Chapter 7

Incomplete Acquisition and Verb Placement in Heritage Scandinavian

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1 Introduction

There is well known variation in the Scandinavian languages with respect to verb placement in embedded clauses (see, e.g., Holmberg and Platzack 1995, Bobaljik 2002, Thráinsson 2010, Heycock et al. 2012 inter alia). In the modern Mainland Scandinavian languages, the finite verb follows negation in relative clauses and embedded questions (henceforth V-in-situ), see (2). In Icelandic, on the other hand, the verb moves across negation to a position in the T-domain (henceforth V-to-T movement); see the simplified structure in (1). Older stages of Mainland Scandinavian pattern with Icelandic.

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(1) a. að Jón [TP keypti [NegP ekki Negº [VP keypti bókina] that Jon bought not ]

book.DEF ‘. . . that Jon didn’t buy the book.’
Much of the discussion of how this difference should be understood has revolved around the role of verb agreement, and on how V-to-T movement was lost in the history of Mainland Scandinavian (e.g. Falk 1993, Sundquist 2002, Håkansson 2013) and is in the final stages in the process of being lost in Faroese (Heycock et al. 2012, 2013). There is now some consensus that a biconditional between verb agreement and verb movement cannot be maintained: verb movement is sometimes possible without verb agreement.

In this paper, we study a development whereby heritage language varieties of Norwegian and Swedish undergo the opposite change from a grammar without V-to-T movement to a grammar with V-to-T movement, but without any concomitant change in verb morphology. The focus is on embedded clauses, but for a fuller picture of verb placement in Heritage Scandinavian we also briefly discuss verb placement in main clauses. We contrast Heritage Norwegian and Swedish (henceforth Heritage Scandinavian) with Norwegian and Swedish as spoken in Norway and Sweden, and by the speakers that immigrated to America in the period 1820–1920. For convenience, we refer to these latter varieties collectively as European Scandinavian (although only Norwegian and Swedish are included). The language spoken by the early, first-generation emigrants, we refer to as Emigrant Scandinavian; we will see that in the relevant respects, Emigrant Scandinavian is identical to European Scandinavian.

The study of Emigrant Scandinavian is based on the recordings by Einar Haugen in the 1930s and 1940s (Norwegian) and Folke Hedblom in the 1960s (Swedish). For Heritage Scandinavian, we use recordings made by the present author Johannessen and her colleagues Signe Laake and Arnstein Hjelde from 2010–2012 (Norwegian), and by the present author Larsson and colleagues in the project “Swedish in America” in 2011–2012. The recordings mainly consist of spontaneous production (interviews and conversations) (see Johannessen and Laake 2011 and the website “Norwegian in America” on the Norwegian recordings, and Andréasson et al. 2013 and Larsson et al. forthcoming on the Swedish recordings). In this study, we restrict the discussion to speakers that have Heritage Scandinavian as L1 (see further Larsson and Johannessen forthcoming). The speakers are all adults, and most of them are (well) over 70 years old.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 gives some background information on the Scandinavian emigration to America, and a brief account of the