

Norwegian linguistic identity through history - from national identity to linguistic individualism

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Abstract

This paper will discuss how linguistic identity has changed during the history of the Norwegian society and language from the time of the Vikings until today's identity shaping of Generation Z. Because of the great span of time that is covered in this discussion it will not be possible to go into greater detail. The overall picture is that while there was little awareness about language as an identity marker during the middle ages, linguistic identity became a group project during national romanticism, even though this group project divided into two different linguistic varieties and identities, Bokmål (Dano-Norwegian) and Nynorsk (New Norwegian). In today's society, linguistic identity is to a large extent characterized by individual language shaping, at least in social media. At the same time, there is still a tendency to accommodate to a group standard and group identity.

Keywords: *language identity, linguistic identity, educational role of language, nationalism, individualism, language history*

Introduction

The topic of linguistic identity is a central field of investigation in accordance with the four research topics of the ERL network: Language-Beliefs, Language-Activity, Language-Affect, and Language-Thinking (ERL Research 2021). Shaping one's own identity with or through language or shaping one's own language because of a certain identity has to do with beliefs – beliefs about oneself, about the language community, and about a national, regional, ethnical, cultural or individual identity. Shaping or reshaping one's identity also has to do with activity. Shaping or reshaping language can be an active process. However, this process can either be led by national language policies or by individual preferences. Language is one of the most important or maybe the most important identity feature of human beings. Even though modern language research principally prefers the term 'first language' instead of 'mother tongue', the exposure to the first language or languages usually happens through close relatives or caregivers during the years of identity shaping. Language is naturally tied to identity and, thus, also to emotions and language-affect. On an intellectual level, language shapes our thinking and, therefore, also our identity. Language-thinking is, thus, also an important part of the picture.

The topic of the present paper is the development of linguistic identity in Norway, i.e. within the Norwegian speaking and writing community. Norwegian as a language is an interesting research object from the perspective of identity shaping. Not only is it possible to use dialects, sociolects and idelects in public communication, one can additionally choose between two official written Norwegian languages. Hence, there are many possibilities to shape or reshape one's identity through language. From the perspective of human rights, this is, of course, rather positive. From the perspective of teaching and learning and the public school system, on the other hand, this creates certain challenges.

Theoretical background

The aim of this paper is to discuss the topic identity shaping/reshaping with or through language from the perspective of Norwegian language history. Instead of presenting detailed case studies, I will look at important milestones in the development of the Norwegian language and the Norwegian nation

and reflect on the relationship between language and identity. According to the Terminology Coordination Unit (2021), “There are different kinds of identities, social identities, national identities, racial identities, ethnic identities, etc.” They also state that linguistic identity is not “frequently talked about”. The Terminology Coordination Unit defines linguistic identity as:

Linguistic identity refers to a person’s identification as a speaker of one or more languages. The linguistic identity is part and often an important part of our identity. And this is especially true for multilingual individuals.

Joseph (2004: 1) states: “Put as simply as possible, your identity is who you are.” (see also the discussion on identities in Eiksund 2015, Mæhlum 2003, or Mæhlum & Hårstad 2018). In his introduction to language and identity, Joseph (2004:2) uses three different oral remarks as an example and argues that “if we heard the dialogue spoken by the three different individuals, our interpretation of their identities would be affected by their voices, accents and other features of how they speak.” This would be the perspective of others trying to create a picture of our identity on the background of linguistic input. Interestingly, Joseph starts his book with the external perspective, i.e. how we conceive other people and interpret language use as an identity marker. As Joseph (2004: 3) puts it:

In a large number of instances our contact with people is purely linguistic, taking place over the phone, by Internet, by letter, reading the as a character in a book, etc. Under these circumstances we seem to be able to size them up, to feel that we know who they really are – that ‘deep’ identity again – more satisfactorily than when we only see them and have no linguistic contact. Looks proverbially deceive.

Of course, if we happen to be members of a society, we know that we are observed, categorized and judged by other members of the society. Hence, we would also consider shaping our own language use in order to present a certain identity to other members of the society (see e.g. Eiksund 2015, Myklebust 2015, Juuhl 2015). As Wardhaugh (2010: 7) puts it: “Much of what we find in linguistic behaviour will be explicable in terms of people seeking to perform, negotiate, realize, or even reject identities through the use of language.” Joseph (2004: 3) distinguishes between three different “fundamental types of identity”:

- one for real people and one for fictional characters;
- one for oneself and one for others;
- one for individuals and one for groups.

These categories are actually quite interesting when it comes to defining one own’s linguistic identity. Do you have the same linguistic identity in speaking and writing? If you are used to expressing yourself orally in a dialect or even a language very different from the official written language in your society, do you have the same identity? Do you feel (cf. the ERL terms Language-Beliefs and Language-Affects) that you are the same person when you are forced to express yourself in a different linguistic variety? In what way may your linguistic differences represent differences from other individuals or groups? When reading books from your own national/linguistic society (speech community) in a language variety that differs in one way or the other from your personal linguistic identity, do you feel as a part of this society, or do you feel alienated in some way?

Joseph (2004: 4) states:

The difference between individual identity and the identity of a group – a nation or town, a race or ethnicity, a gender or sexual orientation, a religion or sect, a school or club, a company or profession, or that most nebulous group identity, a social class (the list is far from exhaustive) – is most likely a true difference of kind.

Identity can be used in a deictic (pointing) sense, for instance, like the examples “American” or “female” that Joseph uses. Again, from an external perspective, we often feel the need to point out

other individuals or groups as having this or that “identity”. Joseph (2004: 5), however, states that the difference between individual and group identity is more complex:

Your ‘deep’ identity is made up in part of the various group identities to which you stake a claim, though you no doubt believe there is still a part of you that transcends the sum of these parts.

According to Joseph (2004: 5), group identities seem to be more abstract than individual identities. Instead of using Americans and “Americanness” as an example, one could say that ‘Norwegianness’ is an abstract concept that does not exist separately from the Norwegians who possess it, and that the individual Norwegian identities are made up of it. Another aspect of group identity is, according to Joseph (2004: 5), that it finds its “most ‘concrete manifestation in a single, symbolic individual’”. Thus, “Individual identity is established in part by rank relative to others with the same group identity.” (Joseph *ibid.*).

Shaping or reshaping one’s own identity with or through language is not a simple task since individuals usually are members of a community. Wardhaugh (2010: 118) states:

Language is both an individual possession and a social possession. We would expect, therefore, that certain individuals would behave linguistically like other individuals: they might be said to speak the same language or the same dialect or the same variety, i.e., to employ the same code, and in that respect to be members of the same speech community, a term probably derived from the German Sprachgemeinschaft.

Even though Wardhaugh (*ibid.*) points out that ‘speech community’ is not easy to define, it is necessary to keep the notion of a speech community because (quoting Labov 2006: 380): “the linguistic behaviour of individuals cannot be understood without knowledge of the communities they belong to”.

In the discussion below, I will problematize Norwegian as the language of the/a Norwegian speech community from a historical perspective and discuss some aspects of shaping and reshaping identity with and through language as it can be observed in the linguistic behaviour of Generation Z, to use a term that refers to the generation of ‘digital natives’ born right before or after the shift of the Millennium. Due to the nature of this historic approach, it is not possible to go much into detail of some of the aspects that would deserve further investigation.

Discussion

Norwegian belongs to the Germanic languages (see e.g. Braunmüller 1991, Haugen 1976, Hutterer 2002, König and van der Auwera 1994, Nielsen 1989). The North Germanic branch, referred to as Ancient Nordic, is documented in writing through the runic alphabet since around AD 200. During and after the Migration Period in Europe, Ancient Nordic underwent major changes and also split into East and West Nordic dialects. From the time of the Viking Age (8th century) or the establishment of the Nordic kingdoms Norway, Denmark and Sweden (9th and 10th century), one may differentiate between Old Norse (including Old Icelandic), Old Danish and Old Swedish. However, the dialects were mutually intelligible and were usually conceived as the same language, referred to as ‘Danish tongue’ (see e.g. Wessén 1960: 29; Sandøy 2018: 155; Janson 2018: 433). It is rather likely that the establishment of greater Nordic kingdoms led to a feeling of identity (or possibly loyalty) tied more to a region or kingdom than to the shared Nordic language – the term ‘Danish tongue’ was in use as late as in the 14th century (Sandøy 2018: 156). While the names Denmark and Sweden are related to certain Germanic tribes, Norway literally just means ‘north/northern way’, i.e. ‘the way towards the northern region’. Danes and Swedes referred to Norwegians as ‘Northmen’ (Norsemen) (see e.g. also Mæhlum & Hårstad 2018: 247), whereas the emigrated Norwegian communities in Iceland and the Faroese Islands referred to their neighbours (and family) from Norway as ‘Eastmen’ (see e.g. Wessén 1960: 24). Hence, identity seemed to have been a matter of belonging to a region more than to a language community. The settlement of Iceland got a kick-start by the establishment of the Norwegian kingdom at the end of the

9th century where many 'Norwegians' or Norsemen decided to emigrate to Iceland and other western islands. After some time, these Norsemen developed an Icelandic identity. However, even after the introduction of the Latin alphabet after AD 1000 and the development of some forms of written standards, Norway and Iceland can be said to have shared the same or a similar linguistic identity on a higher level for some time. There were dialectal differences by the time of the 13th century, but it still took some time before the mainland Old Norse and island Old Norse divided into separate languages.

Naturally, because of political and geographical reasons, the Norse language on Iceland and the Faroese Islands eventually developed differently than the Norse language in Norway. Compare e.g. the first sentence of the Icelandic entry on Norwegian in Wikipedia with the corresponding Norwegian (Nynorsk) translation:

Norska er norrænt tungumál, sem talað er í Noregi.

Norsk er eit nordisk språk som blir tala/snakka i Noreg.

Icelandic and Faroese are often categorized as 'Island Scandinavian', whereas Norwegian, Danish and Swedish belong to 'Mainland Scandinavian'. Other scholars might use the term Nordic languages for all five languages and reserve the term Scandinavian for the three Mainland Scandinavian languages, Norwegian, Danish and Swedish. This is not that important in the present discussion. What is important is the fact that even though Icelandic had its offspring in Old Norse/Norwegian, the only trace of shared identity can be said to be related to the Old Icelandic saga literature, which is still used in both countries as a form of cultural identity marker. As a digression one could mention that the saga literature also played a role at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century where it was used as an attempt to create and legitimate a Pan-Germanic identity.

Here is not the place to deal with all the wars between Norway, Denmark and Sweden during the Middle Ages. The wars were about territory, kings, heritage, alliances and typical reasons for disputes during these times, but not necessarily about identity and certainly not about language. For some time, Norway, Denmark and Sweden were united under queen Margaret I (1353-1412). Obviously, the former wars and alliances between the three Scandinavian countries played a role, but in our discussion, it is interesting that the Kalmar Union (1389/1397–1521) initiated by queen Margaret I was meant to be a defence pact, among others against the German Hansa, i.e. a foreign financial and cultural power. Hence, one may imagine that there might have been a concept of Scandinavian unity and identity based on shared culture and language/dialects at that time. Even though the Scandinavian countries tried to deal with the German Hansa in different ways, German (Low German) had a huge impact on the Scandinavian languages (see e.g. Jahr 1995, Nesse 2002, Rambø 2008). One aspect of this was the fact that Low German was linguistically not too different from the Scandinavian languages. Hence, borrowing and transfer was relatively easy. Whether the language of the Hansa had higher status which subsequently might have led to accommodation (see e.g. Holmes 1992: 255) or whether it was the linguistic compatibility is not important in the present discussion. A fact is that the Scandinavian languages were shaped dramatically during the Hansa time and incorporated a huge number of German loanwords and grammatical structures (see e.g. Mørck 2018: 348). Maybe there have been Scandinavian individuals during that time who wanted to identify with the German merchants or the German language, but for the Scandinavian countries and culture as a whole it would not be possible to say that the language or culture was perceived more German. Scandinavians were still Scandinavians, and Norwegians were still Norwegians, the same way Danes were Danes and Swedes were Swedes. However, the German linguistic influence would play a role later in the history of Norway (and Denmark) when purism led to active language shaping and reshaping from the end of the 18th century.

One important aspect to remember so far in the history of Scandinavian is the fact that most people could not read or write and that most of the writing was concentrated around the domains of the king and the church. Therefore, we do not know very much about how common people thought or felt about

language and identity. But for the history of Norway and Norwegian as a language it is also important to know that Sweden left the union and that Norway, being the weakest part of the Denmark-Norway union was reduced to a Danish province from 1536.

The year 1536 is in many respects an important year in the Norwegian history since Denmark introduced the Reformation which consequently also came to Norway. From a linguistic point of view, the Reformation had a great impact since the Bible was translated into many national languages and the national language was used in church instead of Latin. Representing 'the word of God', Bible translations also served as a consolidation of or a standard for national languages. At that time, there was no official Norwegian written standard anymore. Neither was there a Norwegian political, intellectual or cultural elite. The Bible was only translated into Danish and from 1550, Danish was used in church and public administration. More and more positions were filled by Danish officials and Danish was the 'official' language of administration also in Norway, even though this was long before official language policies. From the perspective of language and identity, it is interesting to notice that national languages did not have any status in the Scandinavian countries from the 16th – 18th century. Due to the status of German and French kings and culture during those centuries, German and French had status while Danish and Norwegian did not. In fact, the Danish poet Christian Wilster (1827:63) wrote a poem about the famous Danish-Norwegian poet Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754) where he referred to the status of languages:

Hver Mand, som med Kløgtgik i Lærdom til Bund,
Latin paa Papiret kun malte,
Med Fruerne Fransk, og Tydsk med sin Hund,
Og Dansk med sin Tjener han talte.

Here, Wilster points at the situation that a well-educated man would write Latin, talk French to the ladies, German to his dog and Danish with his servant. However, the Danish language had more status in Norway than in Denmark since it was the language of administration and church, and Norwegian had no official status at all. In the 18th century, then, public school was introduced, which in effect led to a situation where everyone in Norway was supposed to learn to read and write Danish. Among other things, one had to learn the catechism (in Danish) by heart.

There are no signs of a Norwegian linguistic identity that led to political attempts to preserve the Norwegian language. However, there was a tendency to write more archaic Danish in Norway (15th century Danish) until the 17th century because this variety was closer to Norwegian dialects (Otnes & Aamotsbakken 1999/2017: 109). Otnes & Aamotsbakken (ibid.) also present a text from the end of the 17th century that shows that the writer is aware of his own Norwegian language in contrast to Latin, German, French and Russian. Most common people did not write (or read) and living far away from Denmark and the Danish king, most people did not seem to bother much about Danish versus Norwegian and their own linguistic identity. However, language might represent a barrier between the message and the people, and in this context, it is natural to mention the Norwegian priest Petter Dass (1647-1707) who also happened to write poems. Even though he wrote in Danish, he started using Norwegian words when he could not find corresponding or adequate Danish words. For instance, he would write Qveite instead of Danish Helleflyndre (halibut) or Kaabbe for Danish Sælhund (seal). This can be taken as a sign that a Norwegian writer started shaping the Danish language from the perspective of a Norwegian linguistic identity. Maybe he felt that he as a priest had to be genuine and close to his congregation, which, then, would refer to his personal identity. But most likely he chose to shape his (written) language in order to appeal to a group identity. Hence, language shaping was probably used to unify the congregation and create or state a common group identity.

By this time, the Age of Enlightenment had also come to Denmark-Norway. Among other things, this led to the first attempts to collect genuine Norwegian words and gather them in lists. Obviously, many

of the Danish officials stationed in Norwegian rural dialect-speaking regions would have felt a need to create such lists. Eventually, the time had also come for an interest in the Norwegian language itself. However, the introduction of the confirmation and the public school system in the first half of the 18th century fortified the Danish impact on the Norwegian language. No one could get married without being confirmed and having children without being married was a sin. This was obviously an important incentive to learn to read and to some extent speak Danish. Some individuals even tried to learn to speak Danish because they wanted to identify with the Danish elite. Obviously, the higher classes used Danish as a status symbol and at least to identify with their own class. During the 17th and 18th century it was clear that the Norwegian dialects in urban areas were more influenced by Danish than the dialects of rural areas. This was the reason why the 19th century linguist Ivar Aasen (1813-1896) wanted to exclude the urban dialects from his variety of 'genuine' Norwegian (see below).

The 19th century is the most important century for the Norwegian language and the subsequent period of language shaping and reshaping – and identity shaping – seen from a national perspective or group perspective. On the philosophy and literature side, romanticism and national romanticism had spread in Europe and eventually came to Norway. Among other ideologies from that time was the notion of 'one language – one nation' (see e.g. Mæhlum & Hårstad 2018: 288). Already at the beginning of the 19th century, the question came up why Norway did not have its own language. Then, in 1814, Norway got independent from Denmark after having been the weaker part of the union (and actually been reduced to a province) for 400 years. Suddenly, Norway got its own constitution. During the following decades this created a debate. The only official language in Norway was Danish, but due to the new idea of a genuine Norwegian identity it was not appropriate to call this language Danish. Instead one chose to refer to it as 'the common book language'. In the 19th and 20th century, then – actually, almost for two hundred years, national identity and language shaping and reshaping were defining processes.

In many respects, one could call the situation after 1814 an identity crisis. For hundreds of years one was supposed to be a part of the Danish kingdom, nation and language, and suddenly, one is supposed to find and define an independent Norwegian identity. From our perspective, the crucial point is here that this is a national identity project, hence a group identity project. One important part of national romanticism was literature and art where the writers and artists tried to find and describe the original and genuine soul of the nation and its people, for instance, by collecting folk tales and songs (cf. the Brothers Grimm in Germany). Folk tales, national theatre and national literature in general were a challenge for Norwegian national romanticism since it did not feel right to present them in the Danish language (anymore). Obviously, it was not easy to shape or reshape the (only) official language at that time, which was Danish, in public writing and administration. But authors had their own artistic freedom to search for and demonstrate the linguistic identity of the nation. Even though they were individual writers, the romantic 'project' during that time was a national group project. The vision was to identify and consolidate a Norwegian identity with and through language. The easiest way was, of course, on the lexical plan, i.e. to use genuine Norwegian words not found in Danish, but with Danish spelling in writing. However, some writers, e.g. Henrik Wergeland (1808-1845), also proposed concrete orthographic and grammatical changes that should be made to the written Danish language in order to make it more Norwegian.

However, many romantic writers and artist were radicals at that time when it comes to the use of language. Hundreds of years as 'the little brother of Denmark' had left their traces. The leading elite class still had strong ties to Denmark and the Danish language. In fact, oral speech among the upper class became even more Danish during the first part of the 19th century (see e.g. Jahr 1992: 12) since Copenhagen and Denmark still were seen as the only legitimate reference point for culture and proper education by the elite. Since there had not been any official Norwegian written language since the end

of the Old Norse period in the 14th century, there were only hundreds of different Norwegian dialects. In accordance with the common view at that time (a view that is still maintained in many countries today), dialects were not 'suitable' for academic thinking and writing. Hence, Danish seemed to be the only alternative as an official language in Norway. On the other hand, national romanticism was strong and the birth or rebirth of Norway in 1814 was a valid argument in line with the ideology of 'one language – one nation' or rather 'one nation – one language'.

Even though Norway was a more or less separate nation from 1814 (Norway was in another union with Sweden between 1814-1905, but with no significant impact on language and national identity), it is difficult to claim that there was a Norwegian linguistic identity on a national level. One of the romantic nationalists of that time, Jonas Anton Hielm (1782-1848), pointed at the linguistic differences in Norway by referring to three different linguistic varieties: 1 the dialects that were spoken in the valleys, 2 the Danish-influenced dialects that were spoken in the merchant cities, and 3 the written language, which was the same as in Denmark (see e.g. Otnes & Aamotsbakken 1999/2017:125). Even though Hielm considered the rural dialects the genuine Norwegian language, he proposed that a new Norwegian written norm should be based on urban speech. This could be considered an identity conflict. From the national romantic perspective, the Norwegian dialects spoken by farmers and fishermen in rural Norway represented the genuine Norwegian language with direct roots back to Old Norse. However, writers, scholars and politicians had all been socialized through their background and education into a culture where dialects did not have any status suitable for the leading class in society.

Here is not the place to go into too much detail, but the development of a national linguistic identity took three different directions in the 19th century. The most conservative groups wanted to continue as before, i.e. to write Danish and speak as close to Danish as possible. Other, more moderate, groups wanted to modify the Danish written language and shape it in accordance with the dialects used in the urban cities, which would not be too difficult since these dialects were heavily influenced by Danish. The third direction was radical in the way that the Norwegian rural dialects should build the base for an entirely new written Norwegian standard and all traces of non-Norwegian influence, especially from German, should be eradicated (purism).

From a political and identity perspective, the time for a pure Danish written language in Norway was over. But, interestingly, both of the two other alternatives were followed at the same time. Again, I will skip the details, but the two language shaping ways can be tied to two individuals. Knud Knudsen (1812-1895) tried to reshape Danish into a variety that was closer to Norwegian urban dialects, and Ivar Aasen (1813-1896), in fact, shaped a whole new written standard based on the traditional Norwegian dialects, excluding the urban city dialects. At that time, no one did foresee a situation where one would actually end up with two alternative written languages. The overall goal was to shape one Norwegian language. Hence, those two language shaping strategies were supposed to merge at some point in the future.

Obviously, there were some plain practical issues connected to the two ways of shaping a Norwegian language. Knud Knudsen chose 'the long way' by planning to modify the Danish written language bit by bit with small revisions over a long period of time until it reached a state where it could be considered Norwegian. This Danish-Norwegian variety could be adopted and implemented relatively easily without great effort. Ivar Aasen, on the other hand, presented a totally new variety of Norwegian that had not been used in this form before (since it was constructed as a symbiosis of all Norwegian dialects and not just one dialect), and that therefore felt unfamiliar and required some effort to learn and master, especially since there was such a short time of practical use and such a little text corpus at that time. Interestingly, Ivar Aasen himself still did all his academic writing in Danish. Nevertheless, the Norwegian government chose to give both Danish-Norwegian and the new Norwegian written language official status as national written languages (the so-called 'equality decision' (jamstillingsvedtaket) 1885). To some extent, one might say that this decision was made with an ideal Norwegian linguistic identity in

mind. From an ideological point of view, one accepted the premise that the new Norwegian language was the only genuine Norwegian language and, therefore, the 'right' choice. From a historical and practical point of view, most people only knew Danish as a written language and did not necessarily imagine any concrete Norwegian alternative.

Of course, having two official written languages created a dilemma. The curriculum had to be changed, and from now on, both written languages had to be taught at school and all pupils were supposed to learn both varieties since both were equally official languages. Due to pedagogical considerations, one decided to define one of the written varieties as the main language in school and the other one as the alternative language. But the choice of main language at school was not an individual choice. This choice was made by the municipality. Hence, every pupil in one municipality had to learn one of the varieties as the main written language and the other one as the alternative language. Language use or language shaping was, then, not on an individual level, but rather a matter of group ideology and politics.

At the beginning of the 20th century more and more municipalities chose the new Norwegian variety as their main written language. At the same time, there were several revisions of both written languages in order to make them more alike with the goal to merge them at some point in the future (1907, 1917, 1938, see e.g. Otnes & Aamotsbakken 1999/2017, ch. 7). For instance, Danish had lost the distinction between masculine and feminine gender, while Norwegian still had three grammatical genders. With the 1917 revision, genuine Norwegian female nouns could have the female ending -a (definite article suffix) in the Danish-Norwegian variety as an alternative, e.g. byen (masculine def., 'the city') vs. bygden or bygda (fem. def., 'the village'). Nynorsk, being based on the Norwegian dialects, already had the three-gender system. However, there was a distinction between strong and weak female nouns, strong female nouns having -i as the definite article suffix, weak female nouns having -a as the definite article suffix. Before 1907, thus, bygd could only have the suffix -i in the definite form, while it was made optional -i/-a with the 1917 revision. Hence, both the Danish-Norwegian variety and the new Norwegian variety could choose the form bygda as the definite form instead of bygden and bygdi, respectively (the more conservative forms were still allowed, though). This is just one example of the many adjustments that were made over time.

Note that the revisions (i.e. language shaping and reshaping) were state policy and had become more of a practical matter than a matter of national identity. As it turned out, every new revision of the written varieties resulted in criticism from each of the user groups (see e.g. Jahr 2015). Romantic nationalism was long over, and most people were not necessarily interested in merging both varieties into one written language. Instead the revisions were by many seen as creating a 'bastard language'. The writer Arnold Øverland (1889-1968), for instance, organized his own campaign against the revision of 1938 where he rhetorically asked whether the government had abolished the Norwegian language by destroying the two official varieties and creating a third one (Otnes & Aamotsbakken 1999/2017: 167). Few people imagined a merged Norwegian language as an ideal. Both varieties had developed their own linguistic culture and identity. However, the spreading of the new Norwegian language in the beginning of the 20th century was also seen as a threat by many conservatives (see e.g. Jahr 2015: 45). Before the Second World War, more than 30 % of the municipalities had chosen the new Norwegian language as their language of administration and by this as the main language taught at school (see e.g. Grepstad 2020). There was no concrete end point for the public policy for the merging process that was supposed to end in only one written language. With the growing number of communities that used the new Norwegian language, it must have felt like a battle between the two varieties where one of the varieties would win over the other. Consequently, many felt this as a battle of linguistic identities and defended their variety against the other variety instead of having a merged language as their future ideal.

After the Second World War, language policy gradually changed. Again, I will skip the details (see e.g. Jahr 2015). In 1952, the government created a national language council in order to deal with language issues on the way towards one written language. However, during the following decades it became more and more clear that the public opinion made it impossible to merge the two official varieties into one language. Now in the 21st century, the one-language policy is officially abandoned. Each of the varieties had its own revision in 2005 and 2012, only this time the revisions were made without the goal to make the two varieties more alike. They were independent revisions with the purpose to shape and consolidate each variety on its own terms. The official language policy states that there is one Norwegian language, and that the Norwegian language consists of all Norwegian dialects and the two official written varieties (and Norwegian sign language which is not discussed here).

From an overall perspective, one can see language identity and language shaping/reshaping in the form of standardization and a large number of revisions of both language varieties during the 20th century as an attempt by the government to create a linguistic group identity. After the introduction of radio and television, written official standards also had an impact on oral speech (see e.g. Hårstad & Opsahl 2013: 152). During the 1970s, however, a 'dialect wave' came over many countries in Europe (see e.g. Grijp 2007 for Dutch). From that time on, one can speak of shaping and reshaping the linguistic identity of and by individuals independently of governmental language policy. Of course, we are not necessarily speaking of *ideolects* and individual linguistic identity in a narrow sense. The use of dialect in music and in public speech can be said to be an attempt to identify with smaller groups than the nation one is a citizen of. For instance, before the 1970s, people from other regions usually were forced to change their dialect and accommodate to the oral speech in Oslo when they moved to the capital. In fact, speaking another dialect could in some cases effectively prevent you from getting a job or even a place to live in Oslo. In today's society, one is – in principle – entitled to use dialect in all areas where oral speech is used. The politicians in the government speak their individual dialects and the current prime minister, Erna Solberg, speaks her Bergen dialect and not a dialect from the Oslo area. Even in television and radio, dialect-tainted speech has conquered almost every domain, even the news.

These are some interesting dynamics. On the one hand, we have official written standards. On the other hand, we have the desire to maintain a linguistic identity based on regional dialects which in some cases may deviate a lot from the written standards. Still, in this context one may rather speak of several linguistic identities, where the first language or 'mother tongue', if you like, is the regional dialect one learned before one went to school and had to learn to write the official written language(s). From that perspective, there is not necessarily any reshaping of linguistic identity involved. However, even though most Norwegians, in one way or the other, feel connected to their original regional dialect, the impact of the written language is strong.

After the Second World War, the use of the new Norwegian variety has dropped to 12 % (Grepstad 2020:564). The Dano-Norwegian variety is totally dominating public communication, popular culture and media – if we disregard the fact that English is even more dominating in certain domains. From this perspective, one might say that Dano-Norwegian has 'won' over the new Norwegian variety when it comes to the actual use and the impact. Even though most Norwegians speak dialects, more and more adolescents 'shape' their speech unconsciously or consciously towards their written language (see e.g. Hårstad & Opsahl 2013: 148), which at the same time has most in common with the dialects around the capitol Oslo (see e.g. Hårstad & Opsahl 2013: 151). Hence, identity shaping is not necessarily any longer about belonging to a certain region. The introduction of the internet and national and global social communities led to the development of what one might call hybrid linguistic identities. Hårstad & Opsahl (2013: 23), for instance, observe that despite the potential freedom of linguistic choice and identity in the postmodern age, there is a striking tendency to make traditional and similar choices.

Unlike most other languages, both Norwegian written varieties – as a remnant of the merging process during the 20th century – exhibit a rather huge amount of so-called optional forms. Remember that the original language policy had been to merge the two official written varieties into one written form. One way to achieve this was to offer optional forms in both varieties that were the same, with an underlying idea that people would choose to use these forms and abandon the forms that were not equal. In praxis, this has been a policy of limited success. For instance, in Bokmål (Dano-Norwegian) one can choose past forms that are equal to the Nynorsk (New Norwegian) forms. Both *kastet* and *kasta* are official preterite forms of the verb *kaste* ('cast'). *Kasta* is also the most frequent form in Norwegian dialects. Nevertheless, there is a tendency to conformity and to choose the more conservative form *kastet* (Danish *kastede*) in Bokmål. Also, Norwegian is a language with three grammatical genders (masculine, feminine, neuter). In Danish, as mentioned before, masculine and feminine merged into one form (identical with masculine). Since the upper class in the capital was used to speak Danish or close to Danish, feminine forms were conceived as vulgar forms belonging to the dialects of common people. Still today, the sociolects of Oslo West (traditionally upper class) and Oslo East (traditionally working class) often may be distinguished by the use or lack of feminine nouns. Even though the working-class dialect/sociolect from Oslo has gained status since the 1970s, there is an interesting tendency that some urban dialects start to use masculine forms of nouns instead of the traditional feminine forms (see e.g. Busterud et al. 2019). Formally, Bokmål, the Dano-Norwegian variety, allows to avoid more or less all feminine nouns. This is not an option in Nynorsk, the new Norwegian variety, which has a full three-gender system. This shows that shaping of linguistic identity is a complicated process. One perspective could be that abandoning feminine noun inflection might be an attempt to signal an identity related to a more conservative writing tradition and an abstract concept of an urban and slightly higher class. Another perspective could be that feminine nouns are associated with rural dialects and/or Nynorsk; hence, they have less status. It is not possible to dive deeper into that topic here.

The generation born right before and after the millennium shift is sometimes referred to as Generation Z. One trait of this generation is that they have not lived without the internet. On the contrary, social media has been an important part of their life and identity from early age on. Another trait of this generation is the fact that everyone is writing and producing text on a much larger scale than ever before in history. In Norway, many children are introduced to iPads/tablets already in kindergarten or primary school. It is not unusual for ten-year-old children to have their own mobile phone and the way to social media is not long either, even before legal age (which is normally 13 years). Naturally, most young children do not master the written language perfectly yet. The driving force is communication and the tool is phonological, dialect-based writing. The young communicators learn relative early that dialect-based writing is associated with close relations and informal writing whereas school writing is associated with written norms and standards. The 'real' linguistic identity is shaped by trying to write as closely as possible to the way one actually speaks. Dialect in itself is not necessarily a goal. In the 21st century, every entry on social media is usually individual and not as a representative of a group.

Since Norwegian spelling and writing already has many optional forms in the standards of both written varieties and the use of dialect or dialect-tainted speech is common, the use of dialect-tainted writing is also a way to escape 'the red pen' of the teacher and other adults or peers. Individual linguistic identity in social media has become a reality in Norway. If anyone tries to criticise the declination or spelling, one can always reply that this is the way I speak or choose to express myself, and this is my right to do. 'Hiding' behind free spelling like this takes the pressure away and makes it even easier for adolescents to use social media as a platform.

If we draw in the perspective of 'the role of language in education', the relationship between the two written varieties is interesting. Not only is there a discrepancy in the use, where Bokmål is the main

written language for 88 % of the pupils, whereas only 12% have Nynorsk as their main written language (Grepstad 2020: 564). Bokmål being the dominant language in almost every domain in the Norwegian society is impossible to ignore no matter what political or personal preferences one might have. From this perspective, Nynorsk users would normally have a kind of extended linguistic identity that includes both written varieties. Nynorsk being the lesser-used language (see e.g. Walton 2015) can be more or less non-existent in certain domains and is much easier to ignore or avoid. Since all pupils (with few exceptions) are expected to learn both written varieties in school many pupils develop antipathies against Nynorsk (which lives on in the Norwegian society in general). Hence, Nynorsk is not necessarily a language that those pupils would identify with – even if they speak dialects that are more similar to Nynorsk than to Bokmål (see e.g. Haugan 2017, 2019). This discrepancy, then, has an effect on language shaping. While many Nynorsk users would consciously or unconsciously use Bokmål words and inflections because of the exposure and the dominant or more neutral status of Bokmål this does not happen in the same way the other way round (see e.g. Goffeney 2015). Few Bokmål users would normally want to be associated with a Nynorsk identity since they have been socialized from early age on to think that all pupils (and parents) dislike Nynorsk. There are numerous jokes about Nynorsk, and stand-up comedians and other shows or movie clips mocking Nynorsk in public whereas there is no such genre for making fun of Bokmål. Furthermore, there are returning attempts by pupils and politicians to remove Nynorsk as an obligatory subject in school where it is argued that it should be a free choice of written variety in school. The temperature in these public debates can be rather high and Nynorsk can be a typical hate object in the Norwegian public on the same level as the debate whether there should be wolves in Norway or not. However, whereas it is in principle possible to avoid Nynorsk for a Bokmål user, it would not be possible to avoid Bokmål for a Nynorsk user due to the ubiquitous presence of Bokmål in all public domains. Hence, it would not be a free choice for a Nynorsk user.

Even though one could say that the majority of Norwegians have a Bokmål identity in writing, this linguistic identity is not necessarily very conscious or based on active choices. Since the majority of pupils learn Bokmål as their first language in school, they just continue with it without necessarily reflecting upon it. Nynorsk as the (way) lesser-used language is a constant identity choice that often has to be defended. Even pupils who start learning Nynorsk as their main language in school might choose to change their main language to Bokmål during lower or upper secondary school (probably 25% (Grepstad 2020: 584)). Those who choose to continue with Nynorsk (and those who change from Bokmål to Nynorsk for some reason) usually have a more conscious linguistic identity. Interestingly, there exists a concrete word for a Nynorsk user or a Nynorsk identity: *nynorsking*, while there is no such word for a Bokmål user (there are, of course, the neutral terms *Nynorsk user* and *Bokmål user*, i.e. *nynorskbrukar* – *bokmålsbrukar*, respectively).

However, Generation Z has been socialized into a hybrid text culture where text on social media usually is perceived as a variety of oral speech rather than standardized written language (see e.g. Otnes 2007; see also Hagland, Nesse & Otnes 2018: 77). Using standard Bokmål or Nynorsk on social media is often associated with older users or adults (Eiksund 2015:45). Adolescents need to shape their own identity with and through language. On the other hand, Nynorsk as the lesser-used language with well-known antipathies in the Bokmål society may be conceived too marked in certain contexts, even for a Nynorsk user who normally professes to Nynorsk as his or her linguistic identity. When addressing a public audience outside the inner circle, even those Nynorsk users might choose to write Bokmål (see e.g. Myklebust 2015, Juuhl 2015). Nynorsk users, thus, have a greater toolbox when it comes to shaping, reshaping and presenting one or several identities with or through language. Bokmål as the majority language is in many respects neutral and can therefore be chosen as one of the linguistic varieties by all users. Nynorsk, on the other hand, is marked and would normally be totally avoided by most Bokmål users. Hence, there are fewer linguistic tools to ‘play with’ to shape identity. From an overall

perspective, with two official written varieties with several sub-standards, some non-standard written varieties, and the high number of regional dialects that may be used in public communication, Norwegian like few other languages offers many possibilities to shape and reshape identity on an individual level.

Conclusions

In this paper, I have tried to show how shaping identity with and through language has changed during the history of the Norwegian society and language. While it can be said that there was little awareness about language as an identity marker during the middle ages, at best referring to a shared Scandinavian identity, language shaping happened to a large extent due to external forces represented by not the least the German Hansa and Denmark from AD 1200-1800. Between 1800 and 2000 (1970), then, linguistic identity can be said to have been a group project, even though this group project divided into two different linguistic varieties and identities, Bokmål and Nynorsk. Norwegian as a language today is constituted by the two official written standards (and some non-official standards that have not been mentioned in this paper) and all the hundreds of dialects/sociolects/ideolects that people use in speech and partly in writing. In today's society, linguistic identity is to a large extent individual language shaping. At the same time, there is still a tendency to accommodate to a group standard and identity.

If we try to relate this picture to the four areas are the Educational Role of Language network: Language-Beliefs, Language-Activity, Language-Affect, and Language-Thinking (ERL Research 2021), it is clear that the Language-Beliefs of most members of Generation Z imply that Bokmål is the 'real' Norwegian language and standard. This is expressed by the fact that the Language-Activity exhibits accommodation to Bokmål even though when one tries to shape the identity by using dialect-tainted language. Language-Affect has been an important part of Norwegian history since the 19th century with the continuous 'fight' between the two written standards. Many Norwegians dislike Nynorsk and would not count this variety as a part of their identity. Language-Thinking has not been discussed in this paper, but one aspect of this is the fact that many pupils feel that Bokmål is better suited for academic writing. This claim has existed in various forms since the 19th century (see e.g. Walton 2015).

What remains to be seen is whether the extensive use of dialect-tainted language in digital writing eventually leads to a form of merging of Bokmål and Nynorsk after all. Maybe Norwegian develops into one language standard and one linguistic identity after all. In that case, it will be through democratic shaping and reshaping of the language in social media with subsequent extension to other domains if or when official language policy and the school system opens for lesser narrow standards. This story is for future generations to tell.

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