

## Investigating moribund Scandinavian heritage languages: Methods, challenges and pleasures

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In this paper I will talk about my experiences doing research in the American Midwest, and about my research into some aspects of heritage Scandinavian, especially Norwegian, but also Swedish (collaboration with Ida Larsson).

Heritage Norwegian is a moribund language with very few speakers left, and they are old. This means that for most of them it is many years since they spoke Norwegian regularly, and Norwegian to them is a language that is a link to their past, their childhood and a time that no longer exists. Doing fieldwork with these people is moving, and I will tell some short anecdotes to share this with the audience.

Since the speakers are so old, it is central to keep access to their language in the future, so that we can continue to study the ways a language can vary and change in a new surrounding in which it is a minority language next to a big majority language. For me and my colleagues it has therefore been essential to record conversations with as many as possible, not least conversations between speakers, not just between us and them. Later these recordings have been transcribed and put into a corpus (Corpus of American Nordic Speech, CANS, Johannessen 2015) that is fully searchable along many linguistic dimensions (both at lexical and grammatical levels, and across gender, age, place etc.). This web-based corpus has been used for research by many scholars in recent years, and has proved to be a great resource for many linguists. I will demonstrate the corpus and how it can be used, alone and with other corpora, and with reference to syntactic (Larsson and Johannessen 2015a, b) as well as lexical investigations (Hjelde & Johannessen 2017, Johannessen & Laake 2017).

Since the speakers are old, and mostly illiterate, experimental tasks might seem to be impossible, but I will also mention some experiments that have been successful with this population.

**References:** Hjelde, Arnstein & Janne Bondi Johannessen (2017). Amerikanorsk: Orda vitner om kontakt mellom folk. In Terje Mikael Hasle Joranger (ed.): *Norwegian-American Essays 2017*. Oslo: Novus Forlag, 257–282. Johannessen, Janne Bondi (2015). The Corpus of American Norwegian Speech (CANS). In Béata Megyesi (ed.): *Proceedings of the 20th Nordic Conference of Computational Linguistics, NODALIDA 2015, May 11–13, 2015, Vilnius, Lithuania*. NEALT Proceedings Series 23. Johannessen, Janne Bondi & Signe Laake. 2017. Norwegian in the American Midwest: A Common Dialect? In *Journal of Language Contact* 10:1. Larsson, Ida & Janne Bondi Johannessen. 2015. Embedded word order in Heritage Scandinavian. In Hilpert, Martin, Jan-Ola Östman, Christine Mertzlufft, Michael Riessler & Janet Duke (eds.) *New trends in Nordic and General Linguistics*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 239–266. Larsson, Ida & Janne Bondi Johannessen (2015). *Incomplete Acquisition and Verb Placement in Heritage Scandinavian*. In Page, Richard S; Putnam, Michael T. (eds.): *Moribund Germanic Heritage Languages in North America: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Findings*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 153–189.