

## Loss of Pragmatic Structure in Heritage Language: A Case Study of V2 in American Norwegian

**Introduction:** This paper shows that not only purely syntactic properties such as verb-second (V2) word order may be lost in a heritage language situation, but also that the distribution of contexts for this word order may be severely reduced, arguably as a result of contact with a language that has a different pragmatic structure in declaratives.

**Background:** The V2 phenomenon is a relatively robust property of Germanic languages except English, see (1).

- (1) *I går spiste vi fisk til middag.* (V2=XP – V<sub>fin</sub> – Subject)  
yesterday ate we fish for dinner  
'Yesterday we had fish for dinner.'

The development of this word order has been investigated in various populations (L1, L2, L3) and in historical data. It has also to some extent been studied in Norwegian heritage language (Eide & Hjelde 2015, Johannessen 2015a, Alexiadou & Lohndal 2017), and it is found that, while this word order is intact in many speakers, it has been strongly affected in others; (2).

- (2) *Og der dem lager vin.*  
and there they make wine  
'And there they make wine.'

Target: *Og der lager de(m) vin.* (Heritage Norwegian; from Eide & Hjelde 2015: 89)

Bohnacker & Rosén (2008) show that, despite the syntactic similarity of V2 languages (verb movement to 2<sup>nd</sup> position), they may vary considerably with respect to the pragmatic structure of declaratives, reflected in the type of elements typically appearing in initial position: While Swedish mainly allows informationally light (thematic) elements clause-initially, this position is often filled by informationally heavy (rhematic) elements in German. In their study of L1 Swedish-L2 German acquisition, target-consistent V2 syntax is attested from early on, while learners are found to transfer the L1 pragmatic structure, producing declaratives reflecting the L1 distribution of initial elements into advanced stages of L2 acquisition.

**Research questions:** It is well known that the proportion of non-subject-initial declaratives is relatively high in V2 languages (approximately 30%; e.g. Lightfoot 1999, Westergaard 2009), while English typically does not display this structure very often. In the history of English, the loss of V2 is correlated with a considerable reduction in non-subject-initial declaratives, resulting in the clause-initial position increasingly being defined as a subject position. It is unclear what is cause and effect: While Speyer (2008) argues that loss of V2 causes a reduction in non-subject-initial declaratives, van Kemenade & Westergaard (2012) take the opposite approach. In light of this, we ask the following research questions:

1. Is the pragmatic structure of declaratives affected in a heritage language situation, similar to what has been found for L2 acquisition?
2. If so, what is the relationship between the reduction of contexts for V2 and the loss of the syntax of V2?

**Our study:** The current study is based on the heritage language American Norwegian, a heritage variety of Norwegian spoken in the US which has been extensively studied by Haugen (1953) and Hjelde (1992). Recently, a spoken corpus of more than 50 speakers has been collected and transcribed, the Corpus of American Norwegian Speech (CANS; Johannessen 2015b). These speakers are 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> generation immigrants, aged approximately 70-90. Their L1 was Norwegian from birth until around age 5-7, although today they are very

English-dominant. We have carefully studied all V2 and non-V2 utterances for 16 of the speakers in the corpus (the corpus is tagged, though not for function, which means that the search for relevant constructions needs to be done manually). These data have been compared with the Nordic Dialect Corpus (Johannessen et al. 2009), which is a spoken corpus of 400 speakers from around 100 different areas in Norway. The two corpora are based on the same methodology.

**Results:** The results show that, while the proportion of non-subject-initial declaratives in NorDiaCorp is similar to what has previously been found for V2 languages, the context for V2 is produced significantly less in CANS (as low as 6%). See Tables 1-2:

*Table 1: Overview of subject-initial and non-subject-initial declaratives in the Nordic Dialect Corpus (2 speakers), with and without V2.*

	Subject-initial	Non-Subject-initial (all V2)	Total
dalsbygda_03gm	224	149 (39.9%)	373
dalsbygda_04gk	214	94 (30.5%)	308

*Table 2: Overview of subject-initial and non-subject-initial declaratives in CANS (5 speakers), with and without V2.*

	Subject-initial	Non-Subject-initial (V2+non-V2)	Total
portland_ND_02gk	157	25 + 0 (13.7%)	182
webster_SD_02gm	52	8 + 0 (13.3%)	60
blair_WI_04gk	217	20+3 (9.6%)	240
blair_WI_07gm	199	17+2 (8.7%)	218
webster_SD_01gm	330	11+10 (6.0%)	351

Furthermore, as in the history of English, we find a statistically significant correlation between word order and the proportion of non-subject-initial declaratives, in that the lower the proportion of the context, the more non-target-consistent word order is produced. Nevertheless, syntactic V2 is to some extent still available in the I-language representation of all speakers. Thus, we argue that V2 syntax is vulnerable to cross-linguistic influence from English as a result of the severe reduction in the activation of this word order in the heritage language.

**Discussion:** Although the data are relatively limited, they clearly show that pragmatic structure is more vulnerable than syntactic movement in Norwegian heritage language. Furthermore, the loss of syntactic V2 in some speakers could be interpreted as the result of a severe reduction in the contexts for this movement operation in the language.

#### **Selected references:**

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