

*The Representation of Nynorsk and its Speakers in
Norwegian Post-War Newspapers*

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INTRODUCTION

The conceptualisation of the relation between language and identity, ‘linguistic identity’ if you will, has been a many-faceted question on which scholars from different disciplines have shed their light (a.o. HROCH 1985, HJORTHOL 2004). In this context, there is often a demonstrable coherence between one’s linguistic background and certain aspects of social and cultural adhesion – be it being part of a nation, a social group or belonging to a political party. This close connection between language and identity is particularly evident with minority and smaller language communities, where identification with a language may yield itself very strong. Here we may also find a close cohesion between a language community and its sentiments towards the way in which their language is depicted.

In this article, I will take a closer look at the representation of one of these lesser used languages: Nynorsk (*New Norwegian*), one of the two official written forms of Norwegian. The renaissance of Norwegian nationalism in the second half of the 19th century saw the rise of two written varieties of Norwegian, Nynorsk and Bokmål (*Book language*), both of which have had equal status since 1885. Nowadays, ca. 86% of the Norwegian population use Bokmål as their main language (*hovudmål*), while approximately 14% writes in Nynorsk. Ever since the 1850s, the language question has been a fierce debate in Norway. Before long, Nynorsk was faced with a changing perspective as to its practical use, originality and –most and foremost– its ‘norwegianness’. The same applies to its speakers, who on the one hand are described as conservative, unworldly farmers; on the other as intellectuals who write a ‘purified’ Norwegian language and thus uphold an important cultural continuity. Nowadays, the image of Nynorsk tends to be a negative one, especially in the eyes of Bokmål writing teenagers who are faced with obligatory education in Nynorsk (*sidemål*). To them, the language usually represents old-fashioned, rural values that clash with an urban, modern life style. Many Norwegian youngsters describe Nynorsk as ‘complicated’, ‘unnecessary’ and emphasise its alleged ugly ring.

The language’s adversaries sometimes go to great lengths to demonstrate their negative sentiments. Back in the 1960s, upper secondary pupils from Oslo burnt a number of books ‘they did not like’, among them many grammars of Nynorsk. In 1999, Norway’s leading newspaper *Aftenposten* published a picture of two young men burning an anti-Nynorsk sign. On September 6th 2004, a cheerful young girl from the upper-class part of Oslo announced happily on the radio that her class would burn all Nynorsk books straight after the exams. In the context of these protests, a right-wing politician used the term “Nynorskfrie skoler” (“Nynorsk free schools”)¹. These anti-Nynorsk events and slogans often display a tendency of becoming discriminatory.

In this contribution I would like to explore the representation of Nynorsk and its speakers since the Second World War, against the backdrop of studies of national identity (LEERSEN a.o.) and linguistic identity (BRUNSTAD, HOBBSAWM, HROCH a.o.). I will concentrate on the image of Nynorsk given in Norwegian media in terms of the portrayal of the language and the linguistic, social and national identity ascribed to its speakers. In other words: what characteristics are mentioned in the text corpus of the geographical background and the social and cultural identity of the speakers of Nynorsk? What is being said on the language in general? What is the tone of the article in question? Methodically, I will analyse the text corpus by means of a combination of content analysis and propaganda analysis (KRIPPENDORFF, WESTER a.o.). I will mostly look at the use of adjectives, certain rhetorical and propagandistic indicators and the overall style and tone of the articles in question. My text corpus consists of articles from digital editions of post-war Norwegian newspapers, taken from the online media archive at <www.retriever.no>. *Retriever* has the biggest online media archive of Scandinavia with a contents taken from 10.000 national and international websites. These sites are being checked every ten minutes to make sure the *Retriever* database is fully up to date. Its newspaper archive covers some 80 Norwegian newspapers, both regional and national editions. In total, the *Retriever* website contains over 100 million news articles. I have chosen to concentrate on the three biggest national newspapers in Norway: *Aftenposten*, *Bergens Tidende* and *VG* (*Verdens Gang*)². This way, I hope to get a clear picture of what the idea of the Nynorsk language as

¹ Unless stated otherwise, all translations of non-English quotations are my own.

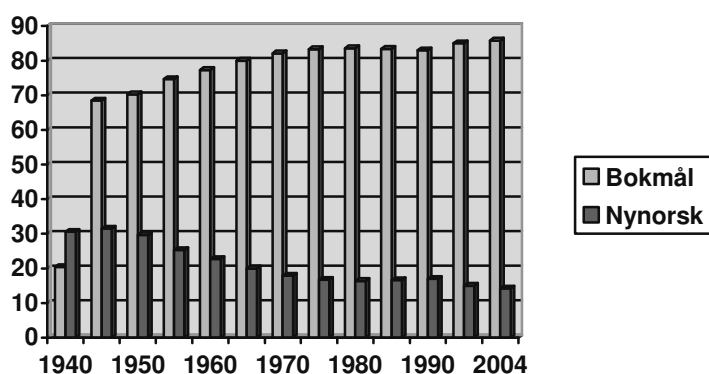
² I would like to thank Magne Eggen from *Retriever A/S* (Oslo) for his kind assistance in browsing the

portrayed in these national newspapers, is. This article also offers a historical outline of the use of Nynorsk in the Norwegian media and on the legal framework concerning the proper use of the two written forms of Norwegian. My point of departure will be the 2000s debate between the Norwegian historian Hans Fredrik Dahl and his countryman, the author Kjartan Fløgstad.

I AN INFLAMMABLE DEBATE

The Norwegian language debate has been a hot potato ever since the revival of Norwegian nationalism led to two separate forms of written Norwegian, Nynorsk and Bokmål. It has been an open sesame to debates and polemics in the Norwegian press and keeps stirring up emotions – even in the 20th century. When speakers of Nynorsk are asked about their sentiments towards the language, they usually stress their personal involvement with the language: “Har ein nynorsken som hjertespråk [...], veit ein at det ikkje berre handlar om rettskriving og ein reint språkleg kompetanse, men om noko meir: om ei handling som eksplisitt eller implisitt viser til kven du er, eller kven du vil vere, samtidig som (språk)handlinga viser til ein konflikt som ikkje berre er språkleg, men også kulturell. Nettopp samanhengen mellom det konflikтуelle i vår tospråks-situasjon og det identitetsdannande for nynorskingane er eit viktig poeng når ein ser kulturvitenskapleg på saka”³. In Norway, nationalism, personal identity and language politics are closely intertwined and emotions can get high with regard to the Norwegian two language system. Surprisingly, there has been very little research in the field of the representation of Nynorsk in the Norwegian media. Since the subject is delicate, one might be inclined to think that a thorough research into the depiction of Nynorsk is still a bridge too far to cross.

The amount of people who write in Nynorsk has been decreasing gradually since the Second World War. Illustration 1 shows the amount of Nynorsk pupils in primary school, in the period 1940-2004. For practical reasons, these figures are shown with a five year interval. Please note that no data are known for the year 1961 and that for the 1942-1945 period no statistics were available for the northern province of Finnmark⁴. Several methods of measuring how many people write Nynorsk are in use in Norway; school statistics being among the most commonly used.



III. 1 *Amount of pupils in Norwegian primary school who use Nynorsk as their main language (hovudmål)*

Retriever database.

³ “Someone to whom Nynorsk is the language of his/her heart [...] knows that this does not just concern orthography or a pure linguistic competence, but rather something more: an action that explicitly or implicitly indicates who you are or who you would like to be, while simultaneously the (linguistic) action indicates a conflict that is not just a linguistic, but also a cultural one. Especially the connection between the disputable [aspects] of our two language situation and the identity shaping [aspect] for supporters of Nynorsk is an important point when one looks at this matter from a cultural-scientific point of view” (HJORTHOL 2004:58).

⁴ Diagram collected from *Nynorsk faktabok* (2005) by Ottar Grepstad at http://www.aasentunet.no/prod_images/doc_2146.pdf and http://www.aasentunet.no/prod_images/doc_2141.pdf

I.1 A NEW INSTALLMENT IN THE NORWEGIAN LANGUAGE DEBATE: DAHL VS. FLØGSTAD

As becomes clear from illustration 1, support for Nynorsk was especially growing towards the end of the Second World War. One of the reasons for this may be that anti-German tendencies were high and nationalist sentiments had grown strong in Norway. This may have led to an increasing interest for Nynorsk, which by some is regarded as a ‘pure’ language and an important part of the Norwegian cultural heritage. Another point of view is provided for by the renowned historian and publicist Hans Fredrik Dahl. In 2001 Dahl published the fifth part in the *Norsk Idéhistorie* series (“Norwegian History of Ideas”), entitled *De store ideologienes tid* (“The Period of the Great Ideologies”). In one of the book’s chapters, the author tries to establish a connection between those Norwegians supporting the German regime in World War II, or even collaborating with it, and their linguistic background. In other words, can an actual link be proven between whether someone writes Nynorsk or Bokmål and their political preference? The question being an quite interesting and legitimate one, Dahl’s conclusions on the subject caused a serious uproar among public and critics alike. In his book Dahl states that “Andelen av mål- og norskdomsfolk som sluttet opp om Quisling, var *ikke ubetydelig* [emphasis added] [...]. Det fantes målfolk som så det slik at Ivar Aasens verk ble videreført av ideologer som Alfred Rosenberg i Tyskland og Vidkun Quisling i Norge [...]”⁵. These comments by Dahl on the link between linguistic identity and political preference initiated a huge social and political debate. Never before had speakers of Nynorsk been so fiercely categorized as a rightwing, downright fascist group of people. Supporters of Norway’s minor *målform* poured out to condemn this unprecedented backlash, some of them criticising Dahl for his deliberate choice of sources and for not providing the full picture.

The debate entered a second stage when Kjartan Fløgstad, a well-known Nynorsk author, published his political pamphlet *Brennbart* (“Inflammable”, 2004). Here, Fløgstad analyses the conclusions drawn by Dahl, which he characterizes as a “falsification of history”⁶. According to Fløgstad’s own research, Nasjonal Samling (NS) had the least number of followers in the western and south-western parts of Norway, those areas where Nynorsk traditionally is the main language. NS was a town-based party and had few supporters in the Norwegian countryside, the author argues. Moreover, the Nynorsk movement categorically denied working with the Nazi government and the ‘Nynorsk areas’ largely remained immune to Nazi indoctrination. Fløgstad states that the empirical evidence shows that not the supporters of Nynorsk, but rather those of Bokmål were predominant among the members of NS.

The book *Brennbart* in turn was met with criticism, *inter alia* in the booklet *NS, høgnorsken og riksmålet* (“NS, Høgnorsk and Riksmål”) by Finn-Erik Vinje. The author, a former professor of Scandinavian Linguistics at Oslo, agrees with the conclusions drawn by Hans Fredrik Dahl and argues that “Parts of the Nynorsk movement were greatly nationalist. If one compares the leading figures in NS [...] with the nationalist people of the Nynorsk movement, they resemble each other up to the point of confusion. [...] Certain people in the Nynorsk movement lived in a world of ideas *which was that of the Nazis as well* [original emphasis]”⁷. Vinje also refers to the well-known quote according to which Vidkun Quisling, the leader of NS, supposedly envisaged Nynorsk as the sole national language for Norway. This citation is frequently used by scholars when describing the position taken by NS in the Norwegian language question. According to some, among them the scholar and journalist Ragnhild Bjørge, Vinje and others have taken this quote completely out of context. Bjørge wrote a Master’s thesis on the political and ideological position of the Nynorsk movement during the Second World War and focused on two organizations, Noregs Mållag and Noregs Ungdomslag. She concluded that although the NS tried to Nazify these and other cultural institutions, the Nynorsk movement remained almost

⁵ “The amount of people in the nationalist Nynorsk movement who supported Quisling [the leader of Nasjonal Samling, the Norwegian Nazi party] was *not insignificant* [emphasis added] [...]. There were people within the Nynorsk movement who thought the work of Ivar Aasen was continued by ideologists like Alfred Rosenberg in Germany and Vidkun Quisling in Norway” (DAHL 2001:348).

⁶ Quoted after HAUGEN 2006 [s.p.].

⁷ Ibidem.

entirely immune to fascist doctrine. Nationalist tendencies as portrayed in the ideology behind Nynorsk –establishing a national language most Norwegians could identify with– are not the same as fascist ideologies.

II LANGUAGE POLITICS AND THE USE OF NYNORSK AND BOKMÅL

Ever since Nynorsk and Bokmål got equal status in 1885, their use has been firmly embedded in a legal framework. Rules and regulations concerning the use of the two *målformer* are laid down in the Norwegian Language Law (*Mållova*, or *Lov om målbruk i offentleg teneste*, latest amendment from 1981). This law also holds the equality of status (*jamstilling*) of Nynorsk and Bokmål in all organs of the Norwegian national, provincial and municipal government. It controls the rights of private citizens of getting exams and forms and of receiving correspondence from stately run organs in their respective language, be it Nynorsk or Bokmål. In addition, the Norwegian Language Law regulates the use of both languages in the written and audiovisual media. Here, the legal enforcement seems to clash with the fact that in televised media in particular, the exact amount of Nynorsk may be hard to establish. Another complicating factor is the status of Norwegian dialects. In Norway, it is normative to speak dialect in almost every social situation, on television and on the radio as well. Since Nynorsk and Bokmål are written languages only, it may prove difficult to measure which dialect is ‘Bokmål orientated’ and which ones lean more towards Nynorsk. This problem does not occur in news programs, where reporters use a more or less standardised form of either Nynorsk or Bokmål.

In 1970, the Norwegian parliament decided that of all radio and television broadcasts by NRK (*Norsk Rikskringkasting*, “Norwegian Broadcasting Cooperation”), at least 25% should be in Nynorsk. This was to ensure that both *målformer* would get their fair share of broadcasting time. However, this goal has never been achieved by NRK. According to statistics in *Nynorsk faktabok* by Ottar Grepstad, the highest amount of Nynorsk in NRK radio broadcasts was 21,4% in 2001, making a downfall to 6,9% in 2002⁸. In NRK television programs, the highest amount of spoken Nynorsk was reached in 1983 (18,5%) with only 6,0% in 2004⁹. If we turn our attention to the written media, only 6% or 172.800 copies of all newspapers printed daily in Norway is in Nynorsk¹⁰. This seems little if one takes into account the ‘official’ number of people who use Nynorsk as their main language of correspondence, ca. 13-14%. However, if we take into consideration those newspapers containing articles in both Bokmål and Nynorsk, the so-called *språkkjøvde aviser*, the amount of Nynorsk rises to 27%, or 810.000 newspapers¹¹.

In June 2008, the Norwegian Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs (Kultur og Kyrkjedepartementet) issued *Mål og Mening. Ein heilskapleg norsk språkpolitikk* (“Language and Meaning. A General Norwegian Language Policy”), a government report on the use of Norwegian in Norwegian society¹². One of the report’s goals is to counterbalance the ongoing loss of domain to English by reinforcing the proper use of the Norwegian language in all applicable areas. An interesting statement in the context of my research was that according to *Mål og Mening*, the use of Nynorsk should be stimulated, but there should not be any enforced political pressure on the Norwegian press to do so. This implies that newspaper editors more or less get a free hand in deciding if they take up articles in Nynorsk, which seems to be clashing with the regulations referred to in the Norwegian Language Law.

⁸ According to the author, statistics from 1999-2003 can in this respect hardly be compared to earlier numbers, since NRK revised its way of keeping statistics in 1999 (GREPSTAD 2005, quoted after “Nynorsk og dialekt i NRK” (2005), p. 130). The same new criteria apply to NRK television programs.

⁹ Amounts quoted after: “Nynorsk og dialekt i NRK”. In: *Med hjartet på rette staden. Kringkastingsringen 50 år: 130*. Oslo: Kringkastingsringen 2005

¹⁰ Skjerdal, T.S. “Meir nynorsk i avisene”. In: *Med hjartet på rette staden. Kringkastingsringen 50 år: 90*. Oslo: Kringkastingsringen 2005

¹¹ Ibid.

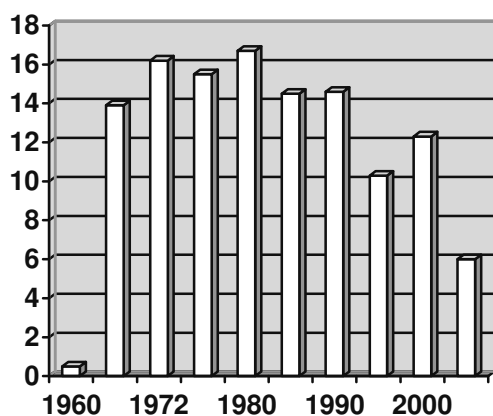
¹² The full report can be found at the department’s website at <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/kkd/dok/regpubl/stmeld/2007-2008/stmeld-nr-35-2007-2008-.html?id=519923>

II.1 SAFEGUARDING THE POSITION OF NYNORSK IN THE NORWEGIAN MEDIA

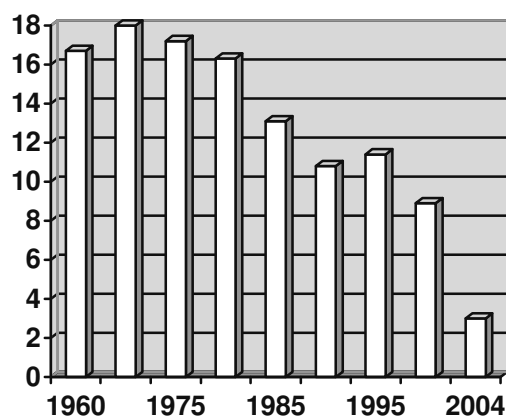
The use of Nynorsk in the Norwegian media is carefully watched by the ‘media watch dog’ of the Nynorsk movement, Kringkastingsringen (“The Broadcasting Ring”), which was established in 1955. Its goal is to protect ”norsk mål og kultur i kringkastinga”¹³ and to help ”nynorsk mål til å få sitt rettkomne rom i norsk kringkasting”¹⁴. In the beginning years, Kringkastingsringen protested heavily against Samnorsk, an idea instigated by Norwegian parliament that comprised a certain fuse of Nynorsk and Bokmål by a series of spelling reforms. The Samnorsk policy was abandoned officially as late as in 2002. It was also the time when *målrørsla*, the Nynorsk movement, met with ferocious opposition from Riksmålsforbundet, an organization that fiercely promoted Bokmål as Norway’s sole written language. Nynorsk journalists in NRK told they felt threatened by anonymous letters and by sent-in letters in Oslo’s main newspapers. Much pointed towards a anti-Nynorsk attitude, in NRK as well. Kringkastingsringen wanted to put things straight and see to it that the use of Nynorsk in the Norwegian media went according to the legal framework the media had to follow. It turned out to be a popular medium: in 1970 Kringkastingsringen had some 15.000 members¹⁵. The organisation instigated a fierce pro-Nynorsk politics and succeeded in getting more Nynorsk journalists into NRK and in producing several LP’s with spoken texts in Nynorsk. Kringkastingsringen also took up the question of the use of the Sámi language and the position of Swedish in Finland.

The opposition, Riksmålsforbundet i particular, was still proceeding with its negative campaigns against Samnorsk and Nynorsk, even comparing the latter to an infectious disease: “Gjennom skolevæsenets betændte lymfebaner har sotten (nynorsken) spredt sig fra de store svulster på Vestlandet: havregjødede spyfluer har sværmet ut over landet og slått ned med smittestoffet overalt hvor de fant et stykke uskjemmet hud”¹⁶. Riksmålsforbundet’s main goal, in its own words, was to fight against “samnorskuhyret” (“the Samnorsk monster”) and “den sproglige lapskaus” (“the linguistic stew”) in Norway¹⁷.

In regional NRK emissions the amount of spoken Nynorsk was still too low with regard to the Norwegian Language Law. Not before long, the overall amount of Nynorsk in NRK saw a negative trend, as becomes clear from the following diagrams, that are taken from GREPSTAD 2005. For practical reasons, I have chosen to use statistics after 1960 only.



III. 2 Percentage of Nynorsk programs in NRK television



III. 3 Percentage of Nynorsk programs in NRK radio

¹³ “to protect the Norwegian language and culture in broadcasting”. Quoted after SVERRES-DOTTER DYPVIK 2005:20.

¹⁴ ”to get the Nynorsk language its justified place in Norwegian broadcasting”. (ibid.)

¹⁵ STRAUMSVÅG 2005:10.

¹⁶ ”Through the infected lymphes of the school system the disease (nynorsk) has spread from the great tumours in Western Norway: blow-flies fattened by oats carrying the infecting substance, swarmed out over the country and settled anywhere they found a piece of unblemished skin”. Quoted after SVERRES-DOTTER DYPVIK 2005:25.

¹⁷ Ibid.

II.2 NYNORSK IN THE WRITTEN MEDIA

If one interprets these diagrams on the amount of Nynorsk in the Norwegian media, one would get the idea that it has dropped fiercely since the Second World War. According to Terje Skjerdal, however, this is not the case. Nowadays, there probably is more Nynorsk in both national and regional newspapers than ever before, he argues¹⁸. The amount of Nynorsk newspapers, those newspapers edited completely or partially in Nynorsk, is high, as is the amount of Nynorsk journalists. Some of Norway's biggest newspapers, however, often refuse to publish articles in Nynorsk. These include big ones like *VG*, *Dagbladet* and *Aftenposten*. According to Skjerdal, there are 45 'pure' Nynorsk newspapers of a total of 225 to be found in Norway¹⁹. This amount has been stable for the last 30 years and includes mostly local newspapers and non-daily ones. The biggest is *Firda* from the town of Førde, with a daily print run of ca. 13.250 copies.

An interesting trend is to be seen in the amount of national and local newspapers. Norway has always been a country with a strong tradition where the local media are concerned, and the amount of local newspapers being sold is increasing. The number of national newspapers, however, is dropping. This could imply that more people read local newspapers only, and therefore will come across articles written in Nynorsk. This implication is strengthened by the fact that precisely those big newspapers that don't publish articles in Nynorsk, *Aftenposten*, *VG* and *Dagbladet*, are losing ground to the smaller, regional ones.

II.3 NYNORSK IN THE AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA

The emission of regular television programs in Norway began in 1960. The new medium proved an immediate success, with 77.200 households having a television licence as soon as in 1962. Kringkastingsringen thought it an indispensable task to have an equal amount of Nynorsk and Bokmål in this new, visual medium. However, since television is mainly a visual medium how could the exact amount of Nynorsk be measured? This may account for the fact that statistics on the use of Nynorsk from the early years of Norwegian television are somewhat unreliable. Nevertheless, statistics show that less Nynorsk was used in NRK television than was required, ca. 10%²⁰. Back in 1960, the Norwegian parliament had asked NRK to raise the amount of programs conducted in Nynorsk. NRK in its turn replied that the low amount was due to a lack of sufficiently educated Nynorsk journalists. In the end, this led to the creation of a special institute in Førde that offers a six months-training for Nynorsk journalists, called Nynorsk Mediesenter ("Nynorsk Media Centre").

After some heavy debates in the media, the Norwegian parliament decided in 1960 that "hovedregelen må være å gi nynorsken en plass som i det minste svarer til en fjerdedel av ord-sendingene"²¹. This was the first time an actual percentage was mentioned for emissions in Nynorsk. However, NRK has never succeeded in meeting this percentage, although it did try to. Magne Rommetveit, the first NRK advisor for Nynorsk, sorted out the inaccurate way in which the Nynorsk statistics of NRK had been done, and saw to it that the amount of spoken Nynorsk in NRK programming grew. The 25 percent rule was a big step in seeing to a proper use of Nynorsk in Norwegian NRK media. Kringkastingsringen advised NRK among others to look for new Nynorsk journalists in the Norwegian districts by following a more active recruiting politics. The start of a number of media studies at new *distriktshøgskular*, among others in the villages of Volda and Bø, was seen as a step in the right direction. There were also plans to build some local tv and radio stations in the Norwegian countryside and thus to deconcentrate NRK headquarters. This decentralisation of NRK was seen as one of the most important steps in promoting local culture and democracy. The role of the districts had become an important aspect of the Kringkastingsringen policy. In the 1960s NRK started emissions of half an hour from each of the nine district offices, which proved very popular in Norway.

¹⁸ SKJERDAL 2005:90.

¹⁹ SKJERDAL, *ibid.*

²⁰ SVERRESDOTTER DYPVIK *op.cit.*:33.

²¹ "the main rule must be to give Nynorsk a position that equals at least a quarter of spoken emissions". Quoted after SVERRESDOTTER DYPVIK 2005:20.

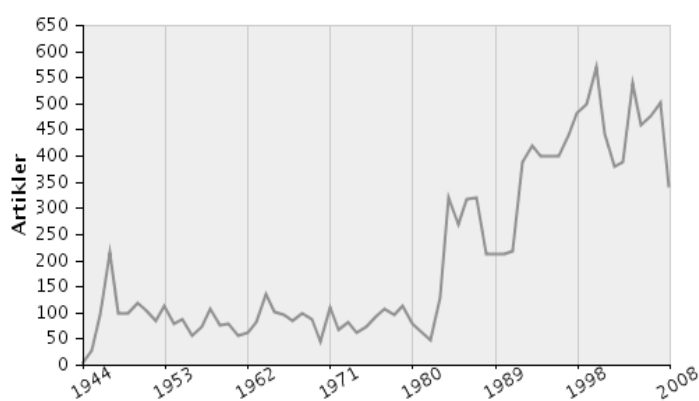
III THE REPRESENTATION OF NYNORSK IN THREE MAIN NORWEGIAN NEWSPAPERS

III.1 INTRODUCTION AND SOURCES

The discussions between Hans Fredrik Dahl and Kjartan Fløgstad are a typical example of the ‘hot potato character’ that characterises the Norwegian language debate. For this case study, I wanted to see to what extent characterisations of Nynorsk make up a part of this. In other words: does the sometimes personal character of the debate have anything to do with the argumentation used *pro* and *contra* Nynorsk? My research into the depiction of Nynorsk and its speakers will concentrate three main Norwegian post-war newspapers in particular. As mentioned in the introduction, I have used the online media archive at <www.retriever.no> to establish my text corpus. I searched the online *Retriever* archive by means of several keywords. In this article, I am restricting myself to analysing the results of one sole keyword: <nynorsk*>. I’ve used an asterisk so as to gather more results beginning with “nynorsk-“, like “nynorskbrukar” (“someone who writes (uses) Nynorsk”). I have limited my search to the period January 1, 1945 - October 1, 2008 and have only looked at the three biggest national newspapers in Norway: *Aftenposten*, *Bergens Tidende* and *VG* (Verdens Gang). In this way, I was able to assess articles with a broad range, both in a geographical and a social-political sense. Historically, *Aftenposten* (AP) is an independent, conservative newspaper that is usually associated with Høyre, a right-wing conservative party (‘høyre’ meaning “right, right-wing”). Nowadays, *Bergens Tidende* (BT) is a liberal and politically independent newspaper, but its roots lie in left-wing political parties. *VG* (Verdens Gang) was originally founded by the Norwegian resistance movement, after the ending of the Second World War. Nowadays, it has no markedly political persuasion and is usually considered a tabloid newspaper. *VG* and *AP* are Oslo-based media, whereas *BT* is printed in the West Norwegian town of Bergen. *VG* is the biggest newspaper in Norway, with a daily print run of 372.900 copies and some 1.355.750 readers. *AP* is published in two editions, a morning edition (*Aftenposten Morgen*) and an evening one (*Aftenposten Aften*). The evening edition is published five times a week, whereas the morning one is published daily. Together, these two *AP* editions have a print run of approximately 395.000 copies, drawing in some 1.167.000 readers. *BT* has some 254.500 readers and has a daily print run of circa 88.900 copies.

III.2 SEARCH RESULTS

Initially, I searched the *entire* *Retriever* archive for the term “nynorsk*” and thus looked at all of the 80 Norwegian newspapers that this archive keeps information on, dating back to January 1st, 1945 for *VG*. This search resulted in **17.519** hits. Then I narrowed the search down to the three leading newspapers which are the key sources of this case study, *Aftenposten*, *Bergens Tidende* and *VG*, which gave **13.027** hits (see illustration 4). As becomes clear from this diagram, the amount of articles in these three newspapers reaches a peak in



III. 4 Articles in *AP*, *BT* and *VG* containing the keyword “nynorsk*”, 1945-2008

2000 (570 articles), the second highest year being 2004 (537), the year of the Dahl-Fløgstad debate. If you itemize these numbers, *AP* had the most articles (5203), with *VG* coming in second (4831) and *BT* following at a considerable distance (2993). Please keep in mind that *VG* is the only Norwegian newspaper with a fully equipped digital archive that dates back to its

very first issue (1945). Articles from AP and BT only date back to the year 1983 and 1992 respectively. This means that the amount of articles containing the keyword “nynorsk*” in AP and BG may be misleading, since editions prior to 1983 and 1992 could not be taken into account. However, these figures do provide an insight into the depiction of Nynorsk and its speakers. It is interesting to see, for example, that AP is in leading position whereas VG is only in second place although the VG archive is considerably older and larger.

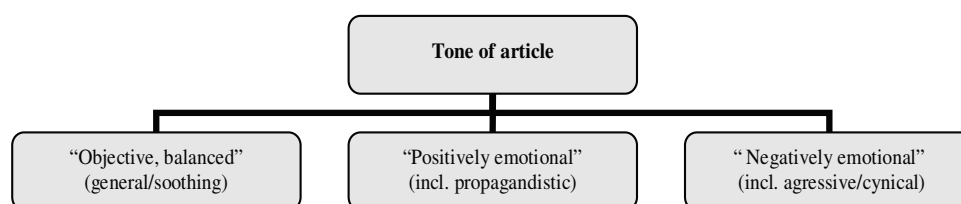
In the span of this contribution, it was not possible to close-read all of these 13.027 articles. I have therefore chosen to concentrate on the 570 articles from 2000, the year that featured most articles containing the term “nynorsk*”. These 570 articles dating from 2000 thus were my actual text corpus. I analysed the material to see if all of it was relevant for my research. Of these 570 articles, only 55 (9.6%) proved to be relevant in the sense that they featured elements of representation of the Nynorsk language. The other articles contained words beginning with “nynorsk-”, but were on other subjects, just mentioned the Nynorsk language and/or had no bearing on the *image* of the language nor did they carry a *typology* of its speakers. Sometimes, the same article was printed in several newspapers, so these duplicate ones could also be left out of the analysis.

III.3 ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT CORPUS

In close-reading these 55 articles, I have focused on the image given of Nynorsk in terms of characterisations of the language and its speakers. What is said in these articles on the geographical and social background and/or political inclination of speakers of Nynorsk? What is said on the Nynorsk language in general and what message, if any, is the author trying to get across? What attitude does the author of the respective articles have towards Nynorsk, according to the text? With regards to my Ph.D. research, a study into traces of ethnolinguistic nationalism in the reception of Scandinavian literature, I was especially interested to see to what extent the text corpus would show a correlation between language and identity. To what degree is Nynorsk seen as a positive or negative factor in terms of the Norwegian cultural heritage? Is the language regarded as an important part of someone’s identity, and in what sense? I have categorised the 55 articles in the text corpus according to:

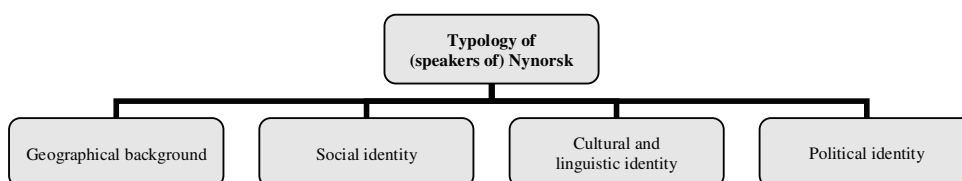
- a) general tone of the article in question ;
- b) typology of Nynorsk and its speakers ;
- c) specific arguments used *pro* or *contra* Nynorsk as mentioned in the text.

These categorisations I then ascribed several subcategorisations, according to their respective character. Where the general tone of an article is concerned, I conceived of three determinators for describing the atmosphere of each article, “objective, balanced”, “positively emotional” and “negatively emotional”. The “objective, balanced” typo I used for those articles in which the author does not display a negative or positive sentiment towards Nynorsk, but rather makes a statement about the language in general terms. I categorised some articles as “positively emotional”, that is to say that these feature a positive tone towards Nynorsk and/or its speakers. A negative attitude as portrayed in the article, then, I have classified as “negatively emotional”. These were the three main indicators I came up with to describe the style and tone of the given articles. Obviously, an article may contain style elements that show both a negative and a positive attitude. Over all, I focused on the *main* tone with regard to a possible inclination of the respective author towards Nynorsk.



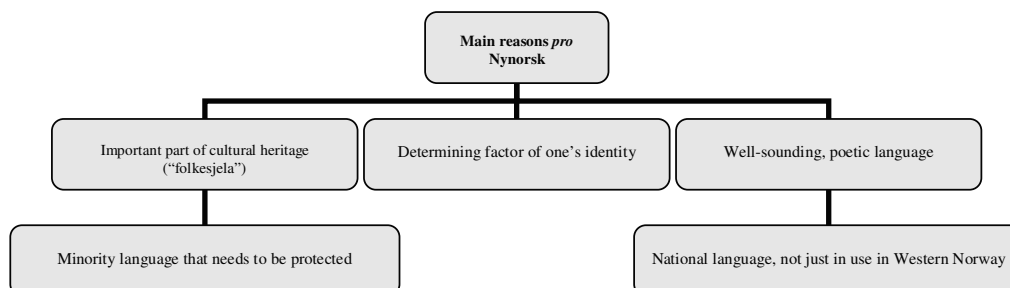
Of these 55 articles, 4 (7.3%) proved to be what I would call “balanced” or “objective”, that is to say that these do not show a markedly positive or negative inclination towards Nynorsk or its speakers. In general, the authors of these “balanced” articles give a general opinion on the Norwegian language debate or on a specific debate issue without leaning towards a specific attitude. “Positively emotional”, that is positive about the Nynorsk language and its speakers, is the tone I found in 18 articles (32.3%). These texts also include “propagandistic” texts, articles that seem to favour Nynorsk over Norway’s main written language, Bokmål. The remainder of the text corpus (33 articles, 61.4%) I found to be “negatively emotional” in style. This means that these texts show a fairly negative and/or cynical attitude towards Nynorsk, sometimes even portraying a harsh and aggressive tone.

In the context of my research, I found it worthwhile to look deeper into the inclination of these articles’ authors towards Nynorsk. This is why I have not just categorised the text corpus according to style, but also looked at the exact characterisation and typology ascribed therein. Obviously, here I had to make a choice with regards to the different typos I was going to use. The characterisation of speakers of Nynorsk I have categorised according to their geographical background, social identity, cultural and linguistic identity and political persuasion as mentioned



ed in the text corpus. These typos may prove interesting since the speakers of Nynorsk are often thought of as traditional peasants from the west of Norway, with little education and with a markedly conservative political inclination. I also included two more or less non-defined categories: “alia” and “no characterisation”. Of these 55 articles, five (9%) focus on the geographical background of Nynorsk speaking Norwegians. Eleven articles (20%) show a certain image of Nynorsk that is linked to the social identity of its speakers, whereas nine texts (16.4%) have a high degree of reference to their cultural and linguistic identity. Only two articles (3.6%) mention the political persuasion of speakers of Norway’s minor *målform*. Interestingly, the remainder of articles show a high amount of reference to non-defined elements or other characterisations: six articles (10.9%) look into other characterisation elements, whereas as many as 21 texts (40.1%) show no typology of Nynorsk speakers at all.

In connection with the style of these articles and the typology portrayed in them of the speakers of Nynorsk, I have also looked at the five main reasons *pro* and *contra* the Nynorsk language and the Norwegian two-language system. These are given in non-specified order.

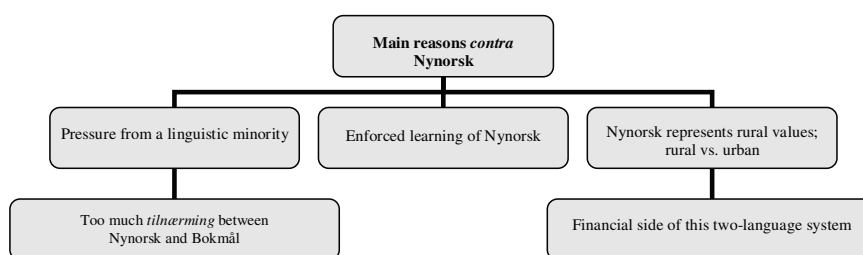


Two out of these five arguments for judging Nynorsk positively, may be characterised as “historical-cultural”; the language being an important aspect of Norway’s cultural heritage and Nynorsk being a national, unifying language, not just used in the western parts of the country. The factor that Nynorsk is a minority language –or a lesser used one, definitions vary on this

subject– also seems to indicate that people think it worthwhile to protect Nynorsk. I take this also to be a historical reason for wanting to preserve the language and its cultural background, although it may be also interpreted as an “external” reason, opposed to the “internal” argumentation that is based more on historical-cultural and emotional reasoning.

Mentioning Nynorsk as a determining factor of one’s identity, then, may be connected to the argumentation of cultural heritage. Seeing Nynorsk as an important part of one’s identity, however, is a much more personal reason for having a positive attitude towards a language. Seeing Nynorsk as a huge part of one’s identity is a often heard reason in Norway: language and identity are in this respect closely intertwined.

I have also browsed the text corpus in search of the five main reasons mentioned for a negative attitude towards the Nynorsk language. These, again, are not in a specific order.



These arguments partially have a different background than the reasons *pro* Nynorsk. Firstly, there is the often heard argument that people tend to ‘lose their appetite’ for Nynorsk because of the enforced learning of the language in primary and secondary school. This may be compared to the education of Swedish in Finland. Due to the Norwegian Language Law, each Norwegian child and teenager is educated in both their *hovudmål* (Bokmål, for most Norwegians) and their *sidemål* (usually Nynorsk). Several studies have shown that an increasing number of Norwegians are bad at spelling and in general have a bad, grammatical command of the language. Although the many dialects in Norway and the ongoing influence of English may account for some of this, this argument is often used as an example of the downside of the Norwegian two-language system. Other reasons for showing a negative attitude towards Nynorsk are the (unwanted) pressure from a linguistic minority, the financial side of the system (the Norwegian state is, *inter alia*, obliged to ensure that school and study books are published in both Nynorsk and Bokmål) and the image of Nynorsk as a rural language. Another interesting argument is that many articles I have close-read mention the *tilnærming* between the two languages, the lesser defined differences between Bokmål and Nynorsk. In other words: why should a system be maintained that upholds two languages that, according to some, are virtually the same? This is an interesting argument in as much as it has two sides to it: on the one hand people argue that Nynorsk and Bokmål should melt into a ‘new’ language, on the other hand it is often said that precisely the grammatical and stylistic differences between Bokmål and Nynorsk enrich the Norwegian language. The ‘Samnorsk policy’ which I mentioned before and which was a state-regulated system of spelling reforms to ensure a melting of the two Norwegian *målformer*, has since 2002 been officially abolished by the Norwegian parliament. This system of differentiation may be typical of Norway, a fairly nationalist country that doesn’t want to be put in any form of straight jacket – hence why Norway declined membership of the European Union twice. Apart from financial and social reasons, one of the main arguments for this is that Norwegians wish to maintain their independence. Nationalism, language and identity are closely intertwined in Norway, which may lead to several new debates in the domain of language politics and the Norwegian two language-system.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this case study, I have looked into the representation of Nynorsk, one of the two official written forms of Norwegian, in post-war newspapers. In establishing my text corpus, I have concentrated on three major national newspapers from Norway: *Aftenposten* (AP), *Bergens Tidende* (BT) and *VG* (Verdens Gang). I have browsed the online media archive at <www.retriever.no> for the keyword “**nynorsk***”, which gave 17.519 hits in total and 13.027 articles for AP, BT and VG. Out of these 13.027 articles, I have close-read all texts from 2000, the year that proved most productive in terms of the amount of articles. The 570 articles from 2000 did not all prove relevant: only 55 articles (9.6%) had any bearing on the representation of Nynorsk and/or its speakers. These articles I have categorised according to tone, typology of Nynorsk and the main reasons *pro* and *contra* the use of Nynorsk. Out of these 55 articles, more than 61% showed a negative attitude towards Nynorsk and/or its speakers. The argumentation *contra* Nynorsk is mostly based on the enforced learning of the language (*sidemål*), a felt overexposure (pressure from a linguistic minority) and the idea that there is no need for two languages in Norway. The articles that showed a positive attitude towards Nynorsk, mostly mentioned the language being part of the cultural heritage of Norway as well as the fact that it is a national and minority language, that needs to be protected. Most identity markers in the text corpus lean towards the social identity of speakers of Nynorsk.

Obviously, the amount of texts I have close-read in the span of this article, is relatively small (only 55 in total). Nevertheless, the outcome of this case-study may prove valuable for future research into the medial representation of a lesser used language, c.q. Nynorsk. It will also be interesting to see if a shift is noticeable in the depiction of Nynorsk, in a few years time. Against the backdrop of my dissertation, which not only thematises ethnolinguistic nationalism but deals with the marked differences between ‘the Other’ (i.e. stress is placed on the *common* features of the Scandinavian and Dutchspeaking people) and ‘the Self’ (which emphasises the differences) as well, more research in this field may prove necessary.

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