Haugen 1953: 454–456). Table 1 shows the *a*-class inflection of the homeland Norwegian Gudbrandsdal and Biri dialects (based on Venås 1974: 99–105, 397–400). In the *a*-class, the Biri dialect has full syncretism between all categories, whereas the Gudbrandsdal varieties distinguish only between non-past (infinitive and present) and past (preterit and participle).

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<sup>3</sup> One speaker in the material from 1942 speaks the dialect of Stange, a different Eastern Lowland dialect (Norw. *flatbygdsmål*). For the purposes of this study, the Stange dialect is treated as grammatically identical to the Biri dialect. The chief notable difference from Biri dialect is that the Stange dialect has a present tense affix /-er/ in the weak classes (excepting the *dde*-type of the *Te*-class).

<sup>4</sup> The class terminology I use here is that used by Lykke (2020: 57). I furthermore follow Lykke (2020: 77–79) in analyzing verbs with inflection like *telje* ‘count’ – *tel* ‘count.PRES’ – *talde* ‘count.PRET’ as irregular verbs. The discussion about regularity and irregularity in inflectional morphology is not relevant to the present work.

In Table 2 the *Te*-class inflection of the Southern Gudbrandsdal and Biri dialects is displayed (based on Venås 1974: 257–279). As can be seen, the *Te*-class has three subtypes, the *te*-type, *de*-type and *dde*-type. There is some dialectal variation internal to the Eastern Norwegian dialect area with regards to the consonant quality of the past participle affix, and it is probable that both forms would have been encountered by a speaker growing up in the Gudbrandsdal area or Biri. In Northern Gudbrandsdal varieties, the forms with /-d/ are the most common.

Table 1: The *a*-class in homeland Gudbrandsdal & Biri dialects

	Gudbrandsdal	Biri
<b>Infinitive</b>	/kast-e/ ‘throw’	/kast-e/ ‘throw’
<b>Present</b>	/kast-e/	/kast-e/
<b>Preterit</b>	/kast-a/	/kast-e/
<b>Participle</b>	/kast-a/	/kast-e/

Table 2: The *Te*-class of Gudbrandsdal & Biri dialects

	<i>te</i> -type	<i>de</i> -type	<i>dde</i> -type
<b>Infinitive</b>	/vi:s-e/ ‘show’	/prø:v-e/ ‘try’	/so:-0/ ‘sow’
<b>Present</b>	/vi:s-e/	/prø:v-e/	/so:-r/
<b>Preterit</b>	/vi:s-te/	/prø:v-de/	/so-de/
<b>Participle</b>	/vi:s-t/	/prøv-d/ OR /prøf-t/	/so-d/ OR /so-t/

In addition to the regular morphology, I provide some examples of irregular morphology, which is relevant to the analysis that follows (based on Venås 1967: 324–325). In Table 3 an example of the inflection of the modal verb *måtte* ‘must’ is displayed, and may serve as an example of modal verb inflection. For instance, the infinitive and preterit are commonly syncretic. Furthermore, the inflection of the highly irregular verb *gå* ‘walk’ is exemplified, because of the change with this verb found in present-day AmNo (Lykke 2020: 172–179).

Table 3: The irregular inflection of *måtte* ‘must’ and *gå* ‘walk’ in homeland Norwegian

	<i>måtte</i> ‘must’	<i>gå</i> ‘walk’
<b>Infinitive</b>	/mot-e/	/go:-0/
<b>Present</b>	/mo:-0/	/go:-r/
<b>Preterit</b>	/mot-e/	/jik-0/
<b>Participle</b>	/mot-a/	/go-t/

## 2.2 Change in the tense morphology of present-day American Norwegian

Two separate trends of change are seen with speakers of present-day AmNo: Class overgeneralization and innovated syncretism. In the class overgeneralization, the trend is that the morphology of the *a-* and *Te*-class spreads into new contexts; to previously irregular verbs, or onto the other regular class. In most cases, innovated forms occur alongside original forms, the exception being the overgeneralizations involving *måtte* ‘must’ and *gå* ‘walk,’ described below. An example of overgeneralization with *måtte* ‘must’ is provided in (1):

- (1) *i tr- tre mane så må-dde ru havvreste<sup>5</sup>*  
in thr- three months so **must-PRET** you harvest.INF  
‘In three months, you had to harvest.’

**Homeland:** /mot-e/ ‘must-PRET’

(Westby\_WI\_06gm, Lykke 2020: 180)

One reason why this change is particularly interesting to the present study is that it occurs with several speakers in the Coon Valley / Westby speech community in the present-day data. Accordingly, Lykke (2020: 179–184) hypothesizes that the change of /mot-e/ to /mo-de/ ‘must-PRET’ is a change which may have arisen before the present-day speakers acquired Norwegian, and that it was spreading in the speech community when they grew up. The diachronic analysis below, however, shows that there is no evidence for this innovation in earlier generations of speakers.

The other overgeneralization, which is used invariably by the speaker who has the innovation, involves the highly irregular and token frequent preterit of the verb *gå* ‘walk.’ The relevance to the present study is that the consistent use of the overgeneralized form may indicate that the innovation arose in earlier AmNo. An example is provided in (2):

- (2) [...] *å vi gå-dde åll åver heile # heile farrmen [...]*  
[...] and we **go-PRET** all over whole # whole farm.the [...]  
‘[...] and we **went** all over whole the whole farm [...]’

**Homeland:** /jik-0/ ‘go-PRET’

(Sunburg\_MN\_03gm, Lykke 2020: 172)

The other trend of change is one of innovated syncretism. The innovation proceeds such that present and participle forms occur in preterit contexts where they did not previously occur. Curiously, the modal verb *måtte* ‘must’ is the verb where this innovation occurs most frequently, though only with present tense forms in preterit contexts. Examples of this trend is provided below, with a present tense form in a preterit context in (3), and a participle form in a preterit context in (4).

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<sup>5</sup> Examples throughout the article are provided with the orthophonic transcription of CANS with glossing. The verb under discussion is outlined in bold. The supplied code, Westby\_WI\_06gm, signifies a specific speaker in CANS.

- (3) *men ho må-0 plannt tre på de*  
 but she **must-PRES** plant.INF trees on it  
 ‘But she had to plant trees on it.’

**Homeland:** /mot-0/ ‘must-pret’

(Webster\_SD\_01gm, Lykke 2020: 210)

- (4) *e prøvde ee sjnakke nåRsjk så e læR-d # efrå demm*  
 I try.PRET uh speak.INF Norwegian so I **learn-PART** # from them  
 ‘I tried to speak Norwegian, so I learned from them.’

**Homeland:** /læ:r-de/ ‘learn-pret’

(Coon\_Valley\_WI\_12gm, Lykke 2020: 211)

The findings of change related in these examples are mainly found by a study of eight present-day speakers of American Norwegian (Lykke 2020: 32, 35–37), the exception being the changes affecting the modal *måtte* ‘must.’ The eight main speakers are at least third generation immigrants, except one second generation speaker, Chicago\_IL\_01gk. These present-day speakers were born in the 1930s and 1940s. Three out of the eight speakers studied by Lykke (2020) come from the Coon Valley / Westby area, and they speak a Gudbrandsdal variety with a possible admixture of Biri traits.

### 3. Methodology

The study draws its data from spontaneous speech, gathered from the Corpus of American Nordic Speech, version 3.1 (CANS; Johannessen, 2015). The speech recordings in the corpus have a dual orthophonic and orthographic (Bokmål standard) transcription, and are automatically tagged for morphosyntactic information (Johannessen 2015; see also Lykke 2020: 24–28, for further information). The 1942 material used in the present work are recordings made in 1942 in preparation of Haugen’s (1953) *The Norwegian Language in America*. Focusing on the language of the Coon Valley / Westby area (in Vernon County, Wisconsin, henceforth “Coon Valley/Westby”) is a useful delimitation of the 1942 material. This is because the language and history of this Norwegian settlement is comparatively well-studied (see Hjelde 2015 and references therein). Additionally, the greatest geographical concentration of speakers in the work on present-day AmNo tense morphology is in this area. Lastly, there are no recordings from 1942 from the other areas studied by Lykke (2020) presently available in CANS (i.e. Chicago, Illinois, Sunburg, Minnesota, Webster, South Dakota and Fargo, North Dakota).

For the sake of internal comparability, only second-generation immigrant speakers were selected. Furthermore, I have delimited the material to speakers of dialects presently spoken in Coon Valley / Westby. Gudbrandsdal and Biri dialects from Coon Valley / Westby in 1942 are arguably the closest approximate to the

input language of the present-day speakers (see Hjelde 2015). Studying further dialects in the 1942 recordings of CANS would, however, be a fruitful way of widening the empirical scope in future work.

Table 4 provides a summary of information about the speakers who comprise the main data for the present study. Firstly, the unique speaker code of each speaker, as well as their place of residence in the US (all Vernon County, Wisconsin), is provided. Secondly, the speaker’s reported dialect is displayed. As can be seen, four speakers speak Gudbrandsdal varieties, and five speak Eastern Lowland varieties, spoken somewhat to the south of the Gudbrandsdal area. A closer geographical specification of dialectal origin is provided in parentheses. Thirdly, the table shows that all speakers are second generation immigrants, with only minor aberrations (see footnotes 5 and 7). Most of the speakers are elderly, with only one speaker being less than 50 years of age.

Table 4: Selected Coon Valley / Westby speakers from 1942 CANS

CANS Speaker code	Place	Norwegian dialect	Generation <sup>6</sup>
coon_valley_WI_43gk	Coon Valley	Gudbrandsdal (Northern)	2
westby_WI_22gm	Westby	Gudbrandsdal (Øyer)	2
westby_WI_23gk	Westby	Gudbrandsdal (Ringebu)	2
coon_valley_WI_51gk	Coon Valley	Gudbrandsdal (Fron)	2
coon_valley_WI_49uk	Coon Valley	Eastern Lowland (Biri)	2-3 <sup>7</sup>
coon_valley_WI_44gk	Coon Valley	Eastern Lowland (Biri)	2
coon_valley_WI_47gk	Coon Valley	Eastern Lowland (Biri)	2
coon_valley_WI_48gm	Coon Valley	Eastern Lowland (Biri)	2
westby_WI_24gm	Westby	Eastern Lowland (Stange)	2

These nine Coon Valley / Westby speakers produced a total of 13,609 tokens, out of which 2,082 are verbs. The occurrence of forms has typical, Zipfian distribution, meaning that the 25 most frequent forms constitute roughly 50 percent of the total

<sup>6</sup> Coon\_valley\_WI\_51gk was 11 years old at the time of emigration, and emigrated with her parents, according to Haugen (1954: 626) and information in CANS. Likewise, westby\_WI\_24gm emigrated when he was seven years old (Haugen 1954: 500). For the purposes of this study, they are considered second generation immigrants, having emigrated to the US in childhood.

<sup>7</sup> The designation “2-3” signifies that coon\_valley\_WI\_49uk is at once a second and third generation immigrant.

tokens. The remaining forms are attested by 11 or fewer tokens, with most unique inflectional forms being attested by 1 to 4 tokens. The large, weak classes are well-attested, as is the most common irregular morphology.

I have supplemented the Coon Valley / Westby data selection described previously with searches in the data produced by all speakers recorded in 1942 and 1987–1992 available in CANS, v.3.1.<sup>8</sup> In this way, it becomes less probable that the non-attestation of change in the 1942 material is due to the dataset being smaller than that studied by Lykke (2020). The 1942 material comprises 76,147 tokens, produced by 81 speakers. The 1987–1992 material comprises 27,021 tokens, produced by five speakers. The goal of including the 1987–1992 dataset is to make it possible to pinpoint the onset of change as closely as possible. Since I put empirical emphasis on the Coon Valley / Westby recordings in the 1942 material, it is relevant to note that four of the five speakers in the 1987–1992 material come from this very area.<sup>9</sup>

In these searches including all speakers recorded in 1942 and 1987–1992, I have extracted all modal verbs, and all preterits of the verb *gå* ‘walk,’ because of the changes found in present-day AmNo.<sup>10</sup> This methodology makes the assumption that the verbs with the most change in present-day AmNo are most probable to change in earlier AmNo.

#### 4. Stability in the tense morphology of earlier stages of American Norwegian

Table 5 shows that there is no evidence of change in the heritage Norwegian tense morphology studied here. The in-depth study of the 1942 Coon Valley / Westby material is designed to find all possible kinds of grammatical innovation. The broader searches specifically target some of the changes found by Lykke (2020: 169–218) in all recordings from 1942 and 1987–1992. The same tendency of stability is found throughout. In examples (5)–(13), I provide some examples of the linguistic data which underlie the data in Table 5. Unless otherwise stated, the examples are from the 1942 Coon Valley / Westby material.

Because the preterit of the modal *måtte* ‘must’ is especially affected by change in the present-day material (overgeneralization and innovated syncretism), I discuss this verb first. There is no evidence for change with the morphology of *måtte* ‘must’ in 1942 and 1987–1992, as exemplified below in (5) and (6):

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<sup>8</sup> The 1987–1992 recordings were made by Arnstein Hjelde and have recently become available in CANS.

<sup>9</sup> Three speakers were residents of Coon Valley, Wisconsin, at the time of recording, and the speaker *la\_crosse\_WI\_02gm* grew up and acquired Norwegian in Coon Valley / Westby (Arnstein Hjelde, pers. comm.).

<sup>10</sup> Modals are extracted by a search for all the forms associated with the lemmata *burde* ‘ought,’ *kunne* ‘can,’ *måtte* ‘must,’ *skulle* ‘shall’ and *ville* ‘will.’



- (5) [...] så **mått-e** demm ræise like te PReRi du Sin  
 [...] then **must-PRET** they go.INF all.the.way to Prairie du Chien  
 ‘[...]then they had to go all the way to Prairie du Chien.’  
 (coon\_valley\_WI\_43gk)
- (6) je **mått-e** lære me te å taLa enng'lst e  
 I **must-PRET** learn.INF me to to speak.INF English I  
 ‘I had to learn to speak English.’  
 (coon\_valley\_WI\_31gk, recorded 1990)

The overgeneralization seen with the preterit of *måtte* ‘must’ in present-day AmNo is a change from irregular /mot-e/ to weak *dde*-type /mo-de/ ‘must-PRET.’ The 1942 and 1987–1992 data indicate that the change of /mot-e/ to /mo-de/ ‘must-PRET’ has occurred with the present-day speakers.

Table 5: Summary of tense morphology production data

Extracted data	Material	Verb tokens	# homeland-like	% homeland-like
All verbs	Selected Coon Valley /Westby speakers, 1942	2082	2082	100 %
Modal verbs	All speakers 1942	1042	1042	100 %
	All speakers 1987-1992	338	338	100 %
<i>gikk</i> ‘walk.PRET’	All speakers 1942	230	230	100 %
	All speakers 1987-1992	91	91	100 %
<b>Sum total</b>		<b>3783</b>	<b>3783</b>	<b>100%</b>

Similarly, the irregular preterit of *gå* ‘walk’ is unchanged in the historical data. Two examples of homeland-like preterits of *gå* ‘walk’ are shown; (7) is from the 1942 Coon Valley / Westby material, while (8) is from a different locality:

- (7) de **jikk-0** e på enngelskoLe **jikk-0** mie på enngeskoLe  
 that **go-PRET** I on English.school **go-PRET** much on English.school  
 ‘Yeah, I went to the English school. I went there a lot.’  
 (westby\_WI\_23gk)

- (8) *vi tokk lennge men de jikk-0 såmm ikk-0 så bra<sup>11</sup>*  
 we take.PRET long but it **walk-PRET** like **walk-PRET** so good  
 ‘We took long, but it went very well.’  
 (blair\_WI\_35gm, recorded 1942)

Having exemplified the lack of change in these particular irregular verbs, I provide some examples of homeland-like inflection in the regular classes. The two weak, regular classes are attested with unchanged inflection. The typical occurrence of *a*-class preterits with a Gudbrandsdal speaker is exemplified in (9) and a Biri speaker in (10). There is a tendency of preterits in /-a/ in the language of speakers with reported Eastern Lowland dialects. This is an effect of dialect contact similar to what is found with present-day speakers (compare Lykke 2020: 149–153). The other weak, regular class, the *Te*-class, is similarly unchanged. Examples are provided of the *de*-type in (11), and of the *dde*-type in (12):

- (9) *så fekk o høre # buddæie såmm # såmm ee*  
 then got she hear # dairymaid who # who uh  
*låkk-a på kua*  
**call-PRET** on cow.the  
 ‘Then she heard a dairymaid who called for the cow.’  
 (coon\_valley\_WI\_43gk)
- (10) *att deinn såmm førunndr-e se på de styggeste*  
 that the.one who **wonder-PRET** himself on the ugliest  
 ‘[...] that the one who wondered about the worst [...]’  
 (coon\_valley\_WI\_44gk)
- (11) *å fekk se opp ett lite lågg-hus # såmm domm*  
 and got themselves up a little log.house # that they  
*levv-de ti*  
**live-PRET** in  
 ‘And got a little log house built, that they lived in.’  
 (westby\_WI\_23gk)
- (12) *førr nå ho tru-dde re*  
 because now she **believe-PRET** it  
 ‘Because she believed it.’  
 (coon\_valley\_WI\_43gk)

As has been exemplified, morphological stability is a clear tendency. There is a single possible counterexample to the trend, which is provided in (13).

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<sup>11</sup> The data do not invite seeing the production of the preterit /jik-0/ without the initial /j/ as anything other than a sporadic, articulatory phenomenon.

- (13) *håss'n de lægg-de re neppå akksjla [...]*  
 how they lay-PRET it down.on shoulders.the [...]  
 'How they put it down/lowered it onto the shoulders [...]'  
 (coon\_valley\_WI\_48gm)

At first glance, this may look like the verb *legge* 'lay' has lost the strong preterit /la:-0/ 'lay-PRET', and gained an innovated weak preterit /læɡ-de/ 'lay-PRET'. However, this datapoint is not of consequence to the conclusion of the present work (and not counted as innovative in the findings in Table 5). Firstly, this is because the form may not be innovated at all, but possibly the preterit of a weak verb *lægje* 'lower'.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, this single token does not constitute a trend by itself. All other instances of preterits of *legge* 'lay' in the Coon Valley / Westby material have the homeland-like form /la:-0/ 'lay-PRET'.

## 5. Different sociolinguistic contexts cause differing trends

The difference in sociolinguistic context is arguably the main reason for the lack of linguistic change in early AmNo. I therefore briefly discuss the sociolinguistic history of AmNo, as a context to the findings.

The speakers recorded in 1942 acquired and used Norwegian under different sociolinguistic circumstances than the present-day speakers of AmNo. AmNo was established in North America by mass emigration from Norway, mainly occurring between 1866 and 1930. The Norwegians formed an immigrant society which to a high degree functioned in Norwegian. The Norwegian Lutheran Church was central. It provided services and religious education in Norwegian, and it was an important social arena for the use of Norwegian language. The church also established secondary schools, for the education of ministers in Norwegian. What is more, there was a Norwegian-language immigrant press with a large readership which was active into the 1940s. Norwegian-language literacy was high, many speakers were balanced Norwegian-English bilinguals, and there were monolingual Norwegian-speakers in America in this early period. Van Baal (2022) calls this a "pre-language shift community".

Present-day speakers, however, have acquired Norwegian in a post-language shift community, where English is the clearly dominant language. Their acquisition of English began around school age, and it became their dominant language during childhood. The use of Norwegian is limited to certain social domains. Access to Norwegian language has in general been more limited after 1940 than it was before. These factors must be central to the markedly higher degree of morphological innovation in present-day AmNo tense morphology.

The present-day AmNo speakers fit the narrow definition of unbalanced bilingual heritage speakers (see e.g. Polinsky 2018: 4), better than the speakers

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<sup>12</sup> For information about this less common verb, see «Lægja» in *Norsk Ordbok – ordbok over det norske folkemålet og det nynorske skriftmålet*.

recorded in 1942. In being heritage speakers in the narrow sense, present-day speakers of AmNo are more parallel to the Heritage English speakers studied by Polinsky (2018: 38–41, 49–50). With the findings presented here, we see that similarity in sociolinguistic situation and access to the heritage language correlates with somewhat similar degrees of change, i.e. in the 1942 data there is no change, whereas in the present-day data there is.

One of the reasons why findings from diachronic work are interesting is that they increase our knowledge about when change arises in moribund heritage varieties. In the case of tense morphology, my findings indicate that change has not arisen before the present generation. Van Baal's (2022) study of double definiteness (the morphosyntax of the noun phrase) reaches similar conclusions as this study of tense morphology. Hjelde's (2015) study of dialect contact points in the same direction.

The correlation of findings of different grammatical phenomena in van Baal (2022) and the present study, as well as Hjelde's (2015) study of contact-induced change, suggests that change proceeds much slower in the early generations of AmNo than in the last. By comparing further grammatical phenomena and more heritage varieties, we may be able to find out how general this trend is. Larsson and Kinn's (2022) study of argument placement in the syntax of the clause, for instance, provide a somewhat similar, but more nuanced picture of the pace of change in the history of AmNo. Determining how different kinds of linguistic change proceed in the early periods of moribund heritage varieties like AmNo is a fruitful avenue of inquiry for increasing our understanding of moribund heritage varieties, which is part of the larger enterprise of understanding multilingualism.

## **6. Conclusion**

This work provides an empirical foundation for a claim that the tense morphology of earlier generations of speakers of AmNo displays little of the change found with present-day speakers of AmNo found by Lykke (2020). Previously studied present-day speakers of AmNo are mainly third and fourth generation immigrants. When change is found in the tense morphology of second-generation heritage speakers of English (Polinsky 2018: 38-41, 49-50), we cannot discount that innovations arose with the second generation of AmNo speakers. The early AmNo material studied here, however, has no examples of innovation.

The study draws its data from CANS, v.3.1. The data consists of a selected material from 1942 Coon Valley / Westby, WI, which is supplemented by broader corpus searches with all speakers of CANS recorded in 1942, in addition to all speakers from 1987–1992. Among the total of 3783 tokens, no certain examples of innovation are found. This finding implies that innovations found in the tense morphology of present-day AmNo have arisen with the present-day speakers.

The sociolinguistic situation of AmNo is greatly changed between early AmNo (recorded in 1942) and the present day. I argue that this changed sociolinguistic situation of Norwegian in America in the period after 1940 is the main cause of the differing trends between the present-day speakers, and the 1942

and 1987–1992 data studied here. Present-day speakers of AmNo fit better the narrow definition of heritage speakers of unbalanced, minority language bilinguals. We can note that the tense morphology of present-day AmNo displays similar innovations to those of second-generation heritage English.

Lastly, I argue that the comparison of findings from the internal diachrony of moribund heritage varieties, is important to increase our understanding of such varieties, and by extension, of multilingual individuals.

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