

Grønvik, Oddrun; Gundersen, Helge; Vikør, Lars; Worren, Dagfinn
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The book under review is the twelfth and final volume of *Norsk Ordbok*, a dictionary of Norwegian dialectal speech and the written standard of Nynorsk. With this volume, a project spanning nearly a century comes to an end, involving several generations of dedicated and visionary researchers, having survived the troubles of seeking funding over so many years, and being both subject to and user of all the technological innovations introduced in this long time span. In this review, I will go beyond this specific final volume and take a more general perspective, including the complete work. In addition to the actual dictionary volumes, I will also consider the data resources that were developed as the empirical foundation of the dictionary and have been made publicly available.

The history of *Norsk Ordbok* is closely connected with the sociolinguistic history of the Norwegian language. Norwegian is characterized by its two written standard languages, with Bokmål deriving from the strong influence of written Danish, and Nynorsk being based on (mostly Western) Norwegian dialects. The existence of both standard languages is connected to long language-political debates concerning what written standard language would suit the comparatively young nation of Norway best: a language based on the genuine Norwegian dialects, or a language that resembles a Norwegianized form of closely related Danish that had been the established written standard during the long Danish reign. Today, both standard languages exist, with Bokmål in a dominant position with regard to the number of users. Complementary to *Norsk Riksmålsordbok*, which documents decidedly non-Nynorsk written Norwegian, *Norsk Ordbok* is meant to provide a historical documentation of the lexical inventory of the Nynorsk written standard. It is therefore deeply connected with the language-political debates shaping Norwegian history.

In addition to the aim of documenting Nynorsk, the dictionary also serves as a dialect dictionary of spoken Norwegian. This specificity makes *Norsk Ordbok* unique, to my knowledge, in European history: Traditionally, dictionaries document either a written standard language or dialects, but a combination of both is hardly ever found. Concerning

Norwegian, however, the combination is straightforward: Nynorsk has always been a standard language reflecting Norwegian dialects far more than Bokmål, and therefore reflects dialectal features in many respects. The original idea of Ivar Aasen was to shape a new Norwegian standard variety based on the local dialects. And this idea is reflected in the high status dialects in Norway still have today. Compared to many other countries in Europe, dialect use is highly accepted in nearly all domains of society, and it is expected outside a speaker's dialect region.

In addition to the twelve volumes of *Norsk Ordbok*, a *Brukarrettleiing* (user's reference) has been published (Grønvik et al. 1994), documenting the project's history, the general methodological considerations, the organization of lemma articles, and providing lists of the written references used and the locations from which dialect data were gathered (including a number of maps). An updated and more reader-friendly reference by Lars Vikør (2018) is available online (<http://no2014.uib.no/eNo/tekst/Inn%20i%20Norsk%20Ordbok.pdf>). In the individual volumes of the dictionary, introductory remarks reflect the historical changes the project went through, both concerning organizational aspects of the long-term project, data extensions and technical changes. Based on these texts, a historical picture emerges, reflecting the challenges and improvements the project experienced.

In the following, I will first review some aspects of the dictionary's history and will then go into some details concerning the structure. After that, I will evaluate the value of *Norsk Ordbok* from an outsider's perspective, looking at its possible contributions to broader Germanic and general linguistics.

1 *Norsk Ordbok* – a long-term project spanning nearly 100 years

The start of the project goes back to the 1920s. An initiative by researchers gathered by the publisher *Det Norske Samlaget* was the starting point of a long-term project that commenced in 1930 and was finished with the final volume in 2016. Based on previous dictionaries by Ivar Aasen (*Norsk Ordbog med dansk Forklaring*, 1873) and Hans Ross (*Norsk Ordbog*, 1895), the aim was to provide a multi-volume dictionary containing both traditional dialectal speech and the modern written use of Nynorsk. *Norsk Ordbok* is therefore comparable with research-based his-

torical dictionaries; cf. the German dictionary by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (*Deutsches Wörterbuch*), the Danish *Ordbog over det danske Sprog*, or the Swedish *Svenska Akademiens Ordbok*. At the same time, it is comparable with the documentation of the lexis of dialects; cf. large-scale projects like the *Jysk ordbog* (Jutlandic dictionary) and *Ømålsordbogen* (Dictionary of Insular Danish) or German projects like the *Schweizerisches Idiotikon*, *Bayerisches Wörterbuch*, *Thüringisches Wörterbuch* and the like.

This broad scope made it necessary to include two types of data: Norwegian literary data (both fiction and nonfiction) from a historical period of time, and data from contemporary dialects. Literary data was collected from written sources, ranging from the 16th century to contemporary texts, but focusing on the development from 1840 onwards. With available sources increasing in numbers, the database of written works was continually enlarged. Technological progress has made it possible to use new, computational and corpus-based techniques since the 2000s. Data from dialects were gathered by a network of informants who filled in index cards providing information on the use, forms, and meaning of specific words in their dialects. Dialect data were extensively collected until the 1960s, resulting in a collection of 3.2 million index cards.

After several restructuring efforts, the project was reorganized as *Norsk Ordbok 2014* in 2002. With its new structure, the project aimed to publish the rest of the volumes with a tight schedule ending in 2014, the bicentennial anniversary of the Norwegian constitution. For this reason, a fully electronic platform for the revision of data and writing of dictionary articles was developed, allowing access to a greatly enlarged corpus of written data. The new structure made it possible to progress much faster with the edition of the planned volumes: Volume 1 (*A – doktrinær*) from 1966, collecting previous editions published from 1947 on, was followed by vol. 2–4 in 1978, 1994, and 2002. With the new project structure, the following volumes 5–11 appeared in much shorter cycles (2005, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013), vol. 12 taking a little longer (2016).

Considering that the pioneers' visions of this dictionary were passed on from generation to generation, spanning nearly a century, and that new funding and modern project structures were necessary for completing the project at several points of time, it becomes apparent how valuable the output of this dictionary is. A project on such a large scale and

so long-term is always at risk of never being finished. In completion, the dictionary provides the largest complete reference work of the Norwegian language with approximately 330.000 word articles. In addition to the volumes themselves, the project has also provided linguists with a large Nynorsk corpus that has been made available publically on the internet (http://no2014.uib.no/korpuset/conc_enkeltsoek.htm), and other material, containing, e.g., the archive of index cards, a synopsis of Norwegian dialectal features, and a number of additional search tools for data used in the dictionary (http://no2014.uib.no/eNo/tekst/tekst_grunnlagsmateriale.html).

2 Aspects of the structure of *Norsk Ordbok*

Norsk Ordbok was planned as a complex, informative dictionary providing information on grammatical and semantic aspects and the variation of each word included into the word list. The word list itself does not aim to be exhaustive (this would be impossible in any case, considering that new words arise all the time from word formation and loan processes), but rather to provide large-scale documentation of words regularly used in written Nynorsk and spoken dialects. The number of compounds and loan words was cautiously restricted, but established items have mostly been included. The lemmas are presented according to the conventions of written Nynorsk and sorted alphabetically.

Since the dictionary aims to document each word in extensive detail, it is clear that each article requires a lot of space. It is one of the most important aspects of lexicographical work to establish a structure that is both reader-friendly and, at the same time, saves as much space as possible. In my opinion, the structure of articles fulfils this aim to a high degree. The following observations show some aspects of the structure that serve this aim.

The efforts to find a sound compromise between reader-orientation and a space-saving structure are evident, e.g., when the structure of word articles is considered. After presentation of the lemma (in bold), grammatical information is provided. This concerns the word class and additional, mainly inflectional features. For word classes, well-established abbreviations such as *adj* 'adjective', *adv* 'adverb', *v* 'verb' are used. This is not the case for nouns, where instead the grammatical gender (which

is specific for nouns) is indicated by *f* ‘feminine’, *m* ‘masculine’, or *n* ‘neuter’. While this saves a little space and is at the same time non-misleading, even more space is saved by use of a default-based description of the inflectional morphology of nouns. The most important inflectional information in Norwegian nouns is the form of the plural marker. In Nynorsk, genders and plural markers mostly have a parallel distribution: Feminines form their plurals with the suffix *-er*, masculines with *-ar*, and neuters do not mark their plural at all. This parallel distribution of gender and declension is used as a default value in the dictionary. This means that no information on plural marking needs to be specified in the dictionary unless a noun does not follow the default. There is no space to go into details about other word classes (mainly verbs) here, but the solutions for these word classes are also clear and sound.

Moving on in the structure of word articles, after the grammatical part, additional information is offered in square brackets. This concerns documentation in older reference works, phonological variation in dialects, etymological information, and references to other word articles. All this demands an extensive use of abbreviations for reference works, dialects and dialectal regions, etc. The frequently cited standard references, like Aasen’s and Ross’ dictionaries, are abbreviated with single letters (*A* and *R*, respectively), while longer abbreviations are found for sources that are more seldom used. All abbreviations are listed in Vikør (2018) with their meanings.

The main part of the word articles is constituted by the description of the word’s meaning. In accordance with lexicographical standards, homographs are differentiated by Roman numerals, and differing meanings are indicated by Arabic numerals, written in bold. A short and exact description of word semantics follows, and in many articles, word usage is exemplified by several examples from the literary corpus of Nynorsk texts. Taking all this together, a broad documentation of meaning and use of Nynorsk and dialectal words is achieved.

The dictionary is maximally informative concerning the meaning, use, and grammar of its registered words. In my view, it offers a good compromise between compression and reader-friendliness, demanding a general knowledge of the structure and a willingness to look up certain abbreviations, but at the same time permitting quick access to the dictionary with as little effort as possible. For readers of the desired group (adults with Norwegian as their native language, normal educational

background and a more than average interest in Norwegian language, according to Vikør 2018: 10), the dictionary will be fully accessible. For the academic world, it will even offer opportunities beyond its main purpose of looking up words, and some of these will be treated in the following section.

3 An outsider's look: What is the value of *Norsk Ordbok* for Germanic and general linguistics?

When large-scale projects such as *Norsk Ordbok* are concerned, it is always legitimate to ask whether the enormous costs of such a project, occupying so many people for such a long time, are justified by the value of the output. In my opinion, the results show that *Norsk Ordbok* has been worth the effort, and I would like to discuss some aspects motivating this.

As a German linguist with a background in Scandinavian Studies, but mainly focusing on German, I probably fail to see some of the values this dictionary has for the Norwegian academic and non-academic community. For example, I can imagine that the dictionary is important for the development of Norwegian variationist linguistics, most probably providing the broadest database of Norwegian dialects that has ever been collected. In addition to its primary aim, a lexicological inventory, it has much more to offer: Both the dictionary and the published database make new variationist studies of Norwegian dialects possible regarding, e.g., phonological and morphological features or semantics, and also aspects of language use. However, a Norwegian dialectologist might go far deeper into the details of what the dictionary can offer than I am able to do. Additionally, aspects of sociolinguistics will play a role. A large-scale documentary and research-based work like this dictionary is actually part of the linguistic history of Norwegian. It offers a statement on the value of Nynorsk, the lesser used written standard language compared with Bokmål. It also supports the strong position of Norwegian dialects with a large-scale reference work. The effects this work has had (and continues to have), e.g., on language attitudes and ideologies or on the linguistic education in Norwegian schools is beyond the scope of issues I can offer from an outside perspective.

Taking up my outside perspective, this does give me a possibility to look into the value the dictionary has for broader Germanic linguistics and general linguistics. *Norsk Ordbok* will definitely be of great value to the Scandinavian linguistic community, given the continuous relation of Mainland Scandinavian dialects. It enables Norwegian, Danish and Swedish dialectologists to relate structures between Nordic dialects. Compared with Norwegian, documentation efforts regarding the dialects of Swedish and, especially, Danish also face the problem of a strong leveling of dialects in the respective countries and a decline in dialect use, which eventually even results in full dialect loss. The documentation of recent dialectal speech is therefore most effectively possible in Norway, compared to its neighboring countries, and *Norsk Ordbok* provides very important data for anyone working on the dialects of Mainland Scandinavia.

While access to *Norsk Ordbok* is possible with no great effort for speakers of Danish or Swedish, the fact that the dictionary is written in Norwegian will, of course, limit access for linguists from other disciplines of Germanic linguistics, e.g. linguists of German, Dutch, or English. However, knowledge of any of the Mainland Scandinavian languages will be a key to using the dictionary. Since most linguists with a broader Germanic scope have learned one of them or are willing to do so, many of them will be able to use *Norsk Ordbok*. The dictionary and its database will be useful for studies comparing Germanic dialects and standard languages. To put this into the context of current developments: In recent decades, a pronounced interest in comparing dialect studies has become evident. Large-scale projects on dialect syntax have been developed, e.g. in Scandinavia and the German-speaking countries, and dialectal morphology is currently moving into focus. *Norsk Ordbok* can be of great value in such projects, and offers new possibilities of research integrating the broader North and West Germanic dialect continua altogether. One hope is that such projects might help us to gain a better understanding of processes of language change by paying attention to dialectal changes (cf. de Vogelaer and Seiler 2012) because these reflect “natural” language change better than standard varieties with their strong normative influences. General typological features of Germanic languages can also be identified more clearly when dialects receive more attention, and reference works like *Norsk Ordbok* provide keys to their identification.

In a more general linguistic view, data on dialects adds up to the identification and description of general typological issues. One of the main resources of language typology is, e.g., the *WALS* (World Atlas of Language Structures). Norwegian structures that are currently represented in *WALS* are based on descriptions of Bokmål. German, however, is represented by 15 dialects in addition to the standard variety. Thorough documentary work, as in *Norsk Ordbok*, at least offers an opportunity to include Nynorsk and Norwegian dialects into important databases like the *WALS* in the future, thereby representing Norwegian as the strongly varying language that it is.

4 Conclusion

A large-scale, 12-volume dictionary, indeed even a single volume, is far too large to be reviewed with all the attention that the project as a whole and individual parts of it deserve. In this review, I therefore attempted to look into some specific aspects concerning the project's history, the structure of word articles, and some aspects I found interesting from an outsider's perspective. Many noteworthy aspects are not mentioned above, and will be left to the readers' own voyages into what this dictionary has to offer. What I can summarize from the perspectives I have taken is that it is not naturally the case that a large-scale project spanning nearly 100 years is completed, and that the academic community can be very happy to be able to use a complete, detailed and well-structured dictionary of Nynorsk and Norwegian dialects. But *Norsk Ordbok* offers even more than a large reference work. Its value will be evident beyond the published volumes by its use in further linguistic studies, be they variationist, typological, or any other directions that linguists will find the dictionary and the newly available, precious data sources useful for.

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