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Language diversity in Norway and the question of L1 and L2

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Abstract

In this article, I will give a historical overview and the present-day status of language diversity in Norwegian schools and Norwegian society. I will also discuss several questions that arise with regard to the political and educational situation. For four hundred years, Norway had Danish as its official and only written language. When Norway became an independent country, Norway decided to have its own national language, Norwegian. However, due to historical events, this is one language with two slightly different written varieties: Dano-Norwegian (*bokmål*) and New Norwegian (*nynorsk*). Since almost 90 per cent of Norwegian pupils learn Dano-Norwegian as their first (written) language, and the other written language, New Norwegian, is not used much in society in general, I will argue that New Norwegian might actually be considered a foreign language by those who learn to write Dano-Norwegian as their first language and that it can even be positioned behind English when analyzed from a language-learning point of view.

Keywords

language acquisition, language diversity, language learning, second language acquisition

Różnorodność językowa w Norwegii a kwestia pierwszego i drugiego języka

Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia historyczne i współczesne podejście Norwegów do języka narodowego, zwracając szczególną uwagę na rozróżnienie wynikające z zestawienia oficjalnych jego form nauczanych w szkołach i zwyczajów językowych użytkowników. Autor umieszcza swe rozważania w kontekście określonej sytuacji politycznej i wynikających zeń założeń edukacyjnych. Kluczowym elementem jest tu historia kraju, w którym przez 400 lat oficjalnym językiem był język innego państwa – język duński. Dopiero po uzyskaniu przez Norwegię całkowitej niezależności norweski stał językiem oficjalnym. W wyniku tych historycznych okoliczności jest to język, w którym funkcjonują obok siebie dwie, nieco odmienne, wersje pisane: duńsko-norweska (*bokmål*) i nowa norweskim (*nynorsk*). Ponieważ niemal 90% uczniów w norweskich szkołach uczy się duńsko-norweskiego jako pierwszego (pisanego) języka, autor niniejszego tekstu formułuje tezę, iż nowy norweski może być traktowany przez nich jako język obcy. W takim ujęciu może się okazać, że zajmuje on nawet niższą pozycję niż język angielski.

Słowa kluczowe

nauka języka, przyswajanie języka, przyswajanie języka drugiego, różnorodność językowa

1. Introduction

In this article, I will outline some of the linguistic and cultural challenges to the education system and society of Norway that are a result of language diversity. Despite an earlier common belief ("one language, one people, one nation"), many countries do not have just one national language or one official language (for the distinction between the terms national language and official language, see Holmes 1992: 105-106). Canada, for instance, has both English and French as its official languages.

Furthermore, there might be a number of other national ("native") languages in use. Moreover, in the new multicultural world, there might be many minority languages belonging to immigrants. In Europe with its 50 states, 626 different languages were registered as being in use in 2015 (Grepstad 2015). Additionally, in most cases, when a country has several official languages, these languages are normally not mutually intelligible.

Norway has two official national languages, Norwegian and Sami, the latter belongs to the Uralic language family, while Norwegian belongs to the Germanic languages. Most speakers of the Sami language (or rather languages) live in the north of Norway (and other countries of the northernmost part of Europe). Additionally, Norwegian and Sami are not mutually intelligible, while very few non-Sami Norwegians have to learn or care to learn Sami. For the purposes of this article, however, the Sami language is not important and so will not be discussed further (see e.g. Sammallahti 1998).

The main official language of Norway is Norwegian, which consists of two official written varieties (see e.g. Wardhaugh 2010: chap. 2), Dano-Norwegian (*bokmål*) and New Norwegian (*nynorsk*). These varieties are mutually intelligible and most pupils have to learn both of them at school. However, pupils (or the municipalities) choose one variety as the main written language while the other one is taught as a co-language ("side language").

Below, I will first explain the background to the linguistic situation in Norway before I go on to point out some challenges to the education system: the main focus being on the linguistic diversity Norwegian schoolchildren face when they acquire writing skills and find their linguistic identity. I will also discuss the relevance of the terms *language 1* (L1) and *language 2* (L2) in the context of this linguistic diversity. The main question I ask in the article is whether New Norwegian, the alternative variety of the official Norwegian language, may actually be

classified as a foreign language in Norway seen from a language-learning point of view.

2. One nation, one language – a short history of Norwegian

Norway is a part of mainland Scandinavia in the north of Europe with Sweden and Finland as its Scandinavian neighbours in the east and Denmark in the south. Iceland and the Faroese Islands represent Insular Scandinavia. When the national flags of the Nordic countries are compared it is easy to notice the historical and cultural bonds expressed by the similarities with a horizontal cross on all of the Scandinavian flags. Apart from Finland, where Finnish, a member of the Uralic language family (see e.g. Hakulinen 1997), is the main official language, all the other Scandinavian countries are representatives of Scandinavian languages in the linguistic sense, meaning they belong to the Germanic languages (see e.g. Bandle 2002, Braunmüller 1991, Haugen 1976, Hutterer 2002, König and van der Auwera 1994). The Insular Scandinavian languages Icelandic and Faroese are closer (archaic) descendants of Old Norse (see e.g. Faarlund 2002, Robinson 1992: chap. 4, or Hutterer 2002: chap. IV), the language of the Norwegian Vikings who settled on the islands in the west during the Viking age (around 800/900 AD). While the Mainland Scandinavian languages Norwegian, Swedish and Danish are largely mutually intelligible (cf. Kloss 1967 (Ausbau-languages), Icelandic and Faroese are linguistically much further apart and represent older language stages of Scandinavian, among other things because of the geographical distance to the mainland Scandinavian countries (cf. Kloss 1967 (Abstand-languages), see e.g. Hutterer 2002: chap. IV, König and van der Auwera 1994: chap. 6 and 7, Wardhaugh 2010: 29).

Before the Viking age, the languages or dialects of the northern Germanic “countries” were rather homogeneous (see e.g. Hutterer 2002: chap. II and IV.2), and we commonly refer

to them as Ancient Nordic or Ancient Scandinavian. During the Viking age, the languages split into two main dialects, East and West Scandinavian, due to different sound changes (see e.g. Faarlund 2002, or Hutterer 2002: chap. II and IV.2.3). Even though dialectal differences might have evolved during the Viking age, all Scandinavian dialects/varieties were usually referred to as "Danish tongue", which suggests that the northern Germanic tribes considered their dialects to belong to the same language (Hutterer 2002: chap. IV.2.3). Due to the number of written sources and the international status of the saga literature dealing with Viking heroes, the West Scandinavian variety is best known.

The following language history is partly tied to the political history of the Scandinavian countries. Beginning with the first smaller Viking kingdoms inspired by Charlemagne, who conquered one another (the Vikings even had a political and linguistic impact on the British islands) or built alliances, there is a long list of different political allegiances. In brief (see e.g. Stenersen and Libæk 2007), Norway, Sweden and Denmark shared kings from 1397–1523 (the Kalmar Union), and after Sweden left the union in 1523, Norway stayed as part of the Dano-Norwegian union that had existed officially since 1450. Denmark-Norway was a political union until 1814 when Denmark lost Norway to Sweden as compensation for the loss of Finland after the Napoleonic wars (a result of the so-called Treaty of Kiel). From 1814–1905, therefore, Norway was a part of Sweden and thus politically dependent since the 14th century. The common term for the western variety of Scandinavian before 1350 is Old Norse (see e.g. Barnes 1999), while I will use Old Norwegian to emphasize the development from the older Norwegian language to the new or modern Norwegian language.

In 1349, the Black Death came to Scandinavia and wiped out large parts of the population. Most countries were struck equally hard (according to Austin Alchon (2003: 21) the Black Death is estimated to have killed 30–60 per cent of Europe's

total population), but the great disease also had a great impact on Norwegian history and the development of the language. Many of the people who were able to write (Old) Norwegian (for instance, clergy) died and dialectal changes became more visible when new writers lacked the professional skills of former times. In addition, due to the serious decrease of population, farmers lived further apart from each other than before and dialectal changes developed even more in the different parts of the country. During the following century, therefore, hundreds of different dialects developed, so that linguistically, Middle Norwegian, as the language varieties from around 1350–1550 are referred to, is hard to define as a consistent language (see e.g. Faarlund 2002, Mørck 2004, Otnes and Aamotsbakken 2012: chap. 4).

Up to 1550, it is still relatively easy to detect the direct linguistic development from Old Norwegian (Old Norse)[1] to Middle Norwegian, which is mostly due to sound changes leading to subsequent reanalyses and grammatical changes. For instance, the weakening of the Old Norse end vowels *a*, *i*, *u* to *e* made it difficult to analyse different inflectional categories like case and person. Hence, the case system and verbal inflection system were greatly simplified leaving modern (standard) Norwegian with almost no case inflection and only one verbal form for each tense and mode. This kind of internal language history is natural for all language development (see for instance the division in internal and external Norwegian language history in Torp and Vikør 1993). In addition to this internal development, Norwegian also experienced quite extensive linguistic loans due to the establishment of a Hanseatic League outpost in Bergen around 1360. The German colony in Bergen existed for approximately four hundred years. Therefore, Low German, the language of the Hanseatic League, has contributed considerably to the shape of the modern Mainland

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Scandinavian languages (see e.g. Braunmüller and Diercks 1993, Jahr 1995, Nesse 2001, 2003, 2008a, 2008b, Rambø 2008).

After 1450, when Norway became a part of the Denmark-Norway union, the Danish language had increasingly more impact on the Norwegian language, not least because of the lack of an official Norwegian language norm and a lack of internal politics. In 1536, Norway became a so-called puppet state under Denmark and was politically dependent on Denmark in all matters. Danish was the common written language of Denmark-Norway and continued to be the only official written language in Norway until the end of the 19th century. After the Reformation (1537 in Norway), most countries had the Bible translated into their national language(s). Sweden had a Swedish Bible translation in 1541 and Denmark-Norway had its Bible translation in 1550. Since Norway was a part of Denmark-Norway and there was no official Norwegian written language, Norway did not get such an important book (at that time) to support the consolidation of a national language (see e.g. Wardhaugh 2010:31). Instead, the Bible and obligatory schooling before Confirmation (after 1736), with reading of the catechism and psalms and learning of Danish phrases by heart, became a part of Norwegian culture. For instance, in 1737, explanations of Luther's catechism were published with 759 questions written in Danish. This book was used for 150 years as a preparation for Confirmation. If a person was not able to answer the questions and failed the Confirmation, he or she could not get married (Skirbekk 2016: 66-67). Of course, every single Norwegian citizen had to learn to read Danish in order to become a full member of society. Moreover, when a public school system was established in Norway at the end of the 18th century, pupils had to learn Danish, as there was no subject in school called Norwegian. Indeed, until 1811, Norway did not have its own university, so that Norwegians normally went to Copenhagen in Denmark to study. It was only in 1878, in fact, that a new school law declared that the lan-

guage of instruction in school should be the children's own speech, i.e. Norwegian colloquial speech instead of Danish (see e.g. Otnes and Aamotsbakken 2012: 150-151).

Linguistically, Danish manifested its position in Norway from 1550. During the Age of Enlightenment in the 18th century, Danish became more standardized and "purified"(by removing and exchanging loan words from German and the Roman languages) in accordance with the ideals of the Enlightenment. By the time of independence from Denmark in 1814, therefore, those Norwegians who could write were able to do this at least as well or even better than people from Denmark itself.

As mentioned earlier, Norway was a part of Sweden from 1814 until final independence in 1905, but Norway was not forced to adopt Swedish as its new official language. Instead, Norway continued to use the Danish written language. However, by that time Romantic nationalism had come to Scandinavia and Norway, and with that also came the ideology of "one nation, one language". In brief, during the 19th century, three different options were explored, a conservative, a moderate and a radical one. Either one could continue to use the Danish written language, modify the Danish language in the direction of Norwegian urban/upper-class (Danish-influenced) colloquial speech, or create a new written language on the basis of more or less "pure" Norwegian dialects (excluding the Danish-influenced urban varieties of Norwegian). Around 1800, approximately 80 per cent of the Norwegian population were farmers in one way or the other and most of them spoke dialects that were less "contaminated" by Danish, seen from a purist perspective.

In 1885, the Norwegian parliament decided that the two written varieties, Dano-Norwegian (later called *bokmål*, "book language") and Norwegian-Norwegian (later called *nynorsk*, "New Norwegian") should be the two official Norwegian written languages and that they should have equal rights. During the first part of the 20th century, there were several reforms of both written languages with the aim of bringing them closer togeth-

er and merging them into one written language. However, people on both sides were reluctant to follow this approach and the government decided to give up trying to merge the two languages into one. Even today, many people see the blends and inflections formed from both languages as a kind of "bastardized" language.

While the New-Norwegian (Nynorsk) movement had great support at the beginning of the 20st century and approximately 34 per cent of the population used it as their main written language instead of the Dano-Norwegian (Bokmål) variety (Otnes and Aamotbakken 2012: 150, Vikør 1975), things changed radically after the Second World War. There are many reasons for this development which do not need to be discussed here. Suffice to say, the percentage of pupils who learn New Norwegian as their first/main written language is somewhere below 15 per cent today while Dano-Norwegian (Bokmål) dominates in almost every (written) domain in Norwegian society.

3. The co-existence of Dano-Norwegian and New Norwegian

As mentioned above, after the Norwegian parliament acknowledged two official written languages in 1885, no one actually planned or foresaw that Norway would have two official written languages (see also Jahr 1992). Several revisions of both varieties were made to bring them closer to each other and eventually merge them into one written language, so-called "Common Norwegian" (samnorsk). Apart from this strategy, however, the originally Danish written language still needed several revisions in order to become more Norwegian.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Norwegians were exposed to at least three different written languages: Danish, modified Danish (Dano-Norwegian) and New Norwegian. New Norwegian (*nynorsk* or earlier *landsmål*) was built on a lexical and grammatical selection of more or less all of the Norwegian (rural) dialects around 1850. This work was done by one man,

Ivar Aasen (1813-1896) who published a grammar (1848) and a dictionary (1850) of his proposal for a new Norwegian language. By 1873, he had published a revised version of his dictionary with an attempt to standardize it to a higher degree. In 1901, New Norwegian, now one of the two official written languages, had its first revision, while Dano-Norwegian was revised in 1907. The next revision of both written languages followed in 1917, and then new revisions of both varieties came in 1938. The official policy was to try to bring the two varieties closer to each other by introducing several common words or inflections. However, now representatives from both varieties perceived the changes as too radical.

To an outsider, the last 100 (or 150) years of the language debate in Norway may seem rather peculiar. When looking at the transmission from Danish into Dano-Norwegian (*bokmål*) one might understand "simple" changes of the Danish voiced consonants into Norwegian unvoiced consonants, for instance, Danish *pibe, kage, hade* into Norwegian *pipe, kake, hate* (English *pipe, cake, hate*). Voiced consonants are mainly used in the south-west part of Norway and not in the capital Oslo. Hence, the cultural elite accepted this change more easily. However, the change (back) to diphthongs, for instance, *sten>stein* (English *stone*), is still not considered "acceptable" by many Norwegians. Since most common people (farmers and workers) even around Oslo said *stein* (from Old Norwegian *steinn*, cf. German *Stein*) while the upper class tried to sound as Danish as possible and said *sten*, diphthongs were seen as markers of the lower class and, hence, not "good enough" for proper language (see e.g. Gee 2015: chap. 5, Holmes 1992: 118-121; 142-163, Milroy and Gordon 2003: chap. 4). *Stein* is the only form in New Norwegian while Dano-Norwegian even today allows both written forms, *stein* and *sten.* The same distribution can be found with other diphthongs: *grøt – graut* (porridge) and *røke – røyke* ((to) smoke). Dano-Norwegian allows both forms while New Norwegian just has the forms with

the diphthong. The Danish forms would be *grød* and *ryge* with monophthongs and voiced consonants.

Another peculiarity of the language debate is the feminine gender in Dano-Norwegian. Danish has only one common inflection for the definite form of masculine and feminine gender (*-en*), for instance, *manden* and *kvinnen* (the man, the woman). New Norwegian has the original Germanic three-gender system and distinguishes between masculine and feminine gender, so the only two possible forms would be *mannen* and *kvinna* today. Dano-Norwegian, on the other hand, allows both variants of the feminine form *kvinnen* and *kvinna*. Despite the fact that most Norwegians actually use the form *kvinna* in oral speech, many users of the Dano-Norwegian variant choose to write *kvinnen* and generally avoid the feminine inflection of nouns.

To give an example from the perspective of New Norwegian, Ivar Aasen distinguished between strong and weak feminine nouns, *kvinne* being a weak noun ending with a vowel (in Aasen's dictionary the indefinite form was actually *kvinna*, as in Old Norwegian (*kvenna*)). Strong feminine nouns (ending with a consonant) had an *-i* as the definite inflection, e.g. *bok – boki* (English: *book – the book*), although the i-form had become a so-called "sideform" (alternative form) by 1938 (side forms were not used in official teaching material), and in 2012 the possibility to use i-forms was removed from the official New Norwegian norm altogether. This is just a small sample of the linguistic diversity one can meet as a reader of Danish, Dano-Norwegian and New Norwegian. Not only are/were there three different varieties, but also both Dano-Norwegian and New Norwegian had a number of optional, alternative forms one could choose. Hence, Norwegian readers have been exposed to a rather inconsistent picture of written "Norwegian" for the last 100 years. Additionally, many Norwegians frequently read and possibly hear Danish and Swedish through business or when going on vacation or shopping trips to their neighbour countries.

4. The status of dialects in Norway

As we have seen, most Norwegian readers are frequently exposed to at least two written varieties of Norwegian (Dano-Norwegian and New Norwegian) and if they care to read texts from former times, they would also have to read "semi-Danish" (older variants of Dano-Norwegian) and Danish and older norms of New Norwegian. Indeed, the founder of the New Norwegian language, Ivar Aasen, actually wrote his grammar of New Norwegian in Danish because Danish was the only official language at that time (1848).

In many countries, one is used to having a standard speech form, usually based on the dialect or sociolect of a historically significant region, for instance, the capital of a country and/or the development of a standard written language (see e.g. Holmes 1992: 82-86, Trudgill 1983: chap. 11,Wardhaugh: 2010: 31-40; see also Milroy and Milroy 1985, for a discussion on spoken and written English). Norway, however, lost its written language in the 14th century and had Danish as its official written language for 400 years. Even though Norwegian speech was highly influenced by Danish and German during these centuries, hundreds of dialects developed with their origin in the Old Norwegian language. For many hundreds of years, therefore, Norwegians have spoken their dialects while they used a more or less different written language (those in the past who were able to write). In 1885, when the Norwegian parliament decided upon the two official written languages, Dano-Norwegian was still too close to Danish and New Norwegian was a synthesis of more or less all Norwegian dialects. Hence, there was no real standard oral ground for either of the written languages. Actually, a popular slogan of the New Norwegian movement still is "Speak dialect, write New Norwegian!" (*Snakk dialekt, skriv nynorsk!*). Thus, the New Norwegian movement has no desire to favour a standard for colloquial speech.

In spite of this, when they began to transmit programmes, Norwegian radio and TV used speech based on written Dano-Norwegian and New Norwegian, while the use of dialect was generally not accepted in public broadcasting. In most cases, radio or TV anchors from the area around Oslo (with East Norwegian pronunciation) were used for reading the news in Dano-Norwegian, while people from West Norway (with West Norwegian pronunciation) were used for texts to be presented in New Norwegian. Hence, the state broadcasting company to some degree contributed to and biased the conception of standard Dano-Norwegian and New Norwegian.

However, during the 1970s, Norway (as with many other countries, see e.g. Grijp 2007 for Dutch) experienced a folk song and dialect resurgence and the use of dialects became synonymous with democracy and/or opposition against official state actions (see e.g. Bourdieu 1992). Today, it is expected that a person will use his or her local dialect and among certain groups, standardizing oral speech (dialect) towards the written language is not appreciated at all (see e.g. Grepstad 2015: 25). According to a survey from 2012, 90 per cent of Norwegians think using dialect is positive (Grepstad 2015: 129). As for national radio, statistics show that there was a 6 per cent use of dialect in 1972, while there was a 35 per cent use of dialect in 2013 (Grepstad 2015: 85).The numbers for national TV are 2 per cent in 1972 and 13 per cent in 2014 (Grepstad 2015: 86).

Even though there is a high tolerance for the use of dialects in Norway, depending on which region a speaker comes from, he or she usually ranks the various dialects of Norway differently. There are also certain stereotypes connected to certain dialects (see e.g. Mæhlum et al. 2003: chap. 7.3.2) and some dialects are usually perceived to be more difficult to understand than others (Grepstad 2015: chap. 5.3).

While the previous section concluded that most Norwegians are exposed to varieties of written Norwegian (and possibly Danish and Swedish), we now see that most Norwegians also

hear many different Norwegian dialects. Through the introduction of text telephone (SMS) and interactive internet, the use of dialects is now also more or less ubiquitous (see e.g. Grepstad 2015: 24-26). Among schoolchildren, especially, the use of dialect in social media has increased. Hence, the average internet user meets not only Dano-Norwegian and New Norwegian as the two official written languages, but a great variety of dialect-based writing. Indeed, Grepstad (2015: 26) actually anticipates the development of a third, non-standardized Norwegian written language.

5. Learning Norwegian at school

Norwegian pupils, of course, have to learn to read and write Norwegian at school. Norway as a state has one official Norwegian language, but two legal written varieties of equal standing – Dano-Norwegian and New Norwegian (see e.g. Det kongelege kultur- og kyrkjedepartementet, 2007-2008: chap. 4). All pupils (unless they are exempted for some reason) have to learn both written languages, but one language is normally the first or main language while the other one is the additional language or so-called "side language" (*sidemål*). Each municipality chooses which variety they want to teach as the main language and consequently as the additional language. To some extent, the choice of language can also be made individually by the pupils (or rather by the parents).

According to the present curriculum (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2013), pupils are supposed to learn to write their main language from first grade, but will also read texts in the other language.[2] After having finished fourth grade, the pupils are supposed to be able to talk about texts written in both Dano-Norwegian and New Norwegian, describe differences between their own dialect and other Norwegian dialects and understand some Danish and Swedish. By the end of seventh grade, pupils

[2] In this context, it is interesting to note that Norwegian pupils learn to read and write English from first grade.

will have "experimented" with written texts in the other language and started to compare both written languages. Official training in the additional language usually starts in eighth grade and the pupils are supposed to be able to write both languages/varieties by the end of tenth grade. At the end of secondary school, pupils usually get three separate grades in the subject "Norwegian", one for oral achievement and one for each written variety.

Approximately 12-13 per cent of pupils learn New Norwegian as their first or main language in primary school. At the same time, Dano-Norwegian is predominant in Norwegian society. Apart from certain regions in the west of Norway, Dano-Norwegian is definitely the majority (written) language. Since almost 90 per cent of pupils have Dano-Norwegian as their main language and this is also the language they most frequently meet during everyday life, many pupils (and people in general) do not understand why they have to learn (to write) both varieties. Given the fact that most pupils meet New Norwegian more or less only in a school environment when they themselves are at the beginning of puberty, many people develop a negative attitude towards the language. According to several studies, 70-75 per cent of pupils and even teachers admit that they are negative towards having to learn/teach two similar written languages or that they are negative towards New Norwegian in particular (see e.g. Hellerud 2005, Nordal 2004, Nordhagen 2006, Røed 2010, Slettemark 2006). Obviously, this is a serious pedagogical challenge for both teachers and pupils when neither teachers nor pupils are motivated to teach or learn New Norwegian.

6. What actually is the Norwegian language?

Look at the following sentences and consider whether you would be able to select the Norwegian one(s):

(1) (a) *What is actually the Norwegian language?*
(b) *Hva er egentlig det norske språket?*
(c) *Hvad er egentlig det norske sprog?*
(d) *Hvað er raunverulega norska?*
(e) *Kva er eigentleg det norske språket?*
(f) *Vad är egentligen det norska språket?*
(g) *Was ist eigentlich die norwegische Sprache?*
(h) *Quelle est vraiment la langue norvégienne?*

Since you are reading this article in English, you might immediately rule out sentence (1a) and you might also be able, without hesitation, to rule out sentence (1h), which is French, because it is most different from the other sentences, being the only non-Germanic language in this sample. You will probably be able to detect the German sentence (1g) and maybe you would rule out (1d) because of the letter *ð*, which is characteristic for Icelandic. The remaining four sentences would be more difficult to differentiate.

(2) (a) *Hva er egentlig det norske språket?*
(b) *Hvad er egentlig det norske sprog?*
(c) *Kva er eigentleg det norske språket?*
(d) *Vad är egentligen det norska språket?*

These sentences look very much alike and still there are some minor spelling differences. In other cases there might be lexical or syntactic differences, too. Sentence (2a) is Dano-Norwegian, sentence (2b) is Danish, sentence (2c) is New Norwegian and sentence (2d) is Swedish. Now, remember that all Norwegian pupils are supposed to deal with all four languages to some degree during primary and secondary school. Additionally, pupils are normally exposed to different dialects, especially in larger cities, but now also in social media, where it has become more and more common to use dialect-based writing/spelling (Grepstad 2015: 26).

Imagine a sentence/question: “How am I supposed to write Norwegian?” This could be written in Dano-Norwegian, New

Norwegian or in different dialects, here exemplified by two varieties from East Norwegian and Northern Norwegian:

(3) (a) *Hvordan skal jeg skrive norsk?* (Standard Dano-Norwegian)
(b) *Korleis skal eg skrive norsk?* (Standard New Norwegian)
(c) *Åssen skar je skrive norsk?* (Eastern dialect)
(d) *Korsn ska æ skriv norsk?* (Northern dialect)

The respective variants in Danish and Swedish would be:

(4) (a) *Hvordan skal jeg skrive norsk?* (Danish, see Dano-Norwegian)
(b) *Hur ska jag skriva norska?* (Swedish)

One might wonder how it is possible for pupils to learn to write Norwegian at all.

7. First language versus second language versus foreign language

Due to political reasons (the languages are defined and standardized by different countries), Norwegian, Swedish and Danish are classified as different languages. From a linguistic point of view, one could argue that they belong to a dialect continuum and are varieties of the same language (Mainland Scandinavian) (see e.g. Wardhaug 2010: 29). There may be greater differences between some Norwegian dialects than between Norwegian and Swedish or Norwegian and Danish. Modern societies need standardized written languages (Wardhaugh 2010: 31-40). Hence, Mainland Scandinavia has to deal with three "different" national languages and due to Norwegian history, Norwegian comes in two written varieties.

According to present policies (more or less since 1885), the official language in Norway is Norwegian (additionally, Sami has official status). Norwegian comes in two written varieties, Dano-Norwegian (*bokmål*) and New Norwegian (*nynorsk*), and hundreds of local dialects. Scholars and politicians from different viewpoints argue whether Dano-Norwegian and New Nor-

wegian are varieties of the same language or two separate languages. This raises the question of what status the other or additional languages should have in the educational system and in society, as well as what they should be called. This is because many pupils and even teachers refer to Dano-Norwegian (*bokmål*) and New Norwegian (*nynorsk*) as Norwegian and New Norwegian, i.e. *norsk* and *nynorsk*. And, since 85-90 per cent of pupils use Dano-Norwegian as their main (and usually only) written language, they consider it *the* Norwegian language (see Omdal and Vikør 2002: 59-62 for a discussion on to what degree a written language is a language), while New Norwegian is felt to be an obligatory "punishment" at school.

According to McLaughlin (1984: 101), the structures of the first language (L1) are fairly well established at the age of three. Therefore, learning another language before the age of three is also considered learning a first language. Most Norwegian children learn a local dialect as their first language. They do not normally learn to write before kindergarten or primary school. But since many children are read to by their parents and children's television (cartoons) is often dubbed on the basis of written texts, most children are exposed to the dialect(s) of their parents and Dano-Norwegian, since this is the most used written variety. Children might actually use "television language" (very often standardized speech based on dialects from Oslo or East Norway) as a language in role play and other activities of play. Even though there might be, to a greater or smaller degree, differences between the local dialect and the written language, we do not usually speak of second language acquisition when children learn to write at primary school. A child from Northern Norway might ask: *Ka du sei?* (What you say?) while the Dano-Norwegian written form would be: *Hva sier du?* (What say you?). So there might be both lexical and syntactic differences between the dialects and the standard written languages. However, after learning to write at school,

the children are socialized to learn the difference between oral speech and written language(s).

If the teacher is doing her job, the pupils will meet a certain amount of the other written language (usually New Norwegian) through listening and reading during primary school. Potentially, the two written languages, then, could be established as varieties of the same language. However, in most cases, the amount of texts in New Norwegian is minimized and the majority of pupils also have little exposure to New Norwegian outside school. New Norwegian, thus, has the same status as Danish or Swedish, being "foreign" languages from an exposure and learning point of view. The other Scandinavian languages, including New Norwegian, would, therefore be second languages (L2). To a great extent pupils are also able to understand each language/variety, but they would not be able to write properly, i.e. according to standard writing.

When it comes to the learning of a second language, one can differentiate between second-language acquisition (SLA) and foreign-language learning (FLL) (see e.g. Berggren and Tenfjord 2003: 16, Engen and Kulbrandstad 2004: 27). A second language is learned in an environment where the language is used on a daily basis. A foreign language is learned outside an environment where it is used on a daily basis. From this perspective, New Norwegian could actually be considered a foreign language by most people in Norway.

In contrast, Norwegian pupils learn to speak and write English from first grade in primary school. After the introduction of private television channels and the ubiquitous nature of Anglo-American music and later computer culture after the Second World War, English is definitely present in modern Norwegian society. Some researchers argue that one could consider most Norwegians today to be bilingual (see e.g. Engen and Kulbrandstad 2004 : chap. 2, for a discussion on different definitions of bilinguality). Most Norwegian pupils would claim that they manage to write in English better than New Norwegian. Formally, English is still considered a foreign language in

the Norwegian school system and society. However, since most pupils achieve better results in English than in New Norwegian, New Norwegian, formally, should also be considered a foreign language.

Interestingly, those pupils who learn New Norwegian as their first/main language at school usually learn Dano-Norwegian without major problems and much extra teaching at school (contrary to those who have to learn New Norwegian as their additional language) because Dano-Norwegian is almost ubiquitous. Paradoxically, therefore, it is the minority in Norway (12-13 per cent) who actually master Norwegian as a language consisting of two written varieties with equal legal rights.

From a language-learning and pedagogical point of view, it would seem reasonable that the national curriculum be changed and that New Norwegian would become the main/first written language in school for all pupils. However, this is not possible for political reasons and the earlier mentioned generally negative attitude towards New Norwegian especially in the capital Oslo and the eastern regions.

8. Conclusion

In this article, I have tried to give a historical overview and the present-day status of language diversity as it exists in Norwegian schools and Norwegian society. I have discussed different questions that have arisen from the political and educational situation. From the moment Norway became an independent country, it was decided that it should have its own national language, Norwegian. Officially, this is one language with two written varieties. Since almost 90 per cent of Norwegian pupils learn Dano-Norwegian as their first (written) language, and the other written language, New Norwegian, is not as visible in the public domain, New Norwegian can actually be considered a foreign language – even taking up a position behind English.

Paradoxically, New Norwegian is, at the same time, one half of the official language Norwegian.

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