

**Dialects in Norway****– catching up with the rest of Europe?\*****Introduction**

For decades Norway has represented a rather special case as far as dialect use and attitudes towards dialects is concerned. Rural dialects in Norway are not only seen as appropriate in private settings, as in most other European countries, but are generally used in public contexts, too. Dialects are spoken at the kitchen table, among friends, in the media, in university lectures and in Parliament. Since modern Norwegians are as mobile as any other Europeans, communication is very often “polylectal”. There is no officially codified spoken standard variety of Norwegian. However – unofficially – the upper class variety spoken particularly in and around the capital, Oslo, has some characteristics of an overarching standard variety. Still, the Norwegian language situation cannot be described as a diglossic one (in Fishman’s sense) with switching between discrete high and low varieties.

This situation should be seen in connection with the fact that Norway has had a long lasting language struggle and as a result two competing official written standard varieties – *Bokmål* and *Nynorsk*. The latter was an attempt to establish a written standard on the basis of the Norwegian dialects. This has obviously contributed to giving Norwegian dialects a relatively high status. In addition dialects in Norway are well preserved and hence dialect diversity in Norway is still considerable as compared, for instance, to modern Sweden and Denmark (e.g. Pedersen 2003, Kristiansen 2003, Edlund 2003, Vikør 1995, Kristensen & Thelander 1984, Thelander 1980). At the same time the effects of urbanization and globalisation are making themselves felt – such as, increased contact between people from different areas, changes of lifestyle, orientation, values and attitudes. Increasing contact between people from different areas combined with other socio-cultural, structural and mental changes is bound to have some effects. One such effect is no doubt regionalization. In this

paper I will discuss the process of regionalization and its effects, linguistic and other, on the Norwegian speech community. A main question will be whether Norway is catching up with the rest of Europe in this matter, or if Norway remains different in certain respects.

### **Regionalization – preliminary remarks**

Generally speaking, the process of regionalization means that the region gradually replaces the local community as the important linguistic and mental orientation unit – it becomes gradually more important to display regional affiliation and identity than strictly local. This process can be seen in connection with the overall industrialisation, urbanisation and globalisation of Norwegian communities at large. However, local “places” do not stop being important, but people may orient themselves to and identify with several “places” simultaneously – the local town, the region, the nation and the outside world. Global or national experiences may be adapted, understood and transformed locally in ways that make them regionally or locally distinct (also called “glocalisation” cf. Robertson 1995). Linguistically this can be seen when communities develop new linguistic distinctions where old ones disappear, for instance by using intermediate forms instead of adapting completely to an urban high status variety or a national standard variety.

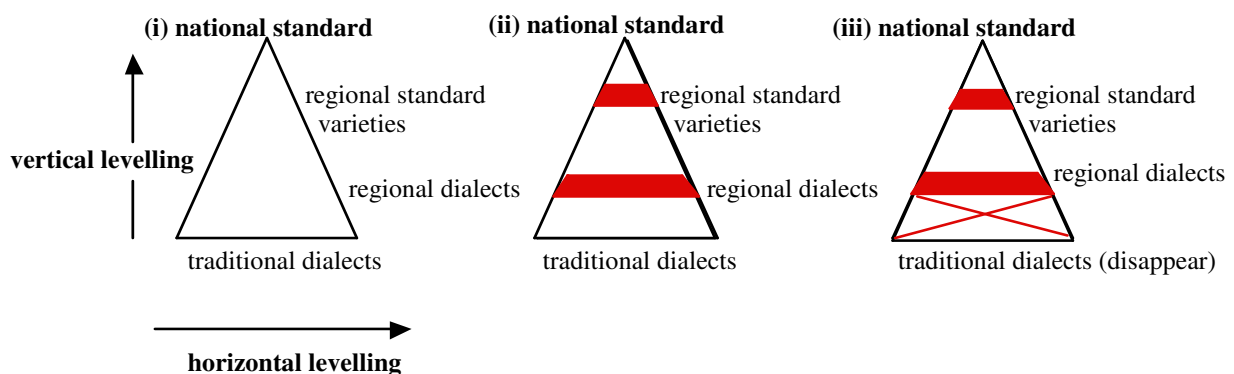
### *Linguistic regionalization*

The most distinct tendency in modern Norwegian dialect change is that of regional levelling – or regionalization. The process of linguistic regionalization can be described as a dynamic dialect contact phenomenon that leads to the gradual abandonment of local dialect features in favour of more regional or standard ones<sup>1</sup>. This means that regionalization is seen as a two-dimensional process where both horizontal dialect-dialect levelling and vertical dialect-standard levelling is involved. Regionalization is primarily understood as the reduction of inter-systemic variation. *Intra*-systemically, the degree of variation may in fact increase since people get to choose linguistic variants from a larger linguistic

repertoire. Decreasing contrast between varieties does not necessarily imply loss of traditional forms. Old and new forms may co-exist for some time, at least in the beginning of the process. However, in the long run, local features tend to be abandoned. As we will see later, this is a destiny suffered by several local dialect features in Norway. The long-time *effect* of the process is therefore most probably also a reduction of dialect-internal variation.

In discussing the phenomenon of linguistic regionalization – and the relationship between inter- and intra-systemic variation – it is thus important to distinguish between the *process* and its *outcome* (cf. Auer 2000a). Obviously the outcome of regionalization will be reduced distance between different varieties, be it different dialects or dialect versus standard. However, reduced distance horizontally, that is between dialects, does not necessarily imply less distance between dialect and standard<sup>ii</sup>. Horizontal dialect-dialect levelling might in fact increase the structural distance to the standard, as shown by Hinskens (1996) in his study of dialect levelling in Limburg, the Netherlands. On the other hand, vertical dialect-standard levelling almost always involves horizontal levelling as well (cf. Auer & Hinskens 1996).

Auer & Hinskens (1996) propose three different scenarios of the process of horizontal and vertical levelling and its products. Figure 1 shows different degrees of focusing and reduction of the linguistic repertoire, and can be seen as three stages of development (uni-directionally from left to right).



**Figure 1** Multidimensional model of dialect levelling (adapted after Auer & Hinskens 1996)

If we consider the repertoire of a speech community with extensive horizontal and vertical levelling, variants from different varieties will compete in the linguistic market, meaning that the amount of variation within the repertoire will increase (as displayed in (i) & (ii), fig. 1). At the termination of the regionalization process, however, some variants will normally win out and others will disappear, so that the total scope of variation will be reduced (as shown in (iii), fig. 1). Generally, local dialect features with a restricted distribution tend to disappear first, whereas features with a wider regional extension, which also have support in an urban dialect, have a greater potential of surviving. The most expected or probable *result* of the process will thus be the growth of new regional varieties or regiolects (see (ii) fig. 1, the bars in the rectangle illustrate new focused lects), but more diffuse situations may also emerge with a range of non-discrete structures within the dialect-standard continuum (as illustrated in (i), fig. 1).

However, the picture is slightly more complicated, since horizontal and vertical levelling may bring about the emergence of intermediate or compromise variants and compromise varieties. These compromises may occur at different linguistic levels. Phonetically, intermediate forms can emerge whenever the difference between two original forms is non-discrete (as palatalization, lowering and raising, etc.) (cf. Auer 2000a). In morphology, one can find a whole range of intermediate forms between the “ad-verging” and the “ad-verged-to” variety (for instance in levelling between north-western Norwegian present tense strong verb forms with i-umlaut and standard forms without i-umlaut: [c̥çø:mə] (dialect form) versus [kɔm:ə] (intermediate form) versus [kɔm:ər] (standard form) “comes”). Lexical erosion can also give birth to intermediate forms if for instance the feature of the accommodating dialect is given up in certain lexical contexts and retained in others (cf. Auer 2000b). All these cases result in a situation where the number of alternative forms in the speaker’s and/or community’s repertoire may increase, while the variational space, as defined by its extreme points, becomes more restricted (Auer 2000a).

*Standard varieties in Norway*

Seeing linguistic regionalization as a two-dimensional process presupposes the existence of base dialects, urban regional dialects and/or a spoken standard. The first question to be addressed when approaching the vertical dimension is of course whether or not such a *spoken* standard variety actually exists in Norway. What then is a standard? Very broadly put one could say that a standard language is that variety of a language which has gained literary and cultural supremacy over the other varieties and which is accepted also by the speakers of the other varieties as a more proper form of that language than other varieties (cf. Bull 1992). Whether or not there is such a variety in Norway is in fact a highly problematic question and a hotly debated issue among Norwegian linguists. There are, nevertheless, two *written* standards of Norwegian – *Bokmål* and *Nynorsk*, which are mutually totally comprehensible. In fact the differences *within* each of the two standards are perhaps as important as the differences *between* them. Both of the official standards allow a great freedom of choice of parallel forms, to the extent that it is possible to identify two major varieties within each of them. Together the four varieties form a continuum from conservative Nynorsk, radical Nynorsk, and radical Bokmål to conservative Bokmål. In addition, we also have at least two more unofficial written standards – *Samnorsk* and *Riksmål*. The latter closely reflects upper middle class Oslo speech, and is clearly the most influential of the unofficial standards. This gives us approximately six written varieties competing at the linguistic market, all of which are fully mutually comprehensible. This means that the general status of written standards is very weak in Norway as compared to how standards tend to be perceived in most other European countries (cf. Jahr 1997). In this situation it is not hard to imagine that agreeing on a common *spoken* standard is even more problematic.

Officially, then, there is no such thing as a spoken standard variety in Norway. In fact the Norwegian Parliament decided in 1878 that no spoken standard should be taught in elementary and secondary schools. On the contrary, teachers should use the local dialect of the children. This principle is also valid today and is now encoded in the Norwegian School Law (cf. Jahr 1997). This historical

background has without doubt been essential for the continued use of local dialects in Norway and it explains the preparedness and willingness to understand other people's dialects in polylectal communication.

The rather special Norwegian situation has thus to be understood historically, by the fact that there was no separate Norwegian standard written language until long after Norway gained its independence from Denmark in 1814. Before that, dialects spoken in the geographical area that constitutes Norway today were regarded as dialects of the common Dano-Norwegian language, (which was in fact based on the speech of Copenhagen). After the separation from Denmark a long lasting language struggle started, which resulted in the recognition of two equal written standards in 1885. Bokmål was based on the Danish written standard, but was gradually norwegianized during the 19<sup>th</sup> and particularly 20<sup>th</sup> century. The model of this norwegianisation was the Dano-Norwegian dialect of the upper classes in the capital Christiania (later Oslo). Nynorsk, on the other hand, aiming at maximizing the linguistic "Abstand" (in the sense of Kloss 1967) to Danish, was based on a wide range of rural, Norwegian dialects. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the goal of the official language planning policy was to amalgamate the two standards into a single written standard by using linguistic material from rural and urban dialects, but this policy is now officially abandoned. Since its establishment and recognition as an official written standard, Nynorsk never reached the same number of users as Bokmål, and the number is declining (cf. Grepstad 1998). Nynorsk is today used only by a small minority of the Norwegian population (approximately 10-12%) and is primarily associated with rural, West Norwegian culture since it first and foremost is used at the West coast and in rural areas (cf. Teigen 2001). Thus the opposition between Nynorsk and Bokmål is both linked to regional (western Norway versus the rest of the country) and social (rural versus urban) oppositions. Attempts at establishing a *spoken* Nynorsk standard have never had any great success. Spoken Nynorsk is only used in news broadcasting, at the Nynorsk theatres and by a few professors (but then only by using Nynorsk morphology – when it

comes to phonology and intonation, each person follows his/her dialect). People using Nynorsk as a written language normally use their dialects when speaking.

Since there is no *official* spoken standard in Norway the question must be whether there is one *unofficially*. According to Norwegian pro-dialect ideology there is no overarching national spoken standard variety. However, the variety spoken in and around the capital, Oslo, seems to function as such in many parts of the country. This variety, which often is referred to as the East Norwegian standard, is quite close to Bokmål, it is the mother tongue of many people, and it is used by many speakers in the region in a way that conceals exactly where they come from (cf. Sandøy 1998). In spite of the pro-dialect ideology, then, the East Norwegian standard seems to be perceived as an overarching spoken standard variety by people in general in Norway. This variety is often referred to as “neutral” and “correct” and it is also often reported as the converged-to variety (cf. Røyneland 1998, 2001b). Besides, children all over the country tend to use this variety when involved in role-play (cf. Eliassen 1998). This indicates that the East Norwegian spoken standard functions as a operative norm. Another question is what precisely this spoken standard consists of linguistically – which variants should be included and which ones should not? As one would expect, there is no consensus within the Norwegian speech community about this. Probably one could say that the spoken standard is relatively wide and allows a considerable amount of variation. Possibly it would be wise to distinguish between two spoken standards a) a “conservative” standard associated with upper middle class Oslo speech and b) an “urban” standard that reflects the most frequently used written Bokmål variety with south-eastern phonology and intonation. In studies of dialect levelling in Norway the “urban” standard seems to be the most expansive one, whereas the “conservative” standard is losing territory (e.g. Papazian 1997, Vikør 1999, Skjekkeland 2000 and references there). This also seems to be a tendency in other parts of Europe (e.g. Kristiansen 1991, Kerswill 2000).

Auer & Hinskens (1996) distinguish between what they call regional standard varieties and regional dialects (see fig. 1). This is also a sensible distinction to make in the Norwegian context. The so-called

regional standard variety would then be the unofficial spoken standard with a regional accent (i.e. other than the south-eastern), while the regional dialect is that dialect within the region, which has relatively speaking the highest prestige – often the dialect of the biggest city in the area. The East Norwegian, Oslo-based, standard is in principle also a regional standard variety, but because of its considerable resemblance with Bokmål, and the general perception of its phonology as being “unmarked” and “normal”, many people regard it as a national spoken standard.

### **Different developments in present-day Norway**

In present-day Norway two opposite tendencies can be observed – on the one hand increasing linguistic regionalization, and on the other hand, increasing dialect acceptance. In spite of the general tendency of overall dialect levelling, the use of dialects in formal settings has gained more acceptance over the last thirty years and is now seen as legitimate in most public domains (e.g. Omdal 1995, Jahr 1997)<sup>iii</sup>. This kind of ambiguity in the position of the dialects is not unique for Norway, but can also be observed in many other European communities. Since the 1970's there have for instance been attempts in several parts of Europe to “revive” dialects as a means of displaying regional affiliation and identities (cf. Auer & Hinskens 1996). Whereas the revival of dialects has only recently emerged in many European countries, this is not the case in Norway, where it can be traced back to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with its language struggle and the emergence of Nynorsk. It is evident that dialects in Norway have had and still have a much stronger position than dialects in the neighbouring Scandinavian countries and in most of Europe, with the exception of the German speaking part of Switzerland. The radical political movements of the 1970's intensified this trend in our country with its slogan: “speak dialect – write Nynorsk” (cf. Bakke & Teigen 2001).

One possible explanation for the increasing national prestige of dialects in Norway during this period is, as pointed out by Sandøy (1998:99), that it coincided with a substantial growth in the regional economies. Indirectly this may have influenced people's self-esteem and consequently their



attitudes towards different local and/or regional dialects, and at the same time, reduced the pressure to converge to the unofficial national standard.

How can it be, then, that the local varieties are changing, when the Norwegian population at large apparently has such positive attitudes towards dialects? At an ideological level most people in Norway would agree that it is important to keep using the dialects (preferably the traditional ones) in all domains<sup>iv</sup>, but ideology is one thing and practice often another. When faced with the demands of face-to-face interaction, it is not at all always that obvious that one should use the traditional dialect. In actual interactions, many dialect users in fact alter their way of speaking. However, attitudes towards mixed or levelled ways of speaking are not particularly favourable, and are often regarded both by the users of mixed varieties themselves and by others as “bad” or “poor” ways of speaking. This has to do with a view of language as something that should be kept pure, clean and unspoiled. Dialects in Norway are very often evaluated according to this ideal of purity. Consequently, levelled dialects are seen as less pure and hence less valuable (e.g. Jahr 1997, Omdal 1995). Metaphors like “bastard”, “corrupt”, “bad mixture”, “diluted”, “contaminated”, etc. are very common when people are asked to characterize their own dialect. Testimonies like “we don’t know how to speak the dialect properly” or “we don’t have command of the true, genuine dialect” are very usual (Røyneland 2001b).

Mixing standard variants into the local dialect, i.e. vertical levelling, has traditionally particularly been held in contempt and considered unauthentic. Norway may in many regards seem like a “sociolinguistic paradise” because of the general tolerance towards linguistic variability. However, this tolerance does not necessarily cover all kinds of variability. Recent studies indicate, though, that attitudes may be changing. Young people today do not seem to be as negative towards mixed varieties as people used to be only few years ago (Røyneland 2001a, b). A short passage from an interview with a 17 year old boy from a small community in Central Norway called Røros may illustrate this point<sup>v</sup>:

Interviewer: ja synes du den er fin dialekten din da? [er du fornøgd] med den?

*yes do you like your dialect then? [are you pleased] with it?*

Bjørn: [(LATTER)] ja skal vel ikke klaga men = kunne vel ha hatt litt mer rørospreg over den men det = det er vel litt sent å legge over att nå da

*[(LAUGHTER)] yes I shall not complain I suppose but = could have had more Røros dialect but = it is probably a bit late now to change back*

(...)

Bjørn: =e= je synes vel at rørosdialekta er finar [ ] men = = ja = den er vel grei oslodialekta og men [[ ]] ja je snakke ikke så veldig = je snakke ikke = verken kav rørosing eller kav Oslo = osloing holl je på å si [ ] iallfall

*=e= I find the Røros dialect finer I suppose [ ] but == yes = the Oslo dialect is ok as well I suppose but [[ ]] yes I don't speak very = I don't speak = neither heavy "rørosing" ((LOCAL DIALECT)) nor heavy Oslo = "osloing"((OSLO DIALECT)) I was about to say [ ] in any case*

Interviewer: [ja] [[mm]] [mm] mm men er det noken situasjonar du = kunne tenke deg at at du kanskje ville ha prøvd å snakke meir sånn som i Oslo eller snakke [[litt mindre utprega rørosing?]]

*[yes] [[ehm]] [ehm] ehm but are there any situations where you = would have thought that that you maybe would have tried to talk more like in Oslo or to talk a [[bit less "rørosing"]]*

Bjørn: [[nei =e=]] det hadde vært morsomt å snakka litt mer rørosing sjølsagt men [=] men =e= viss je anstrenge meg litt så går vel det bra og men [[ ]] det er ikke så veldig mye om å gjørra det

*[[no =e=]] it had been fun to talk a bit more "rørosing" of course but [=] if I make an effort it will probably work out fine but [[ ]] it's not really very important*

(...)

Bjørn: = synes det er ganske fint = at du =e= du greie å snakke litt bredt da [ ] ikke bare oslodialekt men = viss du fæ en blanding mellom det

*= I think that it is quite nice = that you =e= you manage to talk a bit heavy ((LOCAL DIALECT)) [ ] not only Oslo dialect but = if you get a mixture between that*

Interviewer: [mm] mm

*[ehm] ehm*

Bjørn: men det hadde jo sjølsagt vært veldig morsomt å snakke kav rørosing men [[=]] det er ikke så veldig enkelt når ein del av folkane du er sammen med og sånn som [=] som sagt som = ikke snakke da

*but like it would of course have been very fun to talk real heavy "rørosing" but [[=]] it's not that easy when the people you hang out with and like who [=] as I said = don't speak ((THE LOCAL DIALECT))*

Interviewer: [(LATTER)] [ja] mm

*[(LAUGHTER)] [yes] mm*

This extract highlights the tension between what one may call the “politically correct” pro-pure-dialect ideology in Norway, which still is somewhat different from that of most other European countries, and more “negative” attitudes towards dialect. As one can see this boy keeps insisting that it would have

been nice to speak *more* dialect, even when I ask him whether there are situations where he would wish to speak *less* dialect than he actually does. This displays the most common and “pc” view on dialects in Norway. Dialect and dialect use is generally regarded as something positive and something to be proud of. Consequently, you are supposed to keep your dialect – it is almost seen as a moral obligation. Apparently Bjørn has internalised this pro-dialect view, but at the same time he admits that keeping the dialect is not really a big issue for him – it is not *that* important – and besides he reckons it to be too late to “change back” to the local dialect now. When describing his own speech he says that it is neither the traditional Røros dialect nor the Oslo dialect, and further on he indicates that a mixture between the two may be to prefer. So even though he is very positive towards his own dialect, which he finds “finer” than the Oslo dialect, he is not really willing to use the traditional dialect (which he probably never has used anyway). Apparently there are other and more important considerations to be taken into account in actual interactions, than the ideological ones. When the peer-group does not use the dialect it is not easy for him to do it either. This partly explains why mixed varieties may emerge in spite of the pro-dialect ideology. In addition it shows that vertically levelled varieties no longer seem to be viewed merely as negative, but on the contrary, as positive.

In general mixed ways of speaking seem to be more accepted among many young people today, who rather see it as a “natural” development in the wake of urbanization. The attitude seems to be that you simply can not demand that people should speak the traditional dialect given that they move around a lot. Hence, the pressure towards linguistic solidarity, and possibly also the degree of identification with the local town, is not as strong anymore among many adolescents.

The fact that young people seem to be less constrained by linguistic conventions may provide a linguistic perspective on Anthony Giddens’ macro sociological theories on how conditions of life have changed in the post-modern European era, where people are able to choose from a wide range of possibilities. According to Giddens (1991) the disembedding of social institutions, relations, localities and traditions means that individuals in late modernity are less constrained by social, and we may add

linguistic, conventions, less dependent on class and family background, less attached to “local places”, but instead “doomed” to engineer their own lifestyle and to be project leaders of their own lives. Hence, it has become more accepted and maybe even expected that people combine, oscillate between or even abandon different identities – also linguistically speaking. This may be part of the reason why negative attitudes towards mixed speech seem to be changing and further why mixed varieties may emerge and local variants disappear.

As we will discuss later, the linguistic development is not the same all over Norway. The process of vertical dialect levelling seems to be much more advanced in the south-eastern part of Norway than in other regions. While the development in south-eastern Norway is reflected by the expansion of the regional East Norwegian urban standard (with the capital Oslo as its centre), the impression in the other regions is that there is a drift in different directions in each region. In addition, rural and urban communities also seem to develop differently.

#### *Typology of European dialect/standard constellations*

In order to answer the question posed in the title of this article, i.e. whether the dialect situation in Norway is catching up with the development in other parts of Europe, we need to know what the main trends in Europe are. Auer (2001) argues that on a sufficient level of generalization, there is systematicity behind the superficial heterogeneity of the European sociolinguistic repertoires, which unfolds from a historical perspective. Auer suggests a typology that distinguishes four main sociolinguistic types, which capture the standard-dialect dimension in most of Europe. These types are established according to the internal structure of the linguistic repertoires and they also represent a chronological order. This means that the dialect situations in different parts of Europe, in his view, are more or less the same, but some areas represent older and some more recent states within the same overall development.

<b>Different dialect/standard constellations in Europe (Auer 2001):</b>
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Type A areas: Medial diglossia (endoglossic standard, mainly written)
Type B areas: Spoken diglossia (endoglossic standard, both written and spoken)
Type C areas: Diaglossia (more or less even distribution of intermediate variants between standard and (base) dialect – standard/dialect continuum)
Type D areas: Dialect loss

The first type of linguistic repertoires include those areas where we find an endoglossic, mainly written, standard and several, mainly spoken, dialects, while the second type of repertoires also include spoken diglossia<sup>vi</sup>. Type A and B areas are diglossic in the sense that the standard variety and the dialects are perceptually kept clearly apart from each other by their users, the varieties are genetically related to each other and the standard represents the H-variety and is used for writing and for formal situations, while the dialects represent the L-variety. Swiss Standard German and Nynorsk are used as examples of endoglossic (written) standard varieties, that is, type A. They are both almost only used in writing and if used orally, it is exclusively in very formal situations (as for instance in the case of Nynorsk, at the stage or in news broadcasting). Examples of type B areas, that is, areas with relatively stable diglossia, do not seem to be very frequent in Europe today. However attenuated forms of diglossia like for instance situations where frequent code-switching and code-mixing are observed, can be found in many parts of Europe, but are not typical for the Norwegian situation.

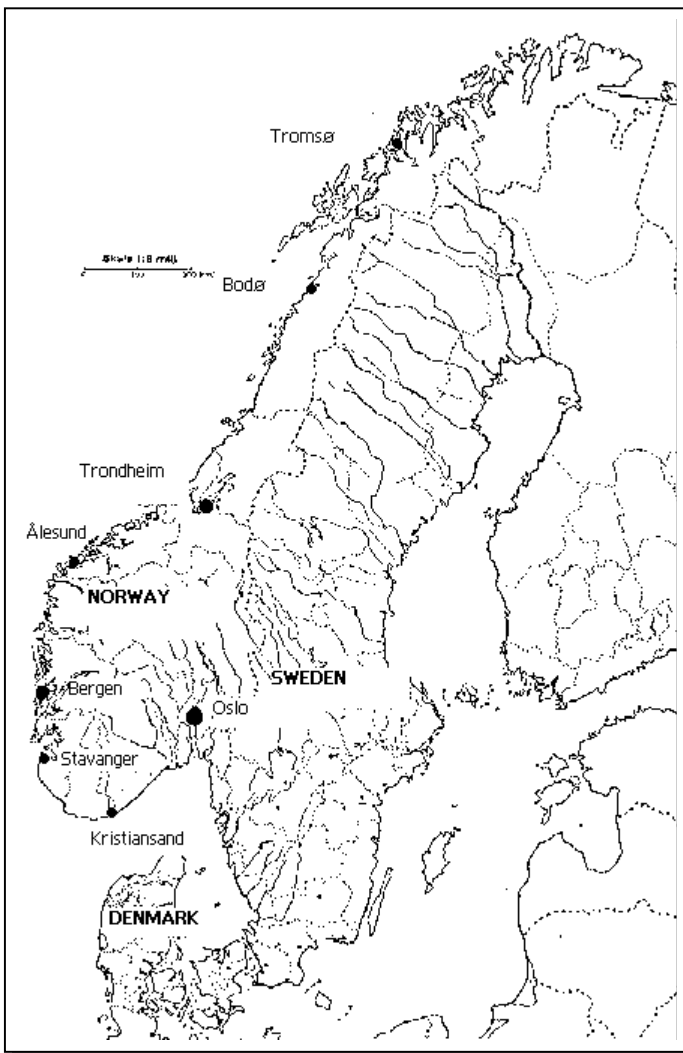
Type A and B areas are obviously not described in the different scenarios presented in figure 1 (p. xx), since these areas are not characterized by dialect levelling. However, the predominant tendency in both type C and D areas is that of dialect levelling and hence they are both described in figure 1.

Type C areas are characterized by levelling between dialect and standard and a more or less even distribution of intermediate variants between standard and base dialect (as visualized in rectangles (i) and (ii), fig. 1). These intermediate forms are often referred to as regional dialects or regiolects (as shown by the bars in rectangle (ii), fig. 1). But it is not necessarily the case that they represent discrete varieties. More often the emergence of intermediate variants between standard and dialect leads to non-

discrete structures within a standard-dialect continuum (as illustrated in (i), fig. 1). This kind of repertoires can be found in many parts of Europe today, including in those areas of Norway where Bokmål is the endoglossic standard variety – especially in the south-eastern part of Norway. In the last type of areas, type D, we find dialect loss – either because the geographically most restricted variants disappear or because the base dialects are not passed on to the next generation (as shown in (iii), fig. 1).

These four types of repertoires cover almost all of Europe. However, according to Auer the most widespread relationship between standard and dialect in Europe today are those outlined in type C, the diaglossic one and type D, in which the traditional dialects have disappeared. The fine-grained dialect diversity, which has been characteristic of the European dialect atlases, is now disappearing in many parts of Europe. In the diaglossic areas, however, the traditional dialects are not necessarily disappearing although they are going through regionalization processes with both horizontal and vertical levelling.

In Norway we find, as indicated above, at least two types of areas – that is type A and Type C, but probably we also find type D areas with dialect loss. Historically, the emergence of Bokmål much resembles a type B situation with spoken diglossia, but we hardly find type B areas, with code-switching between discrete varieties, in present day Norway, even if some scholars have described dialect variation in Norway in these terms, i.e. the famous study by Blom & Gumperz (1972) on code-switching between dialect and standard in Hemnesberget, a small community in northern Norway. The study has been extensively criticized by Norwegian scholars, first and foremost because it describes a diglossic situation with switching between discrete high and low varieties, which is highly unlikely in any Norwegian speech community, and because of different methodological lacks (cf. Mæhlum 1996).



### South-eastern Norway

Several studies of Norwegian dialects indicate that the dialect changes in south-eastern Norway follow a different pattern than the rest of the country (e.g. Sandøy 1998, 2000, Vikør 1999, Skjekkeland 2000, Mæhlum 2002). In south-eastern Norway the regional East Norwegian urban standard is expanding rapidly to all cities and towns, and the inhabitants of an increasing number of communities are developing a more complex speech repertoire. Intra-individual variation used to be a typical urban phenomenon; now people of smaller communities adapt this pattern as well (cf. Sandøy 1998). In noun

morphology, for instance, this results in variation between a simple system much like the standard Bokmål, a rather complex traditional dialect system and the emergence of intermediate variants. Hence, the development in this part of the country resembles the development in many other European countries and can in Auer's typology be described as a type C area, with more or less even distribution of intermediate variants between dialect and standard. However, there may also be a development towards type D areas with dialect loss in parts of eastern Norway, if the vertical dialect levelling continues at the same speed as does it today.

The predominant development in eastern Norway, then, is that of vertical dialect-standard levelling. It is quite clear, however, that it is the *urban* and not the conservative East Norwegian standard which is spreading (e.g. Skolseg 1994, Thoengen 1994, Papazian 1997, Vikør 1999). In Norway in general, as

in the other Scandinavian countries, we observe a development where traditional low status urban features appear to be spreading at the expense of traditional high status ones, both in the cities and in surrounding areas. The traditional low status features are re-allocated from working class features to modern urban features, that is, they do not index social class anymore, but urbanity and urban lifestyle. Apparently young people prefer “urban” to “posh”. This supports the idea that we should differentiate the term “standard” – the traditional (high social class) standard and an urban standard. Hence, the disappearance of local forms does not only occur at the dialect end of the continuum, but also at the standard end, and can be described as a de-standardization.

Regionally marked and stigmatised East Norwegian forms which diverge from the urban standard seem to be converging towards urban standard variants – as for instance first syllable stress on loan words *ˈbanan* “banana”, *ˈuniversitet* “university” instead of standard second syllable stress, retroflex flap [ɾ] instead of standard [r] in words like [ha:ɾ] “hard” and [u:ɾ] “word” and i-umlaut in present tense strong verbs (*kjem* vs. standard *kommer* “comes”). Dialects in this region are under massive pressure from Oslo. The picture of dialect revival and increasing dialect acceptance is not necessarily valid in this part of the country – especially not among adolescents. Many adolescents in these areas now speak a levelled regional form of the traditional dialect (but it is not as yet possible to distinguish discrete regional varieties) and/or they switch frequently between standard and dialect variants (also within the same speech exchange). Although most of eastern Norway most adequately can be described as type C areas, we may expect dialect loss in parts of the area, insofar as the focusing of new regional dialects or regiolects happens at the expense of local dialect features.

#### *Other parts of Norway*

In the northern, southern, western and central parts of Norway, there seem to be several different regional developments where the urban variety of the dominant city or town within each region, the so-



called regional dialect, constitutes the most important intra-regional linguistic ideal. We find vertical levelling towards the East Norwegian urban standard in these parts of the country, too, but in some cases the regional developments may in fact diverge from the standard. Also in these parts of the country the traditional sociolinguistic stratification of speech in the bigger cities and towns seems to be disappearing and people from different social groups tend to speak the same way in both informal and formal situations. These new common urban dialects, which cut across class differences, are normally based on the old low-status urban dialect, but with some modifications from the high status urban dialect (cf. Sandøy 1998).

For dialects with a phonemic inventory containing more vowel phonemes than the East Norwegian urban standard, with its nine monophthongs and four diphthongs, there is a general tendency all over the country to reduce their vowel system so that it corresponds to the standard system. In the consonant system we also find examples of mergers, which reduce the number of phonemes or allophones – for instance the palatals ([ɲ], [ʎ], [ç], [j]). Palatalization of long alveolars and alveolar clusters is a very widespread rural feature, which traditionally is found in the north, west and central parts of Norway, but it is currently disappearing in most of these areas (e.g. Abrahamsen 1995, Borg 1971, Jahr 1990, Røyneland 1999)<sup>vii</sup>. The feature deviates from the standard, and from most urban varieties, even the urban centres within the palatalising area. Generally there is high social awareness of the feature, and it is often regarded as “broad”, “rural” and “peasant like”. The feature is, as one would expect, first levelled in central areas. Even if the feature is quite widespread and consequently has extensive regional support, it is disappearing in most areas. In the western part of Norway the palatals are substituted with the corresponding alveolars ([n], [l], [t], [d]), whereas in the northern and central parts they tend to be replaced by retroflexes ([ɳ], [ʎ], [ʈ], [ɖ]) (cf. Hanssen 1990, Røyneland forthcoming). These retroflex variants represent a typical regional development and may, perceptually speaking, be understood as intermediate or compromise forms both linguistically and socially. Instead of converging

completely to the “too nice” standard alveolar variants, or sticking to the “too rural” dialectal palatal forms, a form in between is preferred. This shows that vertical dialect-standard levelling may have a regional result when convergence to the standard form is not complete.

A morpho phonological feature, which currently is about to disappear, is palatalization of velar plosives. In many parts of the country /g/ and /k/ used to be palatalised ([j], [ç]) word medially in certain surroundings. One would for instance have switching between velar and palatal pronunciation in noun inflection, but this system is now simplified: a [bu:k] – the [bu:ça] > [bu:ka] “book”, a [sku:g] – the [sku:jən] > [sku:gen] “forest”. This feature is also traditionally very wide spread, but may be applied differently in different parts of the country. However, the general tendency today is that it is disappearing (e.g. Abrahamsen 1995, Jahr 1990, Skjekkeland 2000 and references there).

The changes mentioned above may all be described in terms of simplification – both of the sound system and the grammatical system – and they are examples of vertical levelling. But we also find examples of horizontal levelling, which brings about divergence from the unofficial standard. We see, for instance, a rapid expansion of dorsal /r/ from the south of Norway up through the west coast. The feature has first spread to the urban centres on the coast, but is now also gaining ground in the surrounding rural areas. Dorsal /r/ is now found from South-western Norway up to the westernmost tip of the Scandinavian Peninsula (see map 1). Torp (2001) argues that dorsal /r/ and retroflex consonants may be mutually excluding innovations, and he shows how dorsal /r/ is expanding in areas where we do not find retroflex consonants, whereas it is *not* spreading in areas where they have retroflex consonants. On the other hand, in districts bordering to the south-western dorsal /r/ area, the retroflexes may also expand to new dialects. The rest of the country, that is, North-western Norway, central-Norway and northern Norway, then, follows the East-Norwegian pattern with apical /r/ and retroflexes.

Another regional development is found in the expansion of the plural indefinite marker *-a*, and the plural definite marker *-an* in all three noun classes: *bila* m. (standard *biler/bilar*) “cars” *jenta* f. (*jenter*)

“girls”, *husa* n. (hus) “houses” and *bilan* m. (bilene/bilane) “the cars”, *jentan* f. (jentene) “the girls”, *husan* n. (husa/husene) “the houses”. These plural morphemes are not found in either of the two official written standards of Norwegian or in the unofficial spoken standard, but are nevertheless spreading in northern and central-Norway, at the expense of a more differentiated system with different plural markers in the different noun classes (e.g. Skjekkeland 1997, 2000).

In the pronoun system the merger of subject and object case forms is a widespread development. In several parts of the country we find the merger in second person plural – for instance on the West coast, where [di:] (subj.) – [døk:ə] (obj.) > [døk:ə] – [døk:ə]. In one county in southern Norway the merger between the subject and object form of second person singular pronoun is spreading: [dæ:] (subj.) – [dæ:] (obj.) > [dæ:] (subj.) – [dæ:] (obj.) (cf. Broberg 2001). This shows how the last bits of the old case system with nominative and accusative distinction is falling apart in many dialects and is spreading by horizontal dialect-dialect levelling. However, the latter distinction (2. p. sing.) is maintained in the written standards and in the East-Norwegian urban standard.

Another interesting regional development can be found in historical reflexes of the Old Norwegian syllable balance rule. The syllable balance rule has had different historical effects in different parts of Norway, and has traditionally been the most important variable which dialectologists have used to divide Norway into different dialect regions. This variable divides eastern Norway from western Norway and it also divides eastern Norway internally according to how the syllable balance rule is implemented (see maps in Jahr 1990 or Skjekkeland 1997). The East Norwegian urban standard does not have any reflexes of the syllable balance rule. In central Norway the traditional system is apocope in some infinitives and nouns and maintenance of the vowel in the second syllable in others (see endnote ii). However, apocopated forms are spreading in the regional centre Trondheim so infinitives and nouns that traditionally should have retained the vowel get apocope (cf. Dalen 1990). Rural areas in the Trondheim region seem to follow this regional development: [vɔ:rɔ/væ:rɔ] > [vɔ:r/væ:r], standard

[væ:rə] “to be”, [sɔv:ɔ] > [sɔ:v], standard [sɔ:və] “to sleep”, [væk:ʌ/væk:a] > [ʌ:k], standard [ʌ:kə] “week” (cf. Røyneland 1998). This development diverges from the standard as far as the number of syllables in the affected words is concerned, but at the level of phonology there seems to be a tendency to prefer root vowels corresponding to the standard. In this sense one could argue that there are both vertical and horizontal levelling processes at work: vertical levelling towards standard phonology and horizontal levelling towards regional dialect morphology.

As Skjekkeland (2000:81) points out, there generally seems to be more vertical levelling in phonology and more horizontal levelling in morphology. However, we do not find such massive dialect levelling in these other parts of Norway as we do in the south-eastern part, nor do we find as much switching and mixing between dialect and standard variants (although it certainly occurs). What we do find, then, are several different regional developments combined with vertical levelling. In Auer’s typology this would correspond to a combination of type A and type C areas. The unofficial East Norwegian urban standard does not have such a strong influence upon the dialects in these other regions as in south-eastern Norway, but I would still argue that it functions as an overarching “mental” standard, which is partly converged to, in these areas, too. The number of areas where Nynorsk is the endoglossic written standard is decreasing, and even here the regional East Norwegian urban standard seems to have quite some influence. I would argue, then, that the number of type A areas in Norway is decreasing while the number of type C (and D) areas is increasing. The linguistic and sociological changes that the northern, western, central, southern parts of the country are going through today seem to be pushing also these parts towards type C areas, and maybe also type D areas with dialect loss, although this is a more probable development in south-eastern Norway.

*Rural versus urban developments*

Although the process of regional levelling is the most predominant tendency in Norway today, we also observe other innovations, which cannot be described as the result of horizontal or vertical levelling. These innovations typically emerge in urban settings and are often system-internally motivated (cf. Røyneland 2001a, 2001c).

The most discussed urban linguistic development in the country today is the merger between the dorso-palatal fricative /ç/ and the post alveolar fricative /ʃ/: /ç/ > /ʃ/: [çu:lə] > [ʃu:lə] (kjole) “dress”, [çø:pə] > [ʃø:pə] (kjøpe) “buy”, [çi:nu] > [ʃi:nu] (kino) “cinema”. The merger between these two phonemes leads to the merger of a series of minimal pairs<sup>viii</sup>. The merger of /ç/ > /ʃ/ was first reported in Bergen, but seems to have appeared in Oslo more or less at the same time, and is today reported also from other major cities in most of the country (cf. Sandøy 2000:347 and references there). This may thus be an example of an innovation appearing independently in different urban dialects. The merger cannot be understood as being adopted from some other variety. Adolescents report that they know and are able to produce the distinction, but say that they don’t want to (cf. Dalbakken 1997). Apparently the merger has come to function as a group identity marker. Using /ʃ/ instead of /ç/ seems to be fully accepted as the new norm in many adolescent environments and, hence, represents a case of de-standardization. Whereas the merger between /ç/ and /ʃ/ is associated, by people in general, with adolescent culture, sloppiness, childishness and so on, the contact induced innovations caused by dialect levelling are associated with mainstream culture, with standard norms and to a certain extent with correctness (except from the merger of subject and object case pronouns 2. p. sing.). This means that a new innovation like the merger of /ç/ and /ʃ/ is more stigmatised and subject to greater pressure towards norm maintenance than most of the contact induced changes I have mentioned above.

This indicates that the role of adolescents, as initiators and transmitters of change, is quite different in urban and in peripheral areas. Whereas adolescents in rural areas speak in a *more* standard-like way than their parents and grandparents (because of dialect levelling), adolescents in the cities typically talk *less* standard than older generations. They pick up features that go against the established standard norm and hence challenge the standard – (in time, however, these features might be accepted as standard). Whereas adolescents in rural areas converge towards the standard when they stop using local variants, adolescents in urban areas diverge from the standard – and contribute to the de-standardisation of the standard – when they start using new features. In other words, adolescents in rural areas are primarily engaged in dialect levelling whereas adolescents in urban areas are more engaged in other types of innovations. However, adolescents in both rural and urban areas diverge linguistically from their parents and grandparents (though in different ways). In this sense they are both less constrained by the linguistic norms or conventions in their surroundings, and less dependent on their family background. This agrees with Giddens' (1991) reflections on the disembedding of social relations, localities and traditions in post-modern Europe.

## **Conclusion**

The development in Norway resembles the development in many parts of Europe, and to a certain extent Norway seems to be “catching up with” the European development. However, Norway still remain different in some important aspects, which have to do with the overall positive attitudes towards dialects (even if they may be declining somewhat), the amount of dialect diversity, the lack of a strong national spoken standard and the bewildering variation within the written standards. We have seen that the development in south-eastern Norway and in the rest of the country is slightly different, with a much more massive vertical dialect-standard levelling in the south-eastern part. In this area we see a development towards type C and type D kind of areas in Auer's typology. Many parts of the rest of the country may be changing into a diaglossic, type C, kind of area too, but there is, as yet, no sign of

overall dialect loss, type D areas, (although some local variants may be disappearing). According to Auer, development towards type C and D is the predominant tendency in present-day Europe. In Norway, type C is definitely the predominant type, but if local dialect features continue to be levelled at the same speed as they are today, type D areas may be increasing in Norway, too.

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<sup>i</sup> This definition of regionalization is to a great extent inspired by Trudgill (1986) and Hinskens (1996) and their definitions of dialect levelling, but is not identical. The term is used in the sense of “bottom-up”, that is, as the formation of regiolects, and not “top-down”, in the course of de-standardisation.

<sup>ii</sup> An example of this can be found the Trondheim region in Central Norway where the traditional infinitive system has apocope in some verbs (those who had a long root syllable in Old Norwegian) and maintenance of the infinitive ending in other verbs (those who had a short root syllable in Old Norwegian), ex. [hø:p] ”to jump” versus [væ:ra] “to be”. This system is the historical result of the Old Norwegian syllable balance rule. However, the present development in the Trondheim region is that all infinitives are treated the same way, that is, they all get apocope. This means that apocopated forms are spreading throughout the system, so that a verb like [væ:ra] “to be” changes to a regional variant [væ:r] instead of the standard variant [væ:rə]. In other words, these are examples of expansive features, which diverge from the unofficial standard.

<sup>iii</sup> However, not *all* Norwegian dialects are equally well accepted. Dialects spoken in the semi-urban and rural areas close to the capital Oslo are often not perceived of as “real” dialects even by their users, but as some deviant variant of the East Norwegian standard. These dialects are often ridiculed publicly for instance by comedians or actors, who use these dialects when portraying naive or ridiculous persons.

<sup>iv</sup> There are of course people who would disagree on this, and rather advocate a diglossic solution where dialects should be restricted to private domains. However, the predominant and politically correct attitude is that dialects ideally ought to be used for all kinds of linguistic purposes.

<sup>v</sup> The interview passage is extracted from my present research on dialect levelling in two communities in Central Norway, Røros and Tynset.

<sup>vi</sup> Endoglossic standard varieties, as opposed to exoglossic standard varieties, refer to standard varieties which are genetically related to the vernacular varieties. Latin and Arabic are examples of varieties which have been used as exoglossic standards in many parts of Europe. The Norwegian standards (particularly Bokmål) used to function as the

overarching exoglossic standard for the Sámi varieties in Norway. Now however, the Sámi varieties have developed their own endoglossic standards (northern-Sámi, southern-Sámi and Lula Sámi).

<sup>vii</sup> In most cases old Norse *ll*, *ld*, *lt*, *nn*, *rn* (>*nn*), *nd*, *nt*, *dd* and *tt* were palatalized – (*dd* and *tt* especially after front vowels):  
 ba[ʎ:] (ball) “ball”, kve[ʎ:] (kveld) “evening”, spesie[ʎc] (spesielt) “special”, ma[n:](mann) “man”, bjø[n:] (bjørn) “bear”,  
 sy[n:] (synd) “sin”, vi[n]c]er (vinter) “winter”, hy[c:]e (hytte) “cottage”, i[c:] (itte) “not”, ha[j:] (hadde) “had”.

<sup>viii</sup> [çel:] > [ʃɛ] (Kjell - man’s name), [ʃel:] (skjell) “shell” // [çit:] > [ʃit:] (kitt) “putty”, [ʃit:] (skitt) “dirt” // [çɛn:ə] > [ʃɛn:ə] (kjenne) “know”, [ʃɛn:ə] (skjenne) “scold” // [çys:ə] > [ʃys:ə] (kysse) “kiss”, [ʃys:ə] (skysse), “give a lift”, (cf. “han [ʃys:a] henne” = “he gave her a lift” with the merger also “he kissed her”).