

Relexification in a Northern Norwegian dialect?

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1. Introduction

Bull (1994, p. 138) claims that the Norwegian dialects in the language contact areas in northern Norway are new dialects or ethnolects¹, and that they have emerged during the process of language shift. This claim leads to the question of how theories on creole genesis and creolization can shed light on these new dialects.

There are three main approaches to creole genesis: the universalist, the substratist, and the superstratist (DeGraff 1999, p. 6). This paper discusses a Northern Norwegian language contact dialect in light of the substratist theory presented in Lefebvre (1998). More precisely, I explore how the process of relexification can contribute to the understanding of the genesis of the Norwegian dialect of Sappen in Nordreisa in Northern Norway. Sappen is a traditionally Kven community about 300 km north east of Tromsø. The Kvens settled in Sappen during the 18th century, and their language was a dialect of Finnish. A language shift from Finnish to Norwegian started about 1900 and was completed about 1950, and in this process a new Norwegian dialect emerges. Lefebvre's (1998) theory takes the mother tongue of adult language creators as the core point of the argumentation, and relexification is argued to be the central process involved in the initial phase of the creole genesis.

I will not decide whether the Norwegian dialect of Sappen is a creole language or a creolid. However, the relevancy of creole theories is clear when one considers the linguistic and the demographic history of speech communities like Sappen. This is not a new idea, but to my best knowledge it has not yet been investigated in any detail.

¹ The term 'dialect' has different connotations in different research traditions, and 'variety' is sometimes used as a more neutral term. Bull (1994; 1995) uses the term 'ethnolect' to emphasize the history of and the variation in the new dialect of Furuflatlen in Northern Norway. Bull (1997) raises several objections against using 'dialect' in the case of the new dialects of Northern Norway. The main objection is the *normative* ideas behind the term, and that traditional dialectology has idealized the varieties away from the *variation* in spoken language. Bull (1997, p. 61) recognises that the new varieties in Northern Norway potentially may develop into a dialect. In accordance with Sandøy (1996, p. 22f) I use the term 'dialect' as an analytical, neutral term, and I see 'ethnolect', 'sociolect' and 'geolect' as hyponyms to 'dialect'.

Central parts of the process of creolization are relevant during the first period of dialect creation. After the language shift, Norwegian has become the main language in the community. Thus, due to the heavy influence from Norwegian, we can only expect to see a few traces of the creolization process. The development of the dialect after the initial period is closely related to levelling, and will not be discussed here (cf. Sollid, 2003).

This paper focuses on a potential syntactic product of relexification in the new Norwegian dialect of Sappen. First, I present Lefebvre's creolization theory. Second, I describe the data, and third, I discuss the data in light of the process of relexification.

2. Presentation of Lefebvre's creolization theory

The general hypothesis in Lefebvre's (1998, p. 9) creolization theory is as follows:

the creators of a creole language, adult native speakers of the substratum languages, use the properties of their native lexicons, the parametric values and semantic interpretation rules of their native grammars in creating the creole.

This means that the outset of the theory is that *adult* speakers of the substratum languages create creole languages, and that they use their own languages as a resource in the process of language creation.² Thus, creolization is first of all a process of adult second language learning, where the substratum language is the source language and the superstratum language is the target language. This is important in the case of the Sappen dialect since the language shift was an initiative from the Norwegian government. Teachers and parents in Sappen carried out the initiative since they used Norwegian to the children although the Kven dialect was their mother tongue and the major language in the speech community at this point.

However, according to Lefebvre (1998) creation of creole languages is not only a case of adult second language learning, since mental and social processes involved and limited access to the target language can explain why the creoles crystallize the way they do. Lefebvre's (1998) theory is concentrated around the lexicon of creoles, and the relexification hypothesis is the central part of the theory:

² Bickerton's universalist theory is based on children's language acquisition:

the work of new language creation can be attributed largely, if not exclusively, to children. In such situations, however, children are required to build a language out of input materials that contain no complex structures and in which grammatical morphemes, in particular, are reduced well below the minimum required by natural languages (Bickerton 1999, p. 49).

Relexification is thus a mental process that builds new lexical entries by copying the lexical entries of an already established lexicon and replacing their phonological representations with representations derived from another language (Lefebvre 1998, p. 16).

The hypothesis is that the language learners, i.e. the relexifiers, copy the lexicon of their mother tongue in the beginning of the language creation. This new copy is relabelled and given new phonology according to the target language. But since the relexifiers do not have enough access to the target language, the creole will have some grammatical features from the source language. The result is that the new language *sounds* like the target language, but the lexicon have semantic and syntactic features from the source language.

Further, in other parts of the grammar, such as parameters and word order phenomena, the hypothesis is that the relexifiers do not have enough access to the target language in order to potentially reset parameters. The relexifiers will then use the parameters and word order in their mother tongue in creating the grammar of the creole.

Lefebvre's hypothesis is rather strong, and it does not consider possible influence from Universal Grammar (UG). For the dialect of Sappen it is difficult to test it in its strongest sense, first of all because the language shift started about 100 years ago, and we have little data on the Norwegian dialect from the earliest creation period. Second, Norwegian soon became the dominating language in the speech community, and the Kven dialect was given up as a linguistic alternative for the younger generations. Neither could the children use or learn the Kven dialect at school, nor did the parents talk to the children in the Kven dialect. This is relevant since increased Norwegian input, that is input both from other Norwegian dialects and Standard Norwegian, eventually changes the internalised norms (cf. Sollid, 2003). This empirical problem is also stated in Hall (1958, after Lefebvre 1998, p. 6) "who points out that creoles in general have retained very few, if any, *visible* features of their substratum languages." It is thus expected that the Sappen dialect show a few good examples of traces of the process of creolization. The rest of this paper discusses whether declarative main clauses with the finite verb in the third position might be one such example.

3. Declarative main clauses with the finite verb in the third position

Norwegian is said to be a V2-language on the basis of verb placement in main clauses, such as wh-questions (example 1) and declarative clauses (example 2). This is also true when a phrase is topicalized (example 3).

- (1) Hvor **bor** du? (Standard Norwegian)
‘Where **live** you?’
- (2) De **frakta** veden med hest til veien i gamledager. (Standard Norwegian)
‘They **carried** the wood with horse to the road in the old days.’
- (3) I gamledager **frakta** de veden med hest til veien. (Standard Norwegian)
‘In the old days **carried** they the wood with horse to the road.’

To compare, the word order in Finnish main clauses is said to be relatively free. Vilkuna (1989, p. 9) interpret “free” with respect to Finnish word order to mean discourse-conditioned. For my purposes it is interesting to note that the finite verb can be placed in the third position when a phrase is topicalized, (example 4).

- (4) Ennen vanhaan he **kuljettivat** puut hevosella tielle. (Finnish)
‘In the old days they carried the wood by horse to the road.’

In Northern Norwegian it is well documented that the finite verb can be placed in the third position in wh-questions (example 5).

- (5) Kor du **bor**? (Northern Norwegian dialects)
‘Where you **live**?’

The dialect of Sappen, or at least some of the speakers of the dialect, also seems to have the opportunity to place the finite verb in the third position in declarative main clauses (V3). To find out more about declarative main clauses with V3 I have used a questionnaire where 24 out of 55 sentences were designed to elicit information about this construction. These 24 sentences belong together in four sentence groups which tests different grammatical properties:

- V3 and topicalization of adverbial PPs.
- V3 and topicalization of adverbial CPs.
- V3 and topicalization of object NPs.
- V3 and topicalization of object CPs.

In each of the four sentence groups there is one standard sentence, which is a sentence with V2. The other sentences in the four groups are dialect sentences, which means they have the finite verb on the third or fourth position (V4) as in examples 6-10.

- (6) I gamledager dem **frakta** veden med hest til veien.
‘In the old days they **carried** the wood with horses to the road.’
- (7) Når det blei vår, dem **fløta** tømmer på elva ned til Storslett.
‘When the spring came, they **floated** timber on the river down to Storslett.’
- (8) Lekse eg **leste** kver dag etter skoletid.
‘Home work I **read** every day after school.’
- (9) Det at skolen va stengt, alle **likte** godt.
‘That the school was closed, everybody **liked** well.’
- (10) I gamledager dem bestandig **frakta** veden med hest til veien.
‘In the old days they always **carried** the wood with horses to the road.’

I have asked 30 people³ from Sappen about their grammatical judgements of sentences according to their opinion of how their own dialect is. The informants had three possible answers: *right* (“riktig”), *doubtful* (“tvilsom”), and *not right* (“ikke riktig”). The ontological status of such judgements is not clear, cf. Schütze (1996). I regard the judgements as statements about the informants’ attitudes towards the construction, documenting their subjective intuitions, attitudes and beliefs about a local linguistic norm.

As expected, the four standard sentences with V2 are regarded as “right” by almost all of the informants. Therefore, these sentences are disregarded in the rest of the analysis of the questionnaire data.

The dialect sentences are judged less positively, compared to the standard sentences. The results of the questionnaire are presented in table 1. The table report the distribution of answers across the three answers. The total number of answers to be distributed is 480 (30 informants, 16 dialect sentences).

³ In addition, three bilingual, older informants around 80 years old are included in my study (Sollid, 2003). These informants represent a point of reference, and they are excluded from this structural analysis.

Table 1: Dialect sentences with V3

	Group 1 TopPP _{ADV}		Group 2 TopCP _{ADV}		Group 3 TopNP _{OBJ}		Group 4 TopCP _{OBJ}	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Right	36	30%	26	21,6%	27	22,5%	12	10%
Doubtful	27	22,5%	37	30,8%	14	11,6%	11	9,1%
Not right	57	47,5%	57	47,5%	79	65,8%	97	80,8%
Total	N=120	100%	N=120	100%	N=120	100%	N=120	100%

Sentences with topicalized adverbial (group 1 and 2) are judged better than sentences with topicalized object (group 3 and 4). One possible grammatical restriction is related to sentences with a topicalized object CP, which is judged “not right” by 81% of the informants. The distribution of answers is calculated to be significant at the level of .001 (degree of freedom = 6, $\chi^2 = 46.702$). This result confirms the interpretation of the grammatical restriction.

Table 2 present data on four dialect sentences with V4. The total number of answers to be distributed is 120 (30 informants, 4 dialect sentences).

Table 2: Dialect sentences with V4

	Group 1 TopPP _{ADV}		Group 2 TopCP _{ADV}		Group 3 TopNP _{OBJ}		Group 4 TopCP _{OBJ}	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Right	5	16,6%	5	16,6%	7	23,3%	5	16,6%
Doubtful	11	36,6%	5	16,6%	5	16,6%	4	13,3%
Not right	14	46,6%	20	66,6%	18	60%	21	70%
Total	30	100%	30	100%	30	100%	30	100%

The distribution of answers in table 2 is not significant (degree of freedom = 6, $\chi^2 = 7.040$), probably because of the even distribution of answers across sentence groups. This result must be interpreted to mean that there is no grammatical restriction in sentences with V4.

The informants seem have the same attitudes towards V3 and V4. Table 3 summarize the distribution of answers in sentences with V3 and V4:

Table 3: Comparison of sentences with V3 and V4

	V3		V4	
	Total	%	Total	%
Right	101	21%	22	18,3%
Doubtful	89	18,5%	25	20,8%
Not right	290	60,4%	73	60,8%
Total	480	100%	120	100%

The distribution of answers is not significant (degree of freedom=2, chi2=0.611). This is interpreted to mean that the informants do not see any grammatical difference between sentences with V3 and V4.

The questionnaire data shows that V3 and V4 are marginally regarded as part of the repertoire of the Norwegian dialect. But the questionnaire data only say something about the informants' subjective intuitions and attitudes towards the constructions, hence, it is important to look for authentic examples. Examples 11 and 12 show declarative main clauses with V3 from interviews with people from Sappen.

- (11) Da vi vaks opp, **det føltes** jo trykt.
‘When we grew up, **it felt** safe.’
- (12) Selv om ingen er blidd rik heller, **så dem har** no i hvert fall arbeid.
‘Even though nobody is rich either, **so they have** at least work.’

These and other authentic examples document that people in Sappen actually produce sentences that violate V2.

In example 12 the informant has inserted the particle *så* (meaning ‘so’) in addition to placing the finite verb in the third position. During the questionnaire interviews I asked the informants whether this particle made a difference for their judgement, and the informants answered no. This means that *så* does not trigger V3.⁴

4. Age differences

Although the standard sentences are preferred, the dialect sentences are marginally regarded as a part of the linguistic repertoire in Sappen. Due to the relatively marginal position of the V3-construction, it is relevant to look for age differences in the data. If the V3-construction has entered the

⁴ One interpretation of the particle *så* is that it is a copy of a Finnish *ni* (cf. Vilkuna 1997) due to relexification. However, I suspect that these particles in Norwegian and Finnish have arisen independently of each other in the two languages since the particle is used in similar ways in many in other Norwegian and Scandinavian dialects.

Norwegian language during the language creation period, one should expect that the oldest informants are most positive towards the construction.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of answers across four age groups. Age group 1 are the youngest, while age group four are the oldest, and they represent a point of reference.⁵

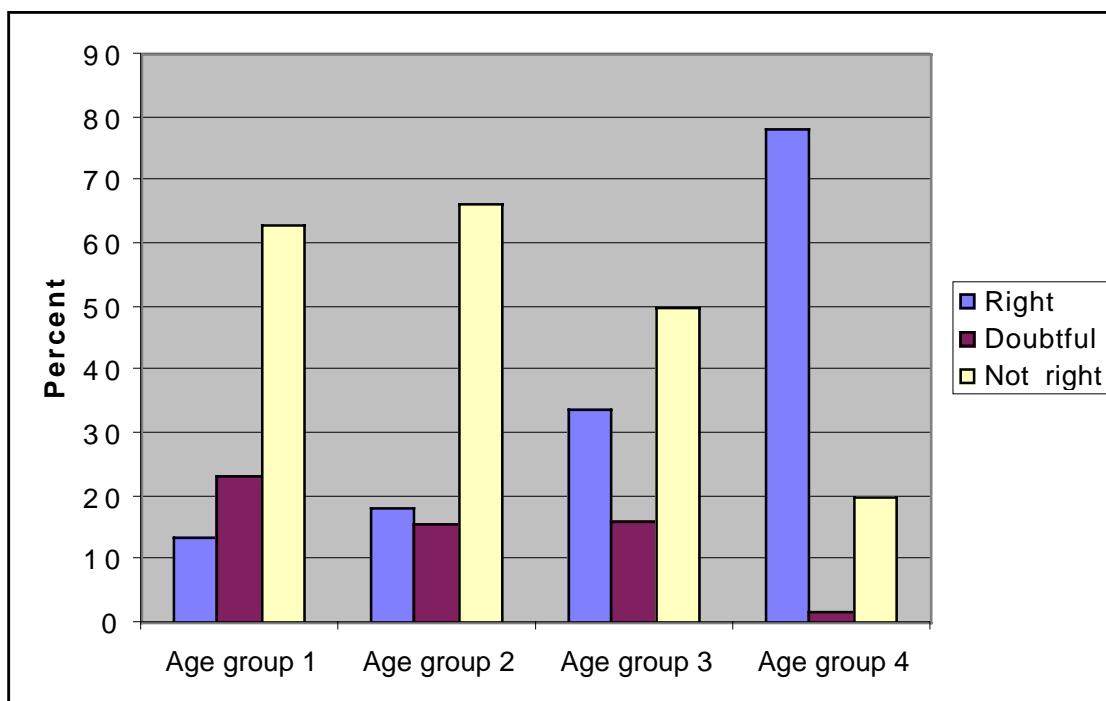


Figure 1: V3: Distribution of answers across four age groups

Figure 1 is based on data from 33 informants, and it shows the distribution of answers across the four age groups. There are 660 answers to be distributed across the four age groups (33 informants, 20 dialect sentences), and the distribution is reported in percent.

The figure clearly illustrates that the oldest informants have more positive answers than the younger. The positive answers decrease in the younger age groups. The distribution of answers between the age groups is significant at the level of .001 (degree of freedom = 6, chi-square = 120.926). This means that the age differences are not random, and I interpret the result to support the hypothesis that the construction has

⁵ Age group 1: 17-32 years, age group 2: 35-45 years, age group 3: 50-65 years, age group 4: 78-82 years.

entered the Norwegian dialect of Sappen during the language creation period.

5. The V3-construction as evidence of relexification?

Both Norwegian and Finnish are SVO-languages, but as we saw in example 3 and 4 (repeated below as 13 and 14) Norwegian must have the finite verb in the second position in main clauses, also when a phrase is topicalized, while Finnish has a more flexible word order.

- (13) I gamledager **frakta** de veden med hest til veien. (Standard Norwegian)
‘In the old days **carried** they the wood with horses to the road.’
- (14) Ennen vanhaan he **kuljettivat** puut hevosella tielle. (Finnish)
‘In the old days they carried wood with horses to the road.’

On basis of examples like these, Norwegian is said to be a V2 language, and Finnish is said to be an SVO-language, and the crucial difference is whether the language has obligatory verb movement in declarative main clauses.

In a generative framework the difference between Norwegian and Finnish can be described as a difference in parameter setting, where Norwegian has some kind of verb raising, whereas Finnish does not. There are different descriptions of this possible verb movement parameter. Holmberg and Platzack (1995) for example relate the parameter to whether the feature finite is in C° or in I°. They argue that tense and finite are not the same features, and verb second languages “differ from most others languages in having the feature [+F] [finite] in C°, separated from the abstract tense feature, which is in I°”(Holmberg and Platzack 1995, p. 43). Although this theory is applied on Scandinavian languages, the predictions should hold for other language families as well.

If this description of the parameter setting is anywhere near the truth, one could argue that the V3-construction in the Norwegian dialect of Sappen is evidence of the initial creolization process where a trace of Finnish parameter setting is found. The V3-construction is possible because the parameters of the creole grammars are predicted to follow the source language (i.e. Finnish) since the relexifiers did not have enough access to the target language (i.e. Norwegian) in order to identify the language specific parameters (V-to-C°-movement). Further evidence might be that

the informants have the same attitudes towards the V3- and V4-constructions.⁶

Roberts (1999) has a universalist approach to creole languages, and his theory represents an objection to Lefebvre's line of argumentation. Roberts (1999) regard SVO word order in languages like Finnish as the unmarked word order in UG. The V2-pattern in Norwegian is thus a marked word order. Roberts (1999) hypothesis is that creoles tend to have weak or unmarked values of parameters, regardless of the parameter setting of the target language, and the weak values are associated with unmarkedness. Roberts relates this tendency to the nature of the trigger; if there is not enough morphological or syntactic evidence to trigger the strong value of the parameter, then the parameter will have weak values, the unmarked setting (Roberts 1999, p. 303f). According to Roberts (1999) analysis then, the V3-construction in the Sappen dialect could be analysed as a result of weak values of the verb movement parameter due to the nature of the trigger. The language creators did not have enough V2 trigger experience; hence, the V3-construction was chosen, as it is the unmarked word order in UG.

This discussion raises several questions related to the description of the verb movement parameter, and to the nature of the trigger. On the basis of data presented so far, it is not possible to favour one analysis over the other. I leave this discussion for a moment, and turn to other potential evidence for the relexification process in the new dialect of Sappen.

6. Evidence from phonology and lexical entries

When listening to the dialect of Sappen, it is obvious that this dialect is Norwegian. At the same time one can clearly distinguish influence from the Kven dialect at the phonological level, especially in the dialect of older people. Examples are placement of main stress and the lack of distinction between voiced and unvoiced stops. You can hear '*tant-Anna*' instead of *tante Anna* (meaning 'aunt Anna'), and no audible distinction between the Standard Norwegian words *glatt* and *klatt* (meaning 'slippery' and 'spot', respectively). These features are also reported in other language contact

⁶ This explanation is not dependent on a generative approach. A functional description of the difference between Finnish and Norwegian is that in Finnish word order is used to signal different pragmatic intentions or discourse related functions. In Norwegian word order signals the syntactic function of a phrase, while discourse related functions are signalled with a more restricted set of syntactic processes like topicalization with obligatory verb movement. Due to relexification then, the relexifiers have copied the functional aspects of the flexible word order system in Finnish in order to signal discourse related functions in Norwegian.

dialects in Northern Norway (Bull 1994; 1995). Influence from the source language is expected both in second language learning, and in creole genesis:

the phonetic strings of the lexifier language are interpreted by the relexifiers in the basis of their own phonological system such that the phonological form of the lexical entry is often quite different from the superstratum form. Although the phonological system of the creole appears to be historically derivable from that of its substratum languages, the resulting system is still distinct from the substratum systems. (Lefebvre 1998, p. 17).

So, it is expected that the phonology of the Sappen dialect is neither exclusively Norwegian nor exclusively Finnish.

In order to explain the relexification process, Lefebvre (1998, p. 18) makes an important distinction between two types of lexical entries: *Major lexical category entries* are nouns, verbs, prepositions, adjectives, adverbs, and derivational affixes identified for major categorial features. *Minor category lexical entries* are determiners, complementizers, inflection, tense, mood and aspect. Lefebvre (1998, p. 18) claims that both major and minor category lexical entries are subject to relexification, which means that all lexical entries are copied from the source lexicon and used as basis in the new language, but the outcome of the relexification is slightly different for the two categories. The reason is that the relexifiers are predicted to have enough access to the target language to identify major lexical category entries and relabel them according to the target language, but not enough to identify and relabel all of the minor lexical category entries. Relabelling is semantically driven, and minor lexical category entries without semantic content are given a null form.

Lumsden (1999, p. 140) claims that functional categories in principle should be immune to relexification since relexification requires a correspondence between denotational semantics in the source language and perceived semantics in the target language. This does not mean that creoles do not have functional categories: They are predicted to be in the grammar but they are not pronounced, or they can typically be expressed with lexical categories.

Even though Lefebvre and Lumsden do not agree on relexification of functional categories, they do agree on the result of the relexification. The functional categories are not left out in the new languages, they are present in the structure but not pronounced (null form), and later they can be subject to reanalysis. The functional categories can also be expressed by lexical entries. And as I said, the new creole sounds like the target language, but the lexicon has the grammatical and semantic structures of the source language.

When it comes to word order, the predictions are the same:

in creating creole, speakers of the substratum languages will adopt the directionality properties of the superstratum lexical heads and retain the directionality properties of the functional heads of their native lexicon (Lefebvre 1998, p. 40).

In the Norwegian dialect of Sappen we find lexical entries with Norwegian phonology and syntactic and semantic features from the Kven dialect, especially in the Norwegian dialect of the oldest people in Sappen. Examples are listed in 18-20:

- | | |
|---|--|
| (18) Eg har ikke heller aldri hørt om det.
Jeg har aldri hørt om det.
'I have not either never heard of it.' | (The Sappen dialect)
(Standard Norwegian) |
| (19) Vi skidde ned, opp til Seima.
Vi gikk på ski ned, opp til Seima.
'We went on ski down, up to Seima.' | (The Sappen dialect)
(Standard Norwegian) |
| (20) Dem hadde ikke nåen stans å legge di ongan når barnehagen va
stengt...

De hadde ikke noen steder å plassere ungene når barnehagen var
stengt...
'They had no place to lie the children when the kindergarten was
closed and the parents had vacation.' | (The Sappen dialect)

(Standard Norwegian) |

Example 18 shows an example of the negative expression *ikke + aldri*, (meaning 'never'). This expression is well documented in the Norwegian dialect of Sappen, and it is clearly related to the speech of older people in the community. The negation elements *ikke* and *aldri* have Norwegian phonology, but this expression is ungrammatical in Standard Norwegian. Even though the Norwegian expression does not mirror the Finnish syntax exactly, it relates to the Finnish negative polarity expression *ei + koskaan* (meaning 'not ever') (Cf. Sollid 2003; in print for further details.)

In example 19 the verb *skidde* (meaning 'went on ski') is based on Standard Norwegian phonology and morphology, but the syntax of this lexical entry corresponds to the Finnish verb *hiihtää*. This is an idiolectal expression from an old, bilingual informant from Sappen, and it is probably levelled out of the dialect.

In example 20 the verb *legge* (meaning 'to lie') has Standard Norwegian phonology, but to my knowledge the choice of verb seems to semantically correspond better with the Finnish verbal system that expresses placement, and probably more precisely to the Finnish verb

laittaa, meaning ‘put’ which has a very generalized use. It is interesting to note that verbs expressing placement in this dialect are frequently used in particular ways compared to Standard Norwegian.

These few examples show influence from Finnish in the Norwegian phonology. They also show lexical transfers from Finnish to Norwegian even though the Norwegian expressions do not necessarily correspond directly to the Finnish system. These traces of Finnish in the Norwegian dialect of Sappen seem to be well explained within the relexification theory. Still, the examples are too random to make any firm conclusions about the relexification hypothesis in its strongest sense. One possibility is to regard relexification as the essential process in the genesis of the Sappen dialect, and that the relexification process is guided by the substratum language (i.e. Finnish), by the superstratum language (i.e. Norwegian), by UG or by all three of them.

7. Conclusions

This paper explores how the relexification can contribute to the understanding of the genesis of the new Norwegian dialect of Sappen. On basis of data presented here it is not possible to decide between Lefebvre’s (1998) and Roberts’ (1999) analyses. Following Lefebvre (1998) one suggestion is that relexification is the basic mental process that leads to the existence of the V3-construction in the dialect of Sappen. The disagreement between Lefebvre and Roberts concerns whether the substratum language or UG guides the process of relexification. So far there are not enough evidence to decide between these options, and one solution is to expect that *all* languages of the language creators, including UG, are involved in language creation. This leads to a weaker version of the relexification hypothesis that takes the empirical problems of the substratist theory into consideration. This solution does not favour one language over the other, and it opts for further studies on the nature of the trigger and on structural details of the products of relexification.

The discussion in this paper adheres to a more general discussion of approaches to language genesis, where substratist and universalist (and also superstratist) theories often are regarded as contrary to each other (cf. Muysken and Smith, eds. 1986). I have no intention of solving this discussion, but in spirit of DeGraff (1999) I believe that different theories can contribute to different aspects of the same question. In the case of the Norwegian dialect of Sappen, I claim that adults are responsible for the products of relexification during the first period of language shift (whether or not the process is guided by Finnish, Norwegian or UG). On basis of the parents’ Norwegian second language the children and following

generations stabilize the dialect. In this process some products of relexification are levelled out, while some still exist.

Whether or not the weaker version of the relexification theory holds in future enquiries, I consider theories of creole genesis as fruitful ways of starting to understand the emergence and the crystallization of the new dialects of Northern Norway.

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