

# The Norwegian Language of the American Midwest: Old-fashioned and standardised towards Bokmål?

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The Norwegian language spoken in the American Midwest is interesting from several perspectives in addition to general linguistic ones: bilingualism, psycholinguistics (acquisition and attrition), sociolinguistics (language attitudes), and of course dialectology, which is our perspective here. Johannessen and Laake (to appear) looked at aspects of the lexicon and syntax, and concluded, based on data from fieldwork done in 2010 plus data described in Haugen (1953) and Hjelde (1992) that although the Midwest is a vast area, it seems that the Norwegian language spoken there today can be viewed as one dialect. This supports the ideas in Haugen (1953), on the basis of similarities in the lexicon and the syntax, and independently of the geographical background of the speakers's ancestors.

In the present talk we will look at more aspects than just lexicon and syntax as we will expand our investigation to function words and morphology. During two field trips in 2010 we recorded conversations with around 80 informants in six states: Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, South Dakota and North Dakota. We will only look at a fraction of the informants in this talk.

Haugen (1953) claims that the development of the dialects in the Midwest could be characterised as a "gradual elimination of conspicuous forms", and that "many speakers have departed from their native speech in the general direction of the BL [Bokmål] without of course attaining the norms of the latter" (op.cit. p. 352). He says about the phonetic, morphological and lexical changes that they are "nearly always moving from a less to a more widely-used form, which is often that of urban DN [Dano-Norwegian]" (op cit. p. 353). Bokmål and Dano-Norwegian are two terms used for the same written version of Norwegian used by the majority of the population in Norway. About the language that the Norwegian-American children learn to speak, he says: "they adopted as their own that dialect which was most generally used in the community, which often meant the dialect that was most close to DN [Dano-Norwegian]" (op.cit. p. 350). In the paper we will investigate whether it is the case that the dialect has become close to Bokmål Norwegian.

In addition, we will question a belief that we have met repeatedly both in Norway and in America, that the language of descendents of the old Norwegian emigration is old-fashioned and represents an older stage of Norwegian than that spoken in present-day Norway.

Haugen, Einar. 1953: *The Norwegian Language in America: A Study in Bilingual Behavior*. Philadelphia.

Hjelde, Arnstein. 1992: *Trøndsk talemål i Amerika*. Trondheim.

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