

## **Conversazioni linguistiche – FLUENT, March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

### **Understanding language structure and development through heritage languages**

FLUENT (Flerspråklig utvikling og endring i nyere tid; Multilingual development and change in society today) is a research group at the University Stavanger in Norway that studies multilingualism from three core perspectives: (1) language and grammar, (2) teaching and learning, and (3) community and society. In this talk, co-directors Nadine Kolb and David Natvig provide an overview of the group and present on two projects conducted under its auspices: Investigating Proxies for Understanding Trajectories: Heritage Language Maintenance and Child Second Language Acquisition in Refugee Contexts (INPUT) and North American Norwegian Tonal Accents in Contact (NANTiC).

INPUT examines heritage language (HL) and child second language (cL2) development in the European refugee context, focusing on HL Syrian Arabic and cL2 German. The project investigates the following research questions: (RQ1) To what extent do experiential variables and HL support affect HL trajectories and outcomes? and (RQ2) To what extent does HL support affect cL2 development?

The hypothesis is that support for continued development in the HL improves L2 development with knock-on effects for the academic achievement of refugees. (Extra)-linguistic variables affecting the development of HL Syrian Arabic and cL2 German in Germany are examined. The participants are 6-to-12-year-old Syrian Arabic-German heritage bilinguals (n=85). The following three measures are used: The Quantifying Bilingual Experience Questionnaire (Q-BEx) (DeCat et al. 2021) to collect information on experiential variables pertaining to Syrian Arabic and German exposure and use, the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test for density of vocabulary, and an eye-tracking experiment on grammatical gender to test comprehension and subsequent use of gender for predictive processing. The primary objective is to understand the extent to which HL exposure leads to HL maintenance and its impact on the path of cL2 development.

NANTiC investigates the impact of individual and community bilingualism on North American Norwegian (NAMNo), a moribund HL spoken primarily in the American Upper Midwest. Between the 1820s and 1930s over 850,000 Norwegians immigrated to the United States. Many of them established and settled in Norwegian-speaking communities. As a result, Norwegian has been spoken as a n HL in these communities for over a century. Due to widespread societal changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, present-day NAMNo speakers comprise the last generation to have acquired the language as children and to have used it at home and throughout their communities. The history of intense language contact has nonetheless shaped the local, American varieties of Norwegian. The project focuses the role that Norwegian

tonal accents play in the HL grammar and whether it has changed and aims to understand grammatical structural relationships against the backdrop of the sociohistorical and sociolinguistic changes that Norwegian-American communities experiences.