

Brit Mæhlum and Unn Røyneland: *Det norske dialektlandskapet*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm 2012, 199 pp.

In setting about reviewing an undergraduate textbook on dialects in Norway, I am faced with some choices. I can evaluate its pedagogical value. Or else I can seize the opportunity to present the book for the benefit of a non-Norwegian reading audience, helping to make information about Norwegian dialects available to a wider readership. And finally, I can take the book as a piece of scholarly writing and evaluate it as such. Potential readers of this review will most likely want to know what the book tells us about language variation in what is often referred to as a ‘sociolinguistic paradise’ (Røyneland 2009) – and this is the principal approach I will take.

There are a number of English-language articles about particular aspects of Norway’s sociolinguistic reality, including several by the present authors (e.g. Røyneland 2009; Mæhlum 1996, 2005), as well as a handful of monograph-length studies of dialect change by foreign scholars (e.g. Kerswill 1994; Strand 2009). Perhaps not surprisingly, there are no truly comprehensive foreign-language treatments of Norwegian dialects. Bandle (1973) fulfills this role to some extent, while Husby (ed.) (2008) is an account of six urban dialects for the benefit of foreign learners. There are a number of book-length treatments in Norwegian, the more recent being Sandøy (1985) and Skjekkeland (2005), both of which are used in university curricula. The authors of the present volume see themselves as building on the secondary school curriculum, which focuses on the geographical distribution of individual features and presents dialects as homogeneous and ‘genuine’ (Mæhlum & Røyneland 2012 [henceforth M&R]: 8). This geographical approach contrasts strongly with Sandøy (1985), which starts from linguistic structure.

The authors’ aim is to extend the students’ understanding by adding discussions of sociolinguistic variation and change. The book in fact goes well beyond this. It contains sufficient detail on geographical and social variation for the authors to make important claims about the specific contributions of language-internal, contact-based and ideological motivations for change. But first I will present a synopsis and general evaluation.

The book has seven chapters, grouped into three parts. Chapter 1 opens with an explanation of the discipline of dialectology, followed by a discussion of ways in which it has now largely merged with (variationist) sociolinguistics. Dialect geography is seen in relation to social dialectology, especially the

dimension of age and its relationship to change. Published dialect maps are seen as representing a non-existent static reality, the corollary being that isoglosses are at best idealisations about particular features used by a restricted social group at a particular time. The very choice of features for examination is seen as problematic: who gets to choose, the linguist or the dialect speaker? Should geographical and political criteria be used in the classification of dialects? How should dialect maps in the future be drawn in the face of widespread dialect levelling? What is the effect of using a dialect questionnaire, rather than spontaneous speech? Of course, these are much-rehearsed critiques of the field, but they are well handled here and appropriate for the intended readership. A big challenge for the authors (as we shall see) is how these problems should be dealt with in their own presentation.

M&R see dialectology in Norway as rooted in National Romanticism and nation building, personified by Ivar Aasen's massively influential work in the 1850s both on dialects and on the polemics of national language development. This movement legitimised dialect in Norway to an extent that still has no counterpart elsewhere in Europe. This culminated in an 1878 Act, still in force, establishing children's own dialect as the language of the classroom. The enduring effect of this early ideological work is tellingly illustrated by Sollid (2014): a young man, having moved from northern Norway to Oslo, consciously chooses not to adopt an Oslo-like variety even though he has mastered it, deciding instead to keep his low-prestige dialect. He explains to his interviewer that he made this choice because of his left-wing egalitarian ideology, alongside his attempt to maintain a feeling of social identity and authenticity.

Chapter 2 shifts away from a discussion of the historical and disciplinary embedding of Norwegian dialectology to a discussion of the number of dialect areas that should be recognised. Predictably enough, there are divergent views, ranging from two to four areas. M&R settle on four, mainly for pedagogical and presentational reasons. The chapter sets out the main linguistic criteria which will be applied in Part 2 of the book. A weakness of this arrangement is that a good deal of the material given here ends up being re-visited, with numerous cross-references.

Part 2 contains separate chapters on East Norwegian, Trøndersk (spoken mainly in Trøndelag), West Norwegian and North Norwegian. As M&R explain, these are based on older descriptions and on existing dialect maps; these maps are redrawn from those in earlier publications with little alteration. On the authors' own admission, and rather flying in the face of their critique

in Chapter 1, these maps give an outdated and idealised picture of the distribution of dialect features. M&R admit that some of the features might not even exist today. By contrast with Part 1, the discussion is traditional and comes across as not a little essentialist. The text is information-rich – perhaps excessively so. This is made the more problematic by the fact that these chapters contain very few references and no suggestions for further reading, making it difficult to source or follow up particular points.

More detail should, however, have been provided in the discussion of the two tonemes, particularly their realisation. The authors largely ignore toneme 2, and this gives the impression that the realisation of toneme 1 is the more significant criterion in dialect classification. The foundational typological work on toneme classification, Fintoft (1970), is not mentioned. More seriously, the failure to indicate toneme 2 in most of the transcriptions leads the reader to the incorrect assumption (p. 48) that loanwords with first-syllable stress in many Eastern dialects, such as *stasjon* ‘station’, have toneme 1, and that the same applies to tone groups such as *gå inn* ‘go in’ and *finne på* ‘think up’. All these examples take toneme 2.

That said, the authors do devote considerable space to contact varieties of Norwegian. Contact between Norwegian and Sámi has taken place over several centuries and continues to this day. In the north, evidence of contact can be detected in syntax and the lack of a tonemic distinction. Surprisingly, the lack of tonemes in the dialects surrounding Bergen is not mentioned; there, language contact is unlikely to have been a factor. Further south, the South Sámi population today mainly speaks the local (Norwegian) dialect, while using certain South Sámi lexical items to encode what the authors call a ‘style’. M&R also include a discussion of the multiethnolectal contact varieties which have become established in multilingual/multicultural parts of Oslo.

Each of the four chapters in Part 2 contains a sociolinguistic description of the major city in the dialect area it covers: Oslo, Trondheim, Bergen and Tromsø. For all the cities, the authors discuss the relatively standardised, but still localised, upper middle-class varieties alongside the working-class ‘street’ or ‘vulgar’ urban dialects, noting that the social and linguistic boundaries between them are now much more fluid than in earlier decades and that the varieties have converged.

Part 3, *Utviklingslinjer* (‘Lines of development’), consists of a single chapter, and it is here the authors are able to set out their ideas about the motivations for dialects change. Because the discussion is based on a single, well-

documented and highly variable language, comparisons across dialects become possible. This makes teasing apart motivations easier. M&R begin by noting Steinsholt's early recognition that stasis is not the normal state of affairs for dialects (Steinsholt 1964), and that there is a constant struggle or competition ('bryting').

Next, the authors outline general developments in Norway, and I will set these out in some detail. Many appear to involve dialect levelling (*dialekt-nivellering*), and for some features this has led to homogenisation (*utjamning*). Some of this levelling involves reduction processes applying across a wide area. Consonant inventories are being reduced: the palatal phonemes /t̪ d̪ ɲ ʎ/, traditionally found in most but not all regions, are gradually being replaced by their alveolar equivalents. A recent innovation is the rapid merger of /ʃ/ and /ç/ across much of the country. Though not mentioned in the book, vowel inventories are also being reduced, resulting in a generalised nine-vowel system, short and long. At the morphophonemic level, the Western alternation of /k g ɲ/ and their palatal counterparts /çç ɟ ɲ/ has been all but eliminated at the expense of the latter. At the same time, there are changes which do not necessarily lead to levelling (where this term is construed as a reduction in the overall amount of variation). The clearest example of this is the spread of the Eastern, Trøndersk and Northern postalveolars /t̪ d̪ ɲ/ to adjacent dialects. These are the realisations of 'underlying' /r/ + alveolar, within words and across boundaries, in, for example, *vært* [væ̥t̪] (BE past participle) and *har du* [hɑ:̥d̪u] 'have you'. South-western [ʁ] for /r/ continues to spread throughout its region – but not beyond – replacing general Norwegian [r]. The use of [ʁ] blocks the spread of postalveolars, and this has given rise to an increasingly sharp boundary between two areas, one with [r] and postalveolars, the other with [ʁ] but lacking postalveolars. In the morphology, the most striking change, giving rise to the loss of a category, is the demise of the marking of the dative case on the definite form of nouns.

As a prelude to their evaluation of motivations for change, M&R argue that the country is divided into two areas with pretty much discrete sets of sociolinguistic processes. In general, Eastern dialects are converging on Oslo Norwegian, particularly adopting its less prestigious variants (I will return to the thorny notion of 'prestige'). In the case of those Eastern dialects that differ more radically from Oslo Norwegian, such as Valdres, dialect shift (the wholesale abandonment of a dialect) in favour of Oslo Norwegian seems to be under way. The facilitating factor seems to be in part linguistic: a good deal of

the segmental phonology is shared across the dialect area, but above all toneme realisations and utterance-level intonation are broadly similar. The other regions, however, are not converging on Oslo, and these follow a second path. Here, levelling on a sub-regional scale seems to apply. Unlike in the East, there is no discernible shift, whether gradual or abrupt, to one of the regional urban varieties; instead, we find the adoption of a number of individual features which are found in the urban varieties. Interestingly, there are also intermediate, or interdialect, forms not found in any of the source dialects or either version of the written standard, Bokmål and Nynorsk.

The authors now consider the driving forces behind these two sets of changes. They summarise two models of change, and in what follows I expand a little on what they write. The first involves regionally based levelling, with a hierarchy of cities and towns leading the changes. Oslo, as by far the largest and best connected city, is at the top of the hierarchy, but does not otherwise have any special status in the process. The mechanism is face-to-face contact (or I assume this is the implication – M&R don't discuss it). This is classic hierarchical diffusion. The second model involves the recognition of some kind of prestigious and/or standard variety of Norwegian. This again places Oslo at the apex, but this time as the direct origin of most of the changes rather than its influence being mediated by contact through a geographical hierarchy. Oslo is the seat of government, its sub-region has the biggest economy and it is the location of most media outlets. Its way of speaking is heard throughout Norway via the media. Its status and availability are suggested by the widespread observation that young children across Norway 'play in *østlandsk* ('East Norwegian')' (Eliassen 1998, cited in Røyneland 2009) – this term being synonymous with Oslo Norwegian in everyday usage. Taking an example from dialect geography, M&R point out that, in the Trøndersk dialect of Oppdal, the vowel /e/ does not acquire the lowered pronunciation [æ] characteristic of Trondheim, 120 km to the north, despite taking on other Trondheim features. M&R ascribe this *directly* to the inhibiting factor of the non-lowered Oslo pronunciation, despite that city being located 400 km to the south. Oslo Norwegian, in other words, has tremendous prestige, and this in and of itself guarantees its influence. Contact, in other words, is not a necessary factor.

At first blush, the East (perhaps together with the southern part of Trøndersk, as changes in Oppdal seem to show) seems to fit the second of these models, with the overweening effect of the prestige of Oslo, and the remainder of the country the first, with a hierarchical arrangement. However, the situation

is not that straightforward. M&R look for evidence of the hierarchical model in the take-up of local urban (but not Oslo) features in rural dialects outside the East: one example is the adoption of the urban form [æ:] for the first person singular pronoun in the North and Trøndelag, in place of rural [i:] or [e:g] (Oslo has [jɛi]). Notwithstanding this example, the complicating factor is that the majority of what look to be adoptions of urban features could equally be classified as the adoption of the Bokmål standard (Bokmål is by far the more commonly encountered version of the written standard). The problem is compounded by the fact that most (but not all, as we have just seen) of these urban features themselves coincide not only with Bokmål, but also with Oslo features. This being so, we cannot easily disentangle the motivations: are they being adopted because they are urban, because they belong to the high-prestige language of Oslo, or because they belong to the standard language?

M&R's solution is a complex one. They point out that the idea of a spoken standard, in the sense of a fully encoded and officially sanctioned variety, is absent in Norway. This contrasts, I would add, most clearly with a country like France. It is precisely the prestige of Oslo that allows its speech to win out in the East, not because it is 'standard'. In much of Europe, spoken standards are similarly not the result of legislation or regulation, except in limited ways for broadcasting. Instead, standard varieties are social dialects (as Trudgill 1999 points out), and ideas about correctness, good speech and good manners derive from that fact. I would add that, in both the UK and Norway, parallel social changes have resulted in broadcast norms being relaxed considerably over the past 30 years, with regional accents now being commonplace on air in Britain and dialects being embraced in Norway, even in planned genres such as news-reading. Despite this, in England (but not necessarily in other parts of the UK), Received Pronunciation is still the prestige norm, carrying with it all kinds of social benefits – even though it is restricted to a relatively small social group. In the southeast of Norway, especially Oslo, a rather specific spoken version of Bokmål, containing a 'conservative' subset of the permitted variants, similarly carries high prestige in certain circles, e.g., finance, business and the legal system – though much less so in government and education. It is the native speech of many people (Røyneland 2009), and its features may even be spreading within Oslo. The parallels between England and Norway are striking, with in each case *de facto* spoken standards being in use – Norway has in a sense 'caught up' (Røyneland 2009).

One difficulty in ascribing influences directly to a ‘standard’ seems to me to be related to which features are admitted as ‘Oslo’ and which ‘standard’. We have already seen that it is mainly the low-prestige features of Oslo which have spread outside the city. Many of these low-prestige features, however, are also ‘standard’, in the sense that they are permissible, and often used, within the variable Bokmål orthography: we cannot therefore easily distinguish the standard from the prestige of the city itself. One feature which is not ‘standard’ even by this criterion, and which is expanding within Oslo, is the use of identical forms for the 3rd person singular feminine pronoun in both subject and object functions. This gives either *hun* or *henne(r)* for both (prescriptively, *hun* is the subject form, *henne* the object). A quick search of online comments shows that this feature is condemned by many older people; its spread across the board in the city is therefore not related to the ideology of correctness or the attractiveness of prestige varieties. Instead, this non-Bokmål innovation follows the pattern found in many other dialects, which have identical subject and object forms. The authors do not comment, but it is clearly a candidate for consideration as an internally motivated simplification, though diffusion from other dialects remains a highly unlikely possibility.

There could also, I think, be an attitudinal factor involved in the spread of the less-prestigious Oslo features. In Hilton’s (2010) study of the small town of Hønefoss, some 60 km north of Oslo, interviews and matched-guise tests indicate that the features from the high-prestige variety of Oslo Norwegian are felt as ‘posh’ and that people who use them are ‘unapproachable’. Interestingly these upper middle-class features are also ascribed by the participants solely to Oslo – a fact which may be related to the relative proximity of the metropolis. Hilton does not investigate attitudes to any of the nonstandard Oslo features. However, less prestigious Oslo features which are also found in Bokmål are not perceived as localisable to Oslo (Hilton 2010: 407–8). Since Hilton states that her Hønefoss informants do not believe they are accommodating to Oslo speech (2010: 408), I would suggest that their perceived non-Oslo status, though they exist there, makes them more available as targets for adoption, and that the same applies to the nonstandard (i.e. non-Bokmål) Oslo features as well.

M&R’s notion of what a ‘standard’ might be is, then, not fully specified. Nor is the role of a standard made clear. The conclusion I draw from all of this is that the driving forces of changes in the East Norwegian area depend on intricate alignments of urban covert prestige, the overt prestige of upper middle-class speech, the influence of a relatively unfocused written standard,

internally-driven change and, finally, dialect contact – each of these varying in strength with the feature undergoing change, geographical location and socioeconomic factors. Exactly what the balance is, and indeed what evidence is needed to isolate the precise influence of a standard, are difficult to establish. This said, the authors lay bare for us the intricacies of the East Norwegian dialect landscape.

It remains for us to consider the rest of the country. As we saw, M&R favour the idea of a hierarchical process. From this, we can conclude that dialect contact has a much stronger effect than in the East. As already mentioned, many features gaining ground are interpretable as intermediate forms, and these may be the outcome of accommodation. Urban dialects are generally not adopted. The clearest example of this is the hinterland of Bergen, where Bergen morphology and phonology have scarcely had an impact with the exception of formerly rural areas which have become urbanised and now form part of the city of Bergen (Doublet 2014) or its immediate sub-region. M&R write (p. 140) that part of the reason for the lack of a shift to Oslo Norwegian outside the East is that the linguistic distance is too great. M&R take the position that the motivations of changes are multifactorial, and mutually supportive. This seems entirely right.

Finally, the book is undoubtedly well produced for its intended audience. There are extended transcriptions of spontaneous regional speech, which can be accessed online. To emphasise the dynamic nature of dialect, they have chosen excerpts from conversations with both older and younger speakers from each location. But there are some problems. One is that, in their transcriptions, the authors use a sometimes confusing form of eye-dialect with some IPA. A particular frustration is that it does not specify the phonemic value of the letter <o>: as in Norwegian orthography, this represents either /o/ or /u/ in an unpredictable way. It is a pity, too, that readers are invited to figure out for themselves what the features are: there is no key to support the weaker, or busier, student. Despite these points, and my criticism of the handling of the factors influencing change in East Norwegian, my impression remains positive: the book is very informative for many different readerships, and it attempts, with success, to present a complete picture of a linguistically complex dialect landscape using contemporary sociolinguistic insights.

References

Bandle, Oskar 1973: *Die Gliederung des Nordgermanischen* (Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie 1). Basel/Stuttgart: Helbing & Lichtenhahn.

- Doublet, Maria-Rosa Raphaela 2014: Ytre Arna – fra strilemål til bergensk på en generasjon. *Replikk* 38, 86–95.
- Eliassen, Camilla 1998: *Rollelekspråk*. Unpublished thesis, University of Trondheim.
- Fintoft, Knut 1970: *Acoustical analysis and perception of tonemes in some Norwegian dialects*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Hilton, Nanna Haug 2010: *Regional Dialect Levelling and Language Standards: Changes in the Hønefoss Dialect*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of York.
- Husby, Olaf (ed.) 2008: *An introduction to Norwegian dialects*. Oslo: Tapir.
- Kerswill, Paul 1994: *Dialects converging: rural speech in urban Norway*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Mæhlum, Brit 1996: Codeswitching in Hemnesberget – Myth or reality? *Journal of Pragmatics* 25, 749–761.
- Mæhlum, Brit 2005: Sociolinguistic structures chronologically III: Norwegian. Bandle, Oskar et al. (eds.): *The Nordic Languages*, Volume II. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1907–1922.
- Røyneland, Unn 2009: Dialects in Norway: Catching up with the rest of Europe? *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 2009 (1), 7–30.
- Sandøy, Helge 1985: *Dialektkunnskap*. Oslo: Novus.
- Skjekkeland, Martin 2005: *Dialektar i Noreg. Tradisjon og fornying*. Kristiansand: Høyskoleforlaget.
- Sollid, Hilde 2014: Hierarchical dialect encounters in Norway. *Acta Borealia* 31, 111–130.
- Steinholt, Anders 1964: *Målbryting i Hedrum*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Strand, Thea R. 2009: *Varieties in Dialogue: Dialect Use and Change in Rural Valdres, Norway*. PhD dissertation, University of Arizona.
- Trudgill, Peter 1999: Standard English: what it isn't. Bex, T. & R.J. Watts (eds.): *Standard English: the widening debate*. London: Routledge, 117–128.

Paul Kerswill

Department of Language and Linguistic Science
 University of York
 Heslington
 York YO10 5DD
 United Kingdom
 paul.kerswill@york.ac.uk