

# Dialectological research in Norway

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**Abstract.** Since dialects have not been in the focus of linguists for a long time, systematic research in this field dates back only to the 19th century. Dialectology as a scientific field began to develop in the 1920s, following the German writer Jacob Grimm's justification of the need for a historical approach to language. At that time, the renowned dialectologist Johann Andreas Schmeller also published several dialectological works. Thus, historical dialectology studies the dialects existing in a specific area, their linguistic features, and is referred to as regional dialectology, dialect geography, or traditional dialectology. However, modern dialectological research is primarily focused on studying each dialect and individual language separately. Additionally, dialects have been studied in comparison with other dialects or in relation to literary language and specific historical contexts. Modern dialectology encompasses various linguistic methods and approaches that present language differences through the analysis of corpus data and the application of modern technologies in linguistics.

Furthermore, the historical factors of the period influence dialectological studies, determining their characteristics. Research conducted in the field of Norwegian dialectology is no exception in this regard. Thus, it is reasonable to consider the main historical periods that have influenced the Norwegian language as the Middle Ages (VIII-XIV), the period of National Romanticism (1830-1867), and the period of independence (1905-). It was during these periods that the Norwegian language and dialects were formed, developed and preserved.

**Keywords:** dialectological research; dialects; Norwegian; Medieval period; Romanticism era; Independence period.

## INTRODUCTION

In Norway, the Middle Ages have traditionally been regarded as the historical period during which Christianization began, feudal society emerged, and the Church and kings held supreme power. Towards the end of the Middle Ages, the Church was criticised, which gave rise to the Reformation. Although Renaissance figures described the Middle Ages as a barbaric era, modern historians consider the Middle Ages to be a fundamental stage in the development of modern Europe. At the end of the 17th century, the National Romanticism movement spread in several European countries. This movement primarily emphasised the importance of national values [2, p. 128]. The spread of the national romanticism movement in Norway was marked by folklorists such as Y. Moe, P.K. Asbyörnson, and P.A. Munk, as well as linguists Aasen, K.

Knudsen, and writers H. Ibsen and H. Vergeland. They left an irreplaceable mark on the history of the Norwegian national awakening and were remembered for their special contributions to the development of national culture. This article describes the Norwegian language, dialectology and research conducted in this field against the background of three historical periods: the Middle Ages, the Romantic period and the Independence period.

The main source of the Norwegian language is also the Old Norse language, also called the "Northern language". The Norwegian language belongs to the Germanic language group of the Indo-European language family. The Indo-European languages later developed into distinct language branches in Europe [2, p. 128]. For example, the Proto-Germanic language, considered the source of English, German, and

the Scandinavian languages in northern Europe, can be cited as an example. Later, this language evolved into the Old Norse language (also known as Old Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian), which in turn developed into the modern Scandinavian languages [4, p. 7]. This language was the language of the Vikings, as well as the language of ancient sagas and poetry in the Middle Ages. In the 14th and 15th centuries, with the beginning of the Hanseatic League period in Norway, Old and Medieval Norwegian were influenced by Low German [2, p. 128]. In general, the spread of Christianity in Europe led to stagnation in several fields of science, as well as in the field of linguistics. Latin was considered the universal language of science [8, p. 46]. For example, this influence can be felt more in the Bergen and Lingen dialects of Norway. Thus, although other Norwegian dialects have a three-gender system (feminine, masculine, and neuter), the Bergen and Lingen dialects have only two grammatical gender systems, as there is no feminine gender system in nouns [6, p. 24].

The Old Norse language was destroyed and forgotten in the 1300s by the Black Death, which killed 60% of the population [2, p.76]. The upper classes were most significantly affected by this situation, and as a result, they lost their social power [6, p. 67]. Moreover, almost all those who could write in Norwegian died as a result of the pandemic. Therefore, shortly after Norway allied with Denmark, Danish became the official written language of Norway. Although the Old Norse language was destroyed, the population continued to speak Norwegian. However, 70% of the country was mountainous, so the different regions had very little contact with each other, and significant dialect differences arose [6, p. 29]. Thus, the stage of development of Norwegian dialects can be listed as follows: Indo-European languages → Proto-Germanic language → Old Norse language → Old Norse language → Norwegian dialects were forgotten [2, p. 127].

There were geographical conditions and several historical reasons for the preservation of local dialects in Norway [6, p. 12]. The historical reason is that during the period of alliances between 1319 and 1905, Norway was first under the rule of Denmark and then Sweden [11, p.44]. The coalition with Sweden (1319-1363) is considered a period of "national disaster" for Norway. Although the country's written language was in disarray at the end of the period, some Norwegian linguists sought to restore it. In this

regard, Norwegian linguists P.A. Munk, I. Osen, K. Knudsen, Y. Fritzner, M. Nigord, Y. Storm, and K. Jensen, among others, played a significant role [2, p. 127].

The foundation of historical linguistics in Norway was laid by the Norwegian historian, linguist and geographer P.A. Munk. His early creative activity coincides with the period of national Romanticism [11, p. 24]. His main goal was to reveal the national characteristics of the Norwegian language, culture, and history, thereby legitimising Norway's claim to independence [6, p. 18]. Therefore, P.A. Munk, following the path of his colleague in history, R. Keyser, became interested in the Old Norse language and conducted his historical research within this framework [6, p. 21]. In general, the primary goal of historical and linguistic research during this period was to connect past and modern Norway. It was through research on the Old Norse language that it was emphasised that the rich Scandinavian literature of the Middle Ages was written in the Old Norse language [11, p. 23].

Another contribution of P.A. Munk was his lectures on the history of the Norwegian language in educational institutions [6, p. 26]. These lectures were initially based on the Old Norse language, and later on, the Old Norse language. P.A. Munk used two grammar books that he had authored, which were based on the ideas of J. Grimm, in these lectures. Thus, the linguist analysed his ideas based on facts and campaigned among young people for the preservation of Norwegian literature and language [6, p. 27].

In the latter half of the XVIII century, scholars realised that there were orthographic differences between medieval manuscripts from Iceland and Norway [2, p. 128]. These contrasts were primarily found in Norwegian texts. Thus, P.A. Munk accepted that there was some dialect variation in the Old Norse language [2, p. 17]. This was a logical consequence of the connection between the Old Norse language and modern Norwegian [2, p. 18]. For example, the consonant combination /ll/ in Old Norse was assumed to be pronounced as /dl/, /dd/, and /ll/ in the same dialect areas that still have these pronunciation forms in modern times. /adle, adde, all/e < Old Norse /allir/ meaning: everyone).

In addition, in the middle of the century, several scholars began their own research on the Old

Norse language. For instance, between 1886 and 1896, the Norwegian priest and lexicographer Y. Fritsner published his book "Det gamle norske Sprog". Additionally, the Norwegian teacher and linguist M. Nygord completed his book in 1906, based on a systematic approach to the syntax of the Old Norse language and selected texts from that language. Consequently, from the publication of P.A. Munk's grammar in 1847 until World War I, that is, for approximately two generations, Norwegian linguistics achieved a new and comprehensive understanding of the Old Norse language [2, p. 128].

Moreover, dialectological research was primarily concentrated on social dialects during the period of independence. The shift in the direction of dialect studies towards sociolinguistics caused less scientific dissatisfaction in Norway than in other countries [7, p. 31]. This is because dialect variations in Norway are closely tied to societal changes. In general, interest in the concept of sociolinguistics in Norway was first sparked by the research projects TAUS and TUB, which were conducted in the 1970s and 1980s [Hanssen, 2019, p. 21].

The TAUS project was carried out in 1970. The primary objective of this project was to examine social differences in the Oslo dialect [3, p. 22]. The material for the project is based on informal interviews conducted in Oslo [3, p. 24]. The TUB project, conducted in 1977 by the University of Bergen, Norway, investigated the use, development, and changes of the Bergen dialect among young people [6, p. 25].

Another study is the CALST project, which incorporates keywords from the four main Norwegian dialects and was developed by the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) for learners of Norwegian as a second language [10, p. 16]. In modern times, these studies have become more socially oriented. The essence of such studies lies in examining different dialect forms within specific social groups [10, p. 15]. The occupational factor is also a crucial criterion in the study of social dialects [12, p. 12]. In several socially oriented studies in Norway, for example, the TUB ("Youth Spoken Language in Bergen") project, "occupation" was the primary criterion for categorising informants [12, p. 13]. Thus, young informants were divided into categories according to their fathers, middle-aged women according to their spouses, and others according to their professions [10, p.26].

The fact that the similarity of the spoken language form among young people of different age groups was the most noticeable aspect of this study.

On the other hand, dialect differences were observed between the elderly and the young [10, p.26]. The reason for this may be that the father has little influence on the child's choice of profession and that they are interested in a field different from their father's profession. Another possibility is that in modern times, occupation does not have as much influence on language variation as it once did [10, p. 26].

In sociolinguistics research, along with the occupational criterion, the gender factor is also usually taken into account [10, p. 27]. In general, the approach to language and language use from a gender perspective gained widespread popularity in the 1970s. Several Norwegian researchers, such as E. Rysen, R. Blakar, and T. Pedersen, have emphasised this topic in their scientific works [10, p. 27]. They, following the tradition of V. Labov, accepted the gender factor as a variable. For example, the topic of language and gender sparked interest with the publication of the collection of materials "Language and Gender," edited by E. Ryen, a professor at the University of Oslo, in 1976 [5, p. 243]. According to V. Labov's research results, which take into account the gender factor, women use stereotyped language forms more frequently and are more sensitive to the criterion of prestige [5, p. 243]. Thus, in this study, women used prestigious speech forms mainly in formal situations. According to Norwegian linguist H. Sandøy, the primary reason for this situation is that women do not have as secure a social status in society as men [11, p. 143]. According to Norwegian linguist H. Sandøy, the primary reason for this situation is that women do not have as secure a social status in society as men [11, p. 143]. In various studies where the gender factor is essential, women have shown a preference for prestigious language. This explanation may not align with the realities of the modern era. In modern Norwegian society, women also actively participate in business life and can achieve high social status in their careers [11, p. 144]. Nevertheless, it would not be entirely accurate to dismiss this result from H. Sandøy's study. Thus, there are more situations in which men hold more prestigious jobs and demonstrate higher social status [11, p. 144].

Other studies emphasise that the gender factor is not decisive, but rather related to social group affiliation [9, p.25]. In U. Röyneland's dissertation on dialect changes, a study conducted among young people in the counties of Rurös and Tinset shows that the greatest language differences are not between genders, but between young social groups [9, p.26]. This difference is noticeable between young people from the elite class and those living a simple life. Thus, a group of young people belonging to the elite class is interested in urban and international culture and wants to move from the countryside. In contrast, the other group is interested in entertainment and local culture, and is connected to the place where they live [9, p. 135].

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In Norway, as in other countries, sociolinguistic studies have also used age, gender, and professional criteria as key variables of analysis. The linguistic consequences of industrialisation and urbanisation were also of interest to researchers. Thus, the struggle for language in Norway has been the subject of numerous scientific works and has played a significant role in enriching Norway's cultural life and linguistic characteristics.

In modern Norway, there is no officially accepted standard literary spoken language. Bokmål, which was developed under the influence of Danish and is considered a Norwegianized form of Danish, is regarded as the language of entertainment and music in modern times. In contrast, Nynorsk, which was created based on dialects, is considered the language of literature.

In general, dialects have been accepted by Norwegian society as an integral and valuable part of culture. Although some are opposed to studying both written languages at the same level in modern times, the majority are in favour of actively using this written language. Dialectological studies of the period of independence are mainly related to sociolinguistics. Norwegian linguists prefer to study dialects within a society, rather than as individuals. Examples of these are the sociolinguistic research projects TAUS (Oslo dialect) and TUB (Bergen dialect), as well as the CALST - Computer-based Listening and Speaking Teacher project, which teaches Norwegian dialects to non-native speakers. Thus, the most

striking feature of the Norwegian language from the point of view of the language learner is its lack of an officially accepted standard pronunciation. Therefore, learners of the Norwegian language must be familiar with the various dialects that are widely used to ensure effective communication. Nevertheless, native speakers are usually able to adapt their speech to the accepted norm when communicating with foreigners.

Similar to other European countries, the initial interest in dialects in Norway was not driven by scientific inquiry. In the early periods, the field of study of historical dialectology was limited to dialect lexicon. As a result, a large number of dialect dictionaries were prepared. For example, the work of the lexicographer and Norwegian priest K. Jensen, "Den norske Dictionarium eller Gloseberg", published in Copenhagen in 1646, was considered the only Norwegian dictionary for the next hundred years. K. Jensen used approximately 1,000 words from the Aksvoll dialect of Sønfyörd in this dictionary [11, p. 13].

Based on the information presented above, it can be concluded that in Norway, unlike other Scandinavian countries, the position of dialects is high. Suppose we relate this to the long-term subjugation of Norway in different years. In that case, it can be concluded that the Norwegians fought to preserve their national identity and did not forget their dialects. In contemporary society, this tradition – namely, the use of dialects with ease and without significant barriers – further attests to this phenomenon. Various language and dialect corpora have been created in Norway for conducting research on dialects or studying dialects. This creates a wide range of opportunities for foreigners interested in researching Norwegian dialects. Thus, research in the field of linguistics in Norway can have international significance in terms of creating diverse language corpora for second language learners and continuing this tradition in other countries.

## CONCLUSIONS

The concept of unity was particularly significant to key figures of the era. In the 19th century, modern dialects were not treated as a linguistic error, but rather as a national treasure. As interest in dialects grew, other scholars began to investigate dialectal influences on the

pronunciation of Old Norse. This could also serve as a tool for research into the origins of manuscripts. At the end of the 19th century, the main focus was on continuous development rather than on connecting the past and the future.

Moreover, features such as age, gender, and professional criteria have been used in modern sociolinguistic studies in Norway. The linguistic consequences of industrialisation and urbanisation were also of interest to researchers. Thus, the struggle for language in Norway has been the subject of numerous scientific works

and has played a significant role in enriching Norway's cultural life and linguistic features.

Consequently, various language and dialect corpora have been created for dialect research or dialect study in Norway. This creates a wide range of opportunities for foreigners studying Norwegian dialects and those learning the Norwegian language. Thus, linguistic research in Norway has an internationalising significance in terms of creating various language corpora for second language learners and continuing this tradition in other countries.

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