

Multilectally Literate Norway



Lecture

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📍 room MIS10, 1.16

As a product of political emancipation from Denmark in 1814 and two different routes of subsequent linguistic emancipation from Danish, Norway ended up with two distinct officially recognized Norwegian standard varieties, Bokmål and Nynorsk. Although enjoying the same judicial status at the national level, the relationship between the two varieties is asymmetric both in terms of number of users and language ideological status: Nynorsk is the lesser used of the two and also the variety most often subject to political debate. Currently, just under 12% of Norwegian pupils have Nynorsk as their school language, most of whom live in Western Norway, and although all pupils are required to learn to read and write the other variety as part of their schooling it is a fair generalization to say that Nynorsk pupils acquire better proficiency in Bokmål than do Bokmål pupils in Nynorsk. A third way of writing Norwegian has emerged over the last couple of decades with social media and widespread digitally mediated communication (DMC), namely “dialect writing”. This is a multivariate code with a multitude of local and regional norms containing salient local/regional dialect features not reflected by the standard norms.

Dialect writing thus understood is particularly common among younger people and furthermore more common in Northern, Central and Western Norway than in the central and urban areas of Eastern Norway in and

around the capital Oslo. Given this we can somewhat simplified postulate the existence of three main types of (young) Norwegian language users as defined by their literacy practices and (presumably) competences across school/formal and private/informal contexts: (i) a monolectal type in Eastern Norway (Bokmål only), (ii) a bilectal type in Northern and Central Norway (Bokmål at school, dialect in private contexts), (iii) a trilectal type in Western Norway (Nynorsk and Bokmål at school, dialect in private contexts).

In the ongoing project Multilectal Literacy in Education a variety of data types have been collected from 9th graders (13–14 year olds) at three locations representing the three groups postulated above. In my talk I will present and discuss some of the results so far, which will tap into the participants’ abilities to process, recognize and distinguish different varieties of Norwegian, the interplay between language processing and working memory, their language attitudes and reported practices, and I will also give snapshots of how they de facto write in private messages.

Curiosa: This year’s winner of the Nobel prize in Literature, Jon Fosse, writes in Nynorsk and has explicitly expressed gratitude for its existence as a basis for his authorship.