Multiethnic Norwegian: Linguistic practices among adolescents in multilingual contexts in Oslo

The linguistic diversity in Norway has increased dramatically during the last 30-40 years, primarily as a consequence of migration. In Oslo, the capital, more than one third of the pupils in primary and secondary school are so-called minority language speaking, and more than 120 different languages are represented. Even though the statistics bear witness to an immensely differentiated language situation, it does not tell us the factual vitality of these languages, neither about how, and to which purposes the languages are used, nor how the languages interact.

In our project we will concentrate upon linguistic practices among adolescents in multilingual and multicultural communities of practice. The overarching goal of the project is to discuss a possible identification of one or more new varieties of Norwegian which might be traced to influences from a multilingual environment. This identification will both have syntactical, morphological, phonological, lexical, and functional points of departure. Some of the key research questions are as follows:

- Can we differentiate a possible multiethnolect as found for example in Hamburg, Mannheim, Stockholm, Utrecht, from a more idiosyncratic second language learner “style”?  
- Is it a variety or is it “mere” bi- or multilingual code-switching in action, or both?  
- Are the multiethnolect(s), if there are any, also used to some extent by monolingual adolescents?  
- To what extent can we connect certain language practice(s) or linguistic traits to a (co-) construction of identities along axes such as youth, ethnicity, urbanity and gender?

Within the project we will study the linguistic traits which characterize these adolescents way of speaking Norwegian, but also their bi- or multilingual language socialization, especially in their families, but also at school and among their peers. The researches in the project will examine slightly different aspects. Whereas some will concentrate on phonology/prosody, morphology or syntax others will concentrate on functions or repertoires. However, we are planning to collect data together and to establish a common database which can be used for different purposes.

We are planning to collect data from approximately 40-50 adolescents with multicultural background, including majority Norwegians. The adolescents must have been born in Oslo/Norway (or must have come here during their first year) and must have grown up here. Parts of the data will be gathered and transcribed through the NoTa-project and other parts will be gathered by us. The NoTa-project has based its material on video taped interviews and conversations between two participants. The informants are to be found by us and we have
allowance from the NoTa-project to ask additional questions relevant to our project. In addition, we would like to gather information through questionnaires, group interviews, the adolescents’ own recordings, and individual interviews.

At the workshop we would be interested in discussing our key research questions particularly regarding methodological issues concerning fieldwork and collection of data.

**Individual presentations:**

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**Among fields of interest and former studies:**
second language acquisition, learner language, language contact, text linguistics, social anthropology, Turkish

PHD dissertation:
*Referential choice in L2 narratives.*
*A study of Turkish adolescent immigrants learning Norwegian*

**Current plans /interest in relation to the UPUS /NIMU project**

Project working title:
Norwegian in many ways. A study of Norwegian spoken by Oslo-youth in multilingual settings.

—Include adolescents with Turkish family origin among the informants
—Look at these adolescents’ language use in different settings, family/ siblings, school, friends (with and without Turkish background)
—Possible linguistic features to be focussed on: syntax (word order), do-constructions, semantic copies

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During her ph.d.-education, starting in January, Toril Opsahl hope to contribute to a possible identification of new varieties of Norwegian by describing the syntactical and morphological characteristics associated with the adolescents’ way of speaking. She is also interested in the possible interaction between these grammatical features and their functional role in discourse. (Variation within the individual speaker’s repertoires as well as within groups of speakers is of interest.)
Phonological characteristics associated with the Norwegian speech of adolescents in multilingual and multicultural communities of practice in Oslo.  
A subproject to NIMU (Norsk i multietniske ungdomsmiljø)(UPUS)

In my project I will be particularly interested in identifying and describing prosodic and segmental phonological features characteristic of new varieties of Norwegian spoken in multilingual communities in Oslo.

Particular prosodic patterns which may be distinguished from the prosodic structure of standard Eastern Norwegian are characteristic of the Norwegian spoken in multiethnic environments. The prosodic patterns of Norwegian dialects are generally not very well described, but two projects – *Norwegian tone typology* and the *Trondheim model* – have described the patterns of Eastern Norwegian dialects (http://helmer.hit.uib.no/NTT/, cf. Kristoffersen 2003, Fretheim 1991, Nilsen 2000, and earlier descriptions Fintoft 1970). Whereas the project *Norwegian tone typology* has investigated how the tone distinction is realized in different dialects, the *Trondheim model* presents a more global perspective on intonational patterns of Norwegian (particularly eastern Norwegian).

It will be interesting to get an overview over what kind of tone patterns that are most typically in use in multilingual communities in Oslo – particularly regarding how the tone distinction is realized. Here I will be using the description of the tone system in eastern Norwegian as a point of departure (cf. Kristoffersen 2000, 2003). In analyzing the different tone contours I will use the speech analysis program PRAAT. This program makes it possible to extract the ground frequency of the voice (F0-tonality) and thereby distinguish different tone patterns. My hypothesis is that the tone distinction is not upheld by young speakers in these communities of practice.

Segmental phonological features which may be interesting to investigate are for instance the realization and distribution of the l-phonemes /l, ł, l, l/, vowels /u, u, y/, the dorso palatal fricative /ç/ versus the post alveolar fricative /ʃ/ and the realization of the alveolar plosives /t/ and /d/. Some of these features may also be in a process of change in the speech of children and adolescents in Oslo outside of these multilingual environments. A problem here, then, is to distinguish between features which are typical of multiethnic Norwegian and features which generally are in process of change. (Merger between /ç/ and /ʃ/, expansion of /l/ at the expense of the other l-phonemes and /y/ pronounced as /i/ are examples of possible changes in progress which are very frequently found in multiethnic environments – the frequency is maybe higher here than among other adolescents). Here, too, I will use PRAAT to conduct acoustics phonetic analysis and to measure formant structure and hertz frequency (cf. Ladefoged 2001). I will also investigate whether and how the speakers distinguish auditively between the different sounds, and thereby determine the phonemic status of the different variants.

My subproject will hopefully contribute to answering one of the main questions of the Oslo-project, namely whether it is possible to identify one or more new varieties of Norwegian which might be traced to influences from a multilingual environment.

Language change, multilingual practice and identity among adolescents in Oslo

The overarching aim of the project is two-folded. First, I want to obtain knowledge about processes of language change, i.e. processes of differentiation, hybridization, and homogenization among multilingual adolescents in Oslo (i.e. adolescents with three or more languages in their linguistic repertoire). To reach that aim, I want to study how Norwegian-Indian and Norwegian-Filipino adolescents’ multilingualism unfolds in daily life activities at different arenas. Secondly, I want to obtain knowledge about these adolescents’ language socialization processes at school, among their peers and in their families, with emphasis on how they (co-/re-)construct their multilingual identity (see below). On this background, I like to develop a theoretical model of how multilingual practice and construction of identity can contribute to the understanding of language change, or how these youths actually function as agents for linguistic change. Another purpose is to obtain knowledge about one of the migrant groups in Norway who is relatively unknown, namely migrants from India and their children. I want to compare data from this adolescents group with data from Norwegian-Filipino adolescents, by taking the five Norwegian-Filipino children I have studied before, as a starting point (Svendsen 2004). At that time they where eight to nine-years-old. This year they will be fifteen. I have chosen these adolescents because it is plausible that they are multilingual.

The adolescents’ language practice in different context will be obtained by conversation data inn small groups, but also through their own recordings of language practice in their families, and by reported data obtained by group interviews and interview with each of them, but also with their teachers and their parents. In other words, the data will be obtained by a triangulation of methods. I will gather and analyze the data from a multitheoretical perspective, a perspective which allows me to see language practice on three levels: an individual level, a relational level (by co-acting in different social institutions), and a structural level, namely Aronin and Ó Laoires (2004) theoretical model: multilinguality (i.e. ‘multilingualism+ identity’). In addition, I want to use an interactional sociopragmatic approach to linguistic practice and language choice/code alternation at the individual and relational level, with tools from conversation analysis and discourse analysis (e.g. Hutchby and Wooffit 2001, Cameron 2004). The dynamics between linguistic differentiation, homogenization, and hybridization will be approached by Appadurais (1990) analyses of globalization processes and their consequences.

A central research question for the Oslo project as a whole is to find out whether it is possible and fruitful to talk about a multiethnic variety of Norwegian at all. My individual sub project aims at studying the use and functions of such a potential multiethnic variety among young people in Oslo, and is therefore dependent on what linguistic findings the Oslo group will come up with in the first stage of the project: the common collection and analysis of data.

Imagine though, that the group finds linguistic material sufficient to be labelled a variety, or at least fragments of a variety identified as multiethnic youth language, my research questions are tentatively formulated as follows:

- Is the multiethnic youth language the only variety used by the members of the group, or do they also switch between a multiethnic variety and more standardised varieties of Norwegian?

- Is it possible to identify certain common attitudes among the group members towards multiethnic Norwegian as opposed to more standardised varieties?

- How do members of multicultural youth groups experience outside reactions to their language use? (The last two bullet points attempts to shed light upon the question of the multiethnic youth language as marker of sociocultural identity.)

Data: The major part consists of recorded (preferably video recorded) conversations from different cultural settings: school, home environment, leisure activities. In addition interviews and questionnaires will be necessary for covering parts of the two latter bullet points above.