

Stability and (apparent) change in Heritage Norwegian nominal structure

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Norwegian (as spoken in Norway, hence *Non-HerN*) allows bare, sg nouns in some contexts where English does not. The perhaps most conspicuous difference concerns post-copular, sg predicate nouns: in English, most such nouns must appear with an article; Non-HerN, on the other hand, uses bare nouns when the predicate is a profession, role, religion or nationality. Compare 1 and 2:

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------|-----|---------------------|
| (1) | a. He is a doctor. | (2) | <i>Han er lege.</i> |
| | b. *He is doctor. | | he is doctor |

Previous studies (e.g. Munn and Schmitt 2002, Halmøy 2016) have argued convincingly that the difference in predicate constructions reflects a more general difference in the internal structure of nominals. English nominals *must* include Num (spelt out by the indef. article in 1a), while Norwegian (and e.g. Dutch and many Romance languages) in certain contexts allow nominals without the Num projection. One piece of evidence that bare predicate nouns do not have Num comes from agreement: it is possible for a bare predicate noun to occur with a *pl* subject (de Swart and Zwarts, 2009).¹ This would be unexpected if bare nouns were specified as sg, but less so if Num is lacking.²

In the context of the difference between English and NonHerN, I will discuss the use of articles vs. bare (predicate) nouns in *Heritage Norwegian (HerN)*, spoken by bilingual (HerN–English) 3rd generation immigrants in North America.³ HerN is an excellent testing ground for studies on syntactic change in contact situations, and I will focus on the following research questions: **1.** To which extent has HerN retained bare nouns, despite the intensive contact with English? (Note that English is the dominant language of most HerN speakers, although they have acquired Norwegian as young children, and that previous studies have observed systematic word order changes arising from the contact situation (Larsson and Johannessen, 2015)). **2.** If HerN speakers use English-style patterns with an indef. article, does it reflect a restructuring of the nominal system, requiring Num, or is it rather a more superficial transfer phenomenon related to attrition (i.e. a change that happens in individuals during their lifetime without affecting grammatical representation (Montrul, 2008)).

I will show that most speakers have retained bare nouns in predicate contexts and use them consistently. Nevertheless, English-style indef. articles occur to a non-negligible extent. In a sample of 182 predicate constructions with a sg subject, similar to the examples in 1–2, the indef. article was used in 13.7% of the cases, and a bare noun in 86.3% of the cases.

I will argue that the English-style use of the indef. article is *not* symptomatic of a restructuring making Num obligatory (in the relevant speakers), for the following reasons: **1.** Very few speakers use the indef article consistently. The intra-speaker variation could be due to competing grammars (Kroch, 1989), but I have not been able to discern any stylistic or functional patterns behind the

¹In standard NonHerN (but, as we shall see shortly, not in HerN), this possibility is largely restricted to quantified subjects: *Alle studentene ville bli lærer*, lit. ‘All the students wanted to become teacher’. Importantly, this cannot be due to a distributive reading of the predicate noun, since an *adjective* in the predicate position would be unacceptable without plural agreement.

²Previous research has observed a correlation between bare (Num-less) predicate nouns and gender in Germanic and Romance: e.g. Norwegian, Dutch and French have both gender and bare predicate nouns; English (and also Afrikaans, Donaldson 1993) lacks gender and regularly uses the indef. article with predicates. Munn and Schmitt (2002) capture the correlation by referring to the “free Agr parameter”. I will propose an updated formal account which does not rely on Agr projections, but instead considers the role of gender and declension classes in delimiting classes of objects (Broschart 2000).

³The study draws on the CANS corpus, <http://tekstlab.uio.no/glossa/html/?corpus=amerikanorsk>, and more recently conducted interviews.

variation, as one could expect under grammar competition (Roberts, 2007, 325).⁴ **2.** In predicate constructions with a *pl* subject, HerN speakers, including speakers that use the indef. article with sg subjects, allow a bare, non-agreeing noun, as in 3:

- (3) *vi er ikke farmer*
we are not farmer (sunburg_MN_16gm)

As argued above, I take the lack of agreement to indicate that Num-less nominals are available in the grammar. **3.** Apart from predication, NonHerN uses bare nouns in another context where they are not licit in English, namely when the *type* of referent is emphasised, rather than the specific token (Julien 2005 and ref. cited there). Like bare predicate nouns, bare type nouns appear to be Num-less (see Halmøy 2016), and they are clearly possible in HerN, even in speakers that use the indef. article with predicate nouns. Cf. 4:

- (4) *because jeg hadde passport*
because I had passport
'because I had a passport' (portland_ND_02gk)

If HerN had undergone a restructuring that made Num obligatory, like in English, we could potentially expect type nouns to be affected on a par with predicate nouns; this, however, does not seem to have happened.

Due to its limited and apparently unsystematic distribution, the indef. article in HerN predicate constructions carries some of the characteristics of attrition (Lohndal and Westergaard, 2016). I tentatively suggest that the overall structural stability of bare nouns may at least partially be related to children's ability to make fine-grained syntactic/semantic distinctions from a very early age (Westergaard, 2013). The appropriate use of bare, Num-less nouns is largely semantically defined, and if children master the distinctions early on, restructuring (due to incomplete acquisition) is less likely to happen than in the case of e.g. subordinate clause word order, which is acquired later (Larsson and Johannessen, 2015).

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⁴Hasselmo (1974) suggests that speakers of Heritage *Swedish* prefer to use the article with English loan words, but I will show that this does not hold for HerN.