

The integration of English loanwords into America-Norwegian

It is reasonable to assume that the integration of borrowed lexical elements into an immigrant language is a process that is done in one day: from the first time such a word is introduced into the minority language, and until it has become a part of the community's vocabulary, should obviously take some time. And a rather old debate within the field of language contact research is how this process evolves. Haugen (1953 : 394) claimed that the first generation Norwegian-American immigrants, a generation he labels pre-bilingual and adult bilingual depending on their ability to master English, showed a high tendency to integrate English loanwords into the Norwegian phonological and morphological system. Depending on their fluency in English, the way they adopted loanwords would differ: adult bilinguals were more systematical in the way they substituted English phonemes with Norwegian ones compared to the pre-bilinguals. Later generations however, which he labeled childhood bilinguals, and who had learned to master both languages from early years on, showed a weaker tendency towards integrating such words into their L1. Haugen's classical example to demonstrate this is the English word *whip*: First generation pre-bilingual and adult bilingual immigrants normally rendered this word as *hyppe* in America-Norwegian, with a shape fully in accordance with the Norwegian phonological and morphological structure. Subsequent generations however, who had learned to master English in their childhood, used a form more in accordance with the English original, *whipp*. Consequently, the situation Haugen is describing, should at a given time involve quite a lot of variation into what degree borrowed elements are integrated into the immigrant language. Haugen also states that borrowing is a constantly ongoing process, a state which he calls *reborrowing*, and he presents several examples of differences in the way old and young generations render different loanwords. As can be expected from Haugen's argumentation, the old generation show full integration of the words into Norwegian, while young people often use the same loanwords, but now more in accordance with the phonological and morphological structure it originally had in English.

Poplack and Sankoff (1984) take a different stand based on their study on Puerto Rican Spanish spoken in New York. Here they found no significant differences in the way different generations adopted borrowed elements from English. Thus they could conclude that

“The findings thus disproves the contention of Haugen and others that childhood bilinguals (...) tend to reproduce borrowed material in a form which more closely approximates that of the source language (English) than speakers who acquired one of their two languages in adulthood... (1984: 126).”

The integration of lexical elements across generations is off course best studied by applying a real time approach, a possibility not available to Poplack, Sankoff or Haugen in their studies. Today we have a much wider selection of material documenting the Norwegian language in America at different time, covering several generations from around 1900 and up to our time: this should make it possible for us to gain more insight into this aspect of the borrowing process.

In this presentation I will first of all use Flom (1901-04, 1926) and Flaten's (1901-04) word lists to get some insight into how borrowed words were integrated around 1900. Furthermore, I will use Haugen's *The Norwegian Language in America* (1953), as well as his recordings from the field work he did to see how borrowed words were treated a generation later, in the late 1930s and 1940s. We do also have two more sets of material which will increase the number of measuring points in this study: Arnstein Hjelde's field work from around 1990, and NorAmDiaSyn's material, which has been collected during the last four years.

By using these four different materials, collected with a gap of between twenty and forty years apart, I will focus on how English words are integrated into America-Norwegian at different times and try to trace changes in this process. This will also make it possible to explore Haugen's concept of reborrowing, the idea that borrowed words are not once and for all integrated into the immigrant language and as such handed down to new generations, but rather that each generation will borrow such words, and thus the result might vary from generation to generation.

References:

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