

## Norwegian in the American Midwest: A common lexicolect

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### Abstract

The American Midwest is an area that stretches over huge distances. Yet it seems that the Norwegian language in this whole area has some similarities, particularly at the lexical level. Comparisons of three types of vocabulary across the whole area, as well as across time, building on accounts in the previous literature from Haugen (1953) onwards, are carried out. The results of these comparisons convince the authors that it is justified to refer to this language as one lexically defined dialect, which we call *lexicolect*.

**Keywords:** Heritage Norwegian, loanwords, types of words, one common language variety, different dialects, koiné, diglossia, lexicolect

### 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

During the first fieldwork the present authors undertook in 2010, an unfamiliar use of certain words came to our attention. This was all the more noticeable since it happened across vast distances in the American Midwest. That a new speech variety can develop in a close-knit community is not surprising. It is also possible to see how members of a society tied together by mass media, especially radio, television and social media, can develop a common language variety. However, when people live far apart in a vast and sparsely populated area like the American Midwest, one would have thought it less likely that the language would develop common linguistic features. Add to this that travel was hard, expensive and time-consuming, and the relevant mass media only existed in print. Yet the Norwegian Heritage language as it developed from approximately 1850 to 1950 did have a common linguistic development at word level.

The goal of this paper is to show that Heritage Norwegian communities have three types of lexical development in common: a) words borrowed from English to coin concepts that were unknown in the old country, b) words borrowed from English to replace Norwegian words, and c) word meanings borrowed from English onto Norwegian

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<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank the three anonymous reviewers for very constructive comments. We are also grateful to Arnstein Hjelde, Joe Salmons, Helge Sandøy and Øystein Alexander Vangsnes, as well as participants at *Nionde nordiska dialektologkonferensen* in Uppsala, 18.-20. August 2010, and at the workshop *Languages abroad*, Gothenburg, 24.-25. October 2012 (organised by Maia Andreasson, Christiane Andresen and Benjamin Lyngfelt), for useful comments. We would also like to thank all our wonderful informants. Without them this work would not have been possible.

words with the same form. This common development shows that the language in the Midwest should be viewed as a linguistic unit. We discuss how to classify this kind of variety, and coin the term *lexicolect*.

The basis for the paper is first and foremost fieldwork that was done in 2010 by the authors, though we also use some additional material towards the end of the paper.<sup>2</sup> Our contention that American Norwegian in the Midwest is a single language variety is in many ways surprising. There are 800 kilometres between the two extreme points (Westby, WI, and Hatton, ND) from which the data for this paper are taken. Also, this is an area to which people immigrated from all over Norway; Haugen (1953:343) describes, for example, how in western Wisconsin "we find practically all the major dialects of Norway". We will present our findings in light of the work of Haugen (1953) and Hjelde (1992). We disagree with Haugen (1953), who claimed that a common dialect was developed in the direction of the written norm of "Dano-Norwegian" (see Section 1.2, and Johannessen and Laake, 2015). Certainly, the new vocabulary amongst the American Norwegians does not go in such a direction.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 gives a background introduction to the informants investigated in the paper. Section 3 presents some typical types of language varieties. Section 4 presents two specific syntactic phenomena that show that the language is structurally unchanged. In Section 5 three types of vocabulary change serve as an argument that the American Midwest Norwegian is a new and single language variety. In Section 6 the data are supplemented with more data, and discussed with respect to the language types presented earlier, resulting in the suggestion that the language should be regarded as a lexicolect rather than as a dialect or a koiné, and that there might have been a bidialectal, almost diglossic language situation at the time when Norwegian was one of the major languages in many communities in the Midwest. Section 7 concludes the paper.

## 2. Informants

The fieldwork on which this article is primarily based, took place in March 2010. To obtain informants we placed advertisements in three Norwegian American periodicals: *The Viking Magazine*, *The Norwegian American Weekly* and *The Norseman*. Through these, we wanted to get in contact with descendants of Norwegian immigrants to America. The immigration should have taken place before 1920, and the descendants should speak Norwegian as a result of having learned it at home in the family. We contacted the informants who answered our ads, and our fieldwork itinerary spanned twelve days covering 3518 kilometres and 31 informant visits. The tour included large parts of the Midwest: nine locations in five states (Chicago, IL, Westby, WI, Sunburg, MN, Starbuck, MN, Albert Lea, MN, Stillwater, MN, Webster, SD, Hatton, ND and Grand Forks, ND).

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<sup>2</sup> The fieldwork was part of the project Norwegian American Dialect Syntax (NorAmDiaSyn), financed by the Norwegian Research Council, as a special subproject under the big dialect project Norwegian Dialect Syntax. Johannessen has done more fieldwork later, but that plays only a minor role in the present paper.

All our informants were descendants of Norwegian immigrants, and they varied between second and fifth generation immigrants. The Norwegian language spoken in the Midwest is a dying language, and our informants are aged 67-90 years. We did about an hour of video recording with each informant, typically a twenty-minute interview with one of us in addition to a forty-minute conversation between two informants. Most had never visited Norway and had never spoken Norwegian with someone so much younger than themselves. Our conversations for the most part went completely fluently in Norwegian once we fieldworkers learned to substitute our Oslo dialect with question words and inflections from the dialects of the valleys in eastern Norway.

For the present paper we have chosen to investigate five informants from Wisconsin, Minnesota and North Dakota, covering a distance of 800 km, see Table 1. They have been chosen because they speak fluent Norwegian, and because they live far apart; together they cover a large area of the Midwest. Their ancestors come from the same area in Norway (eastern valley districts). For the present study this is irrelevant, since what we are investigating is vocabulary that has clearly developed after the ancestors settled in America. In addition to these key informants, we have also used other informants from other fieldwork to substantiate our claims.

Archie (A)	Florence (F)	Howard (H)	Eunice (E)	Olaf (O)
Westby (WI)	Westby (WI)	Westby (WI)	Sunburg (MN)	Hatton (ND)
79 years old	87 years old	82 years old	84 years old	83 years old
Grandparents: Gudbrands- dalen (Hødalen)	Grandparents: Gudbrands- dalen (Tretten+ Ringebu)	Great grandparents: Gausdal	Grandparents: Gudbrands- dalen	Grandparents: Hallingdal and Telemark
One two-week visit to Norway	Never been to Norway	Never been to Norway	Never been to Norway	One one-week visit to Norway
Has had some contact with Norwegians. Can read Norwegian	Has not had much contact with Norwegians	Has had some contact with Norwegians and reads Norwegian	Has had some visits from Norway in the 1970s	Has not had much contact with Norwegians

Table 1: Main informants in this paper

Each informant will be represented by the first letter of his or her name at the end of each example line. Since the examples are taken from spontaneous speech in conversations of varying length and on different topics, not all phenomena occur in the recordings. It does not follow, of course, that if a phenomenon is not documented for each informant, it does not exist in their language.

### 3. Heritage language dialect and koiné

In this section we will give some background on the concepts of heritage language and koiné language. Both are relevant to understanding the status of the Norwegian language in America, both generally and specifically with respect to the main claim of this paper; that of Norwegian being one variety in spite of linguistic differences among the speakers. The Norwegian language spoken in North America is a heritage language. There are several definitions of this term for example, by Fishman (2001), Valdés (2000), Polinsky and Kagan (2007), Rothman (2009), and Benmamoun, Montrul and Polinsky (2013.) Rothman's definition (2009:159) covers our kind of heritage speakers, who can have many generations of heritage speakers before themselves: "A language qualifies as a heritage language if it is a language spoken at home or otherwise readily available to young children, and crucially this language is not a dominant language of the larger (national) society."

Recently, the study of immigrant heritage languages in America has become a major research area, as witnessed, for example, in two volumes that have both appeared this year: Page and Putnam (2015) and Johannessen and Salmons (2015). It should be noted that a heritage language does not have to be an immigrant language, though Norwegian definitely is also a language that has immigrated to North America from Europe. Studying heritage languages often involves looking at phenomena that are due to language contact with the majority language. Immigrant languages have an interesting added dimension in that it is possible compare the migrated language with the language that stayed behind. The present paper has both perspectives.

As we shall see in subsequent sections the Norwegian language in the American Midwest has had a lexical development that makes it different from European Norwegian. This language therefore should be considered as a special variety of Norwegian, and we will try to determine what kind of linguistic classification would be suitable. There are two likely candidates: a new dialect or a koiné.

Crystal (1985) defines dialect as "a regionally or socially distinctive variety of a language identified by a particular set of words and grammatical structures." Sandøy (1985:16) defines dialect as a language system related to a particular location. Dictionary definitions say the same: "a regional variety of language distinguished by features of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation from other regional varieties and constituting together with them a single language" (<http://www.merriam-webster.com>). Notice that the lexicon is not mentioned by any as being enough to define a dialect. We will get back to this in Section 6.

The term koiné was originally used for the variety of Greek that became the lingua franca of the eastern Mediterranean during the Hellenistic and Roman periods (Siegel, 1985:358-359). This original koiné comprised features of several regional varieties, but it was primarily based on one of them. Linguistically it was reduced and simplified. Siegel points out that a definition of a koiné must encapsulate certain linguistic and sociolinguistic concepts. Siegel (2001:175) defines koiné thus:

*A koine is a stabilized contact variety which results from the mixing and subsequent levelling of features of varieties which are similar enough to be mutually intelligible, such as regional or social dialects. This occurs in the*

*context of increased interaction or integration among speakers of these varieties.*

He distinguished between two types of koiné: a regional koiné and an immigrant koiné. A regional koiné is usually the result of contact between regional dialects of what is considered a single language. This regional koiné typically remains in the region where the contributing dialects are spoken. An immigrant koiné may also be the result of contact between regional dialects, however the contact takes place not in the region where the dialects originate, but in another location where there are a large number of dialect speakers from different regions have migrated. The immigrant koiné often becomes the primary language of the immigrant community and eventually makes the contributing dialects obsolete (Siegel, 1985:363-364).

Siegel also discusses the possibility that koiné and koineization could include the mixing of different languages and not be restricted to dialect mixing, but rejects this possibility. The language variety that might occur in a contact situation with two different languages is the result of borrowing and not koineization. The latter is characterized by reduction or simplification (Siegel 1985:363). Kerswill (2013:520, quoting Mülhüsler (1980)) specifies that reduction involves a reduced vocabulary of fewer stylistic devices, while simplification refers to either an increase in regularity or a decrease in markedness. This means a decrease in irregularity in morphology and an increase in invariable word forms. Trudgill (1986:103-105) adds that koinéization leads to symmetrical paradigms, fewer obligatory categories marked by morphemes of concord, simpler morphophonetics and reduction in the number of phonemes as examples of simplification.

We shall get back to the concepts of koiné and dialect with respect to Heritage Norwegian in Section 6.

#### **4. The syntax of the Norwegian language in America is stable**

Little has been written about the syntax of American Norwegian, although this situation seems about to change, given a special issue of the Norwegian Journal of Linguistics (*Norsk Lingvistisk tidsskrift*) in 2012 and two volumes of papers on immigrant Germanic languages in America: Page and Putnam (2015) and Johannessen and Salmons (2015). Haugen (1953:457) actually says: “Norwegian word order is similar to English, and offers no serious problems in the adaption of loanwords”. Much of Norwegian syntax, however, is very different from English. This fact can be used to check whether a particular group of American Norwegians speak the same variety, or whether some of them have constructions that have changed, perhaps in the direction of English.

Here we will only present a couple of syntactic phenomena, in order to show that they are stable amongst our informants. This is in spite of the fact that they are not part of standard Norwegian (i.e. in the standard written forms) or occur in English, and therefore plausibly could have changed or been simplified. The examples show that the Heritage Norwegian language is basically intact.

##### *4.1 The prepositional article*

Most Norwegian dialects have a preposed article in the form of a pronoun used with names and some name-like kinship terms (Faarlund et al., 1997:247, Håberg 2010, Johannessen and Garbacz 2013). All our five interviewees have a Norwegian dialect background from the valleys in the southeast, where one traditionally finds these preproprial articles. Its use is widespread amongst all our respondents. Eunice, Archie, Florence and Howard use it consistently with all names, while Olaf is not as consistent, but still uses it with a majority of names.

- (1) a. n Hans og n Anton (A)  
 he Hans and he Anton  
 'Hans and Anton'
- b. ho Lina Bakkom (F)  
 she Lina Bakkom  
 'Lina Bakkom'
- c. n Jerome og Amy (O)  
 he Jerome and Amy  
 'Jerome and Amy'
- d. ho Jane (E)  
 she Jane  
 'Jane'
- e. ho Susan Galstad (H)  
 she Susan Galstad  
 'Susan Galstad'

We do not go into the conditions of use for the preproprial article here. They differ somewhat from dialect to dialect. For example, in some dialects it is obligatory for all names (this seems to be the case for North Norwegian dialects), while for others it is used only with first, given names (some dialects of southern Norway, see for example Faarlund (2000) on the Toten dialect). The most important thing for us to point out here is the fact that this article exists for all our informants and that English has not influenced the language in a direction of non-use of this article.

#### 4.2 Possessive constructions

Possession is expressed in several ways in Norwegian dialects, many which are not possible in English. Here we present some of these as they are used amongst our informants.

- (2) a. mor hennes Karen (A)  
 mother her Karen  
 'Karen's mother'

- b.     mann-en        hennes                   (A)  
        husband-DEF her  
        'her husband'
- c.     bror    å        mor    di                   (F)  
        brother to     mother your  
        'your mother's brother'
- d.     fetter-ane        dommers                   (F)  
        cousins-DEF their  
        'their cousins'
- e.     plass-en        hass                   (O)  
        place-DEF     his  
        'his place'
- f.     syster hass                   (E)  
        sister his  
        'his sister'
- g.     onkel-en        min                   (E)  
        uncle-DEF     my  
        'my uncle'

In Norwegian, one of the common ways of expressing possession is to form a phrase consisting of the possessed noun with the definiteness suffix + a possessive pronoun, as in (2b,d,e,g). As discussed in Lødrup (2014) certain kinship terms (especially *mor* 'mother', *far* 'father' and *bror* 'brother') can also occur without a definiteness suffix when possessed. We see examples of this in (2a,c,f). The latter is not part of the written language standard. Our informants are well acquainted with both types and use them. The possessive constructions are thus not influenced by English.

We have shown two kinds of syntactic phenomena here, prepositional articles and possession constructions, to illustrate that there are central parts of the syntax of our informants that are not influenced by English. They have all retained these constructions, across the vast area of the Midwest. Johannessen and Laake (2012, 2015) take a closer look at more syntactic constructions amongst these informants. In these two articles we show that although the American Norwegian is not an archaic form of Norwegian, the syntactic dialect traits are retained. One example of this is the syntax of wh-questions in main clauses where many Norwegian dialect can have V3 instead of the normal V2 order. Our informants had V3 in wh-question. (Johannessen and Laake, 2012:369). Another example of a retained dialect trait is the inflection of finite verbs and the two infinitival suffixes found in many Norwegian dialects (Johannessen and Laake 2015:304-306).

## 5. The vocabulary in the Norwegian language in America

We have presented two syntactic construction types to illustrate that we find the language of our informants to be very similar across the whole Midwest. However, we will use vocabulary changes to argue that the speech of our informants can be said to constitute a new American Norwegian variety.

A striking feature of the language of the Norwegian Midwest Americans, are, of course, the loanwords. It is especially interesting to see whether they are established words or whether they are just so-called random loan (nonce borrowings, Romaine 1995). If words are established amongst multiple informants over a larger area, and over time, they must be said to be part of a common language, which indicates that there is a common dialect. Below we show three tables. We have sorted the words into three groups:

- A: words for things or concepts that did not exist in Norway
- B: words that have replaced existing Norwegian words
- C: words that have a new meaning

Table 2 shows loanwords of type A. The first column shows the borrowed word into American Norwegian; the second column shows the modern Norwegian word while the third column shows the original English word. In the fourth column, we show who of our five participants have used the word in our sample, while column five shows where, if anywhere, in the literature it was first mentioned: Haugen (1953) or alternatively in Hjelde (1992).

<b>American Norwegian</b>	<b>Modern European Norwegian</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Informant</b>	<b>Word first documented in</b>
breiken	bremsen	the brake	H	Ha1953
caran	bilene	the cars	E	Ha1953
college	høyskole/college	college	O	Hj1992
cookies	kjeks	cookies	E	Hj1992
excercise	trening	excercise	H	--
garagen	garasjen	the garage	H	Ha1953
grillen	grillen på bilen	the grill	H	--
lieutenant	betjent	lieutenant	H	--
loadern	traktortilhengeren	the loader	H	--
pickupen	pickupen	the pickup	H, O	Hj1992
retira	pensjonert	retired	H	Hj1992
rig	utstyr	rig	A	Hj1992



sportsgaman	sportskampene	the sports games	H	--
trækter	traktor	tractor	H	Ha1953
trøkk	trøkk	truck	H	Ha1953
tv	tv	tv	H	Hj1992

Table 2: Loanwords of type A (for things that did not exist in Norway)

We see that most of the words are used by at least one of our informants, and in addition are also mentioned in the previous literature on the American Norwegian language. The word *pickup* was used by two informants from different states: both Howard (WI) and Olaf (ND) use this word. The word is also documented in Hjelde (1992). As mentioned above, the conversations that our recordings are based on are relatively short, so it is almost surprising if different pairs of informants have talked about the same topics, and hence used the same words. In spite of that, several actually did do this. *Retaira* ('retired'.PAST) is a word we heard many times, even though it is only documented once in the recordings.

Since most of the words are documented in Haugen (1953) and Hjelde (1992), we understand that they must have a certain distribution in time and space, since their surveys are done earlier than ours and with informants from different (though to some extent overlapping) areas. They must therefore be said to be part of a common vocabulary of American Norwegian. However, there is nothing surprising in the words of type A, and it is conceivable that other heritage languages have many of the same ones.

Table 3 shows type B, in which English loanwords have taken over existing European Norwegian ones. This group carries much more weight than type A, since the words in this group are less predictable. It is interesting that the American words were borrowed into Norwegian, not just words for new concepts, but also words that replaced the Norwegian word for the same concept. Haugen also noted this phenomenon (1953: Ch.14).

American Norwegian	Modern European Norwegian	English	Informant	Word first documented in
ditchen	grøfta	the ditch	O	Ha1953
ekspekte	forvente	expect	E	--
farm	gård	farm	E, O	Ha1953
figgera ut	funnet ut	figured out	H, O	Ha1953
filda	jordet	the field	H	Ha1953
grævel	grus	gravel	O	Ha1953

grandchildren	barnebarn	grandchildren	E	Ha1953
høgskola	gymnaset	the high school	O	Ha1953
job	jobb/arbeid	job	H	Ha1953
kidsa	barna	the kids	O	Ha1953
krikken	bekken	the creek	A	Ha1953
liver	bor, lever	lives	A, F, O, E	Ha1953
mil	amerikansk mile	mile	O	Ha1953
nå	nei	no	A, O, E, F, H	Ha1953
nekste	neste	next	O	Ha1953
planar	planlegger	plans	O	Ha1953
pleide	lekte	played	E	Ha1953
plenty	mye	plenty	O	Ha1953
quilten	lappeteppet	the quilt	E	Ha1953
rådn	veien	the road	A, H, O, E	Ha1953
recess	friminutt	recess	E	Hj1992
travle*	travle/gå	(travel) walk	E, F, A	Ha1953

Table 3: Loanwords of type B (words that have taken over for existing Norwegian ones)

\* The verb *travle* 'walk' has an uncertain history and is discussed below.

In Table 3, too, we see that some of the words have been uttered by several informants, in some cases by all five. One example is *nå* 'no', which has replaced *nei*. It is used by all five informants, in other words in all the three states WI, MN and ND, and is also documented in Haugen (1953).<sup>3</sup> Another typical example is *rådn* 'road'.DEF, documented in all our informants and also in Haugen's work.

The verb *travle* /<sup>2</sup>*travle* 'walk' is interesting. It was documented by Haugen (1953) and also found in the recordings of three of our informants, but we heard it used by many more speakers. The meaning of this word is somewhat unexpected, since it means 'walk on foot' and not 'travel' or even 'go' like its English counterpart. The European Norwegian verb *gå* 'walk', on the other hand, is not used with its original meaning in American Norwegian, but seems to have acquired the meaning of its

<sup>3</sup> The word *nei* still exists in American Norwegian, but now as a discourse marker, not as negation. Typically it will be used as a reaction to a dramatic story told by a discourse partner. It will be uttered with a vivid intonation and signals much interest in the story told: "Neeei!".

American English counterpart *go* ‘move from one place to another in a method or manner not specified’. It is exemplified below, (3), by our informant Archie (see Table 1) and a female speaker from Sunburg, Minnesota.

(3)

- a. ja mor mi fortalte hun **travla** heim att ifra Springdalsskolen og opp Springdalsbloffa en gang, og da var det tre ulver som gikk over roaden (westby\_WI\_01gm)

‘Yes, my mother told us that once when she **walked** from the school up the hill, there were three wolves that went across the road.’

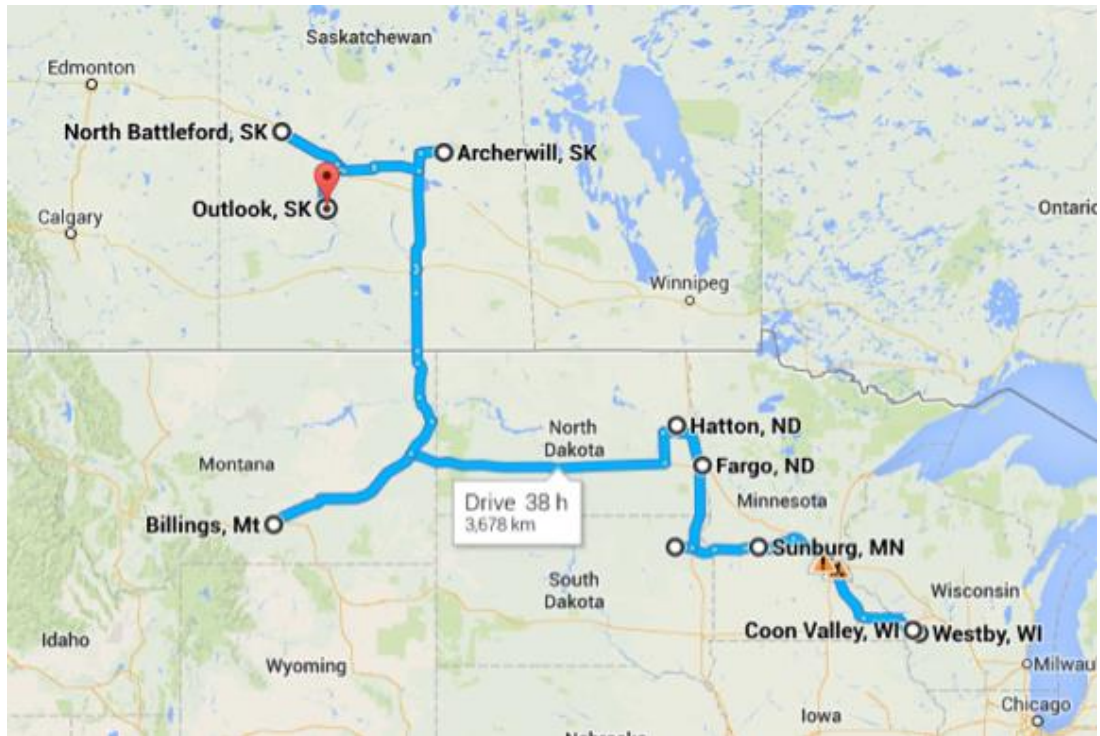
- b. tre det var tre mil fra meg men e jeg jeg **travla** ikke støtt jeg for hun e tanta mi tok meg med bil (sunburg\_MN\_04gk)

‘It was three miles from us but I didn’t always **walk**, since my aunt took me in her car.’

It is not clear exactly how the meaning of the American Norwegian *travle* ‘walk’ has developed, and it is even possible that it should have been categorized as type C. It is obviously not a direct loan from American English. Haugen (1953) speculates that while he does not think it is an original Norwegian word, it probably has moved into American Norwegian from British dialect-speaking immigrants. But closer surveys reveal that *travle* can actually be found in Norwegian dialects, although according to written sources, the meaning is then somewhat more specialised: the slip archive of the Norwegian dialect dictionary (*Setelarkivet, Norsk Ordbok 2014*) gives the meanings *skynde seg* ‘be in a hurry’, *trave* ‘walk fast’ or *slite* ‘struggle’. However, after presenting this mystery in a radio program, the present authors have been contacted by people from several parts of Norway (from Finnmark in the far north to Rogaland in the south) who tell us that they actually use the verb *travle* to mean ‘walk about on foot’. Whatever the history of the word in American Norwegian, it is interesting that most of our informants use this word with a much more general meaning, simply ‘walk’, which is so idiosyncratic with respect to the standard English and European Norwegian, that it is yet another example that shows that American Heritage Norwegian is one variety. We include a map from Johannessen and Hjelde (to appear), which shows how this word, with this meaning, stretches from the American Midwest and into Canada.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In 2013 Janne Bondi Johannessen and Arnstein Hjelde did fieldwork in the area of northern Saskatchewan.



Map 1: *Travle 'walk'*: Coon Valley, WI, USA, Westby, WI, USA, Sunburg, MN, USA, Webster, SD, USA, Fargo, ND, USA, Hatton, ND, USA, Billings, Mt, USA, Archerwill, SK, Canada, North Battleford, SK, Canada, Outlook, SK, Canada. This is a distance of 3678 km. (Johannessen and Hjelde, to appear.)

Finally we consider type C. These are words that strictly speaking exist in European Norwegian, but have acquired a new meaning in American Norwegian.

American Norwegian	Norwegian word	Original meaning in European Norwegian	English word	Infor-mant	Word first documented in:
dekk	terrasse	boat deck	deck	A	--
gro opp	vokse opp	to grow (about plants)	grow up	O	--
kalle	ringe	to name	call	O	Ha1953
kalle for	krever	to call	call for	E	--
portrett	bilde/ fotografi	a picture of face of a person	picture	O, E	Hj1992
vegen	måten	vei	the way	A	Ha1953

Table 4: Loanwords of type C (words that have acquired a new meaning)

We should comment the word *portrett* ('photograph'). This word is used twice in the recordings, but like *retaira* and *travle* was a word we heard all the time. Both in Norwegian and in English the meaning is a painting or photograph of a person, with special focus on the face. However, this word simply means 'photograph' amongst our informants. The first occurrence we had of this word was when one of our informants (not one of the five here) wanted to show us a *portrett* of a cot in Norway. This idiosyncratic meaning is unlikely to have developed separately by chance in two different states: North Dakota and Minnesota. Instead, it shows that our informants speak the same variety of American Norwegian.

We have gone carefully through the speech of five informants in this study. They cover a vast area, from Westby in Wisconsin to Hatton in North Dakota. However, there are not many words that are used by all the persons. This is not necessarily because they are missing from their vocabulary, but because the conversations are relatively short and cover few topics. The vocabulary changes have typically been in the lexical and not functional domain (see Johannessen and Laake, 2015, for a discussion on which linguistic categories that typically have changed), and lexical words are much less frequent than function words. However, the fact that nearly all the words have been noted by Haugen (1953) and/or Hjelde (1992) support our claim that these words are stable and in use. These authors worked with different informants at different times and in different places (but all in the Midwest). In order to further substantiate our contention, in Section 6 we add some more data.

While it could have been conceivable that the words of type A have arisen spontaneously in each place by each speaker, and thus do not point towards a common dialect, this is not so with types B and C. As regards type B, it is difficult to imagine how these words would have been borrowed at the expense of exactly those Norwegian words everywhere. The Norwegians already had words for such concepts as 'creek', 'work', 'field', 'road', 'play', 'walk' and 'no' in their own language. Although it is possible to understand how each of them individually could have been borrowed into one person's language, it is not likely that this would have happened for each person for each word. A much more likely scenario is that they became part of their common language, being passed on from one speaker to the other, and thus became part of their common language. It should also be added that while *no* 'no' is part of the common vocabulary (in the meaning of a negating interjection), the word *yes* is not. The word *no* has also not extended its domain to all the uses where the Norwegian *nei* 'no' was used. The verb *travle* 'walk' is particularly interesting, of course, since its meaning is totally idiosyncratic whether regarded from a standard English or Norwegian perspective. Type C is also convincing for the same reason: the members in this group are unpredictable. The word *portrett* got a new meaning that was not part of either the English or the Norwegian original vocabulary. We conclude that the shared lexicon, in which central words of the vocabulary have developed in idiosyncratic and unpredictable ways, shows that there is a common American Norwegian dialect in the American Midwest.

## **6. Heritage Norwegian: Dialect, koiné or something else?**

The lexical innovations of all three types that we found in the five informants we discussed above, show that Midwest Heritage Norwegian is a linguistic variety with its own characteristics. Two additional speakers with a different dialect background strengthen this conclusion. We will first consider these two and some additional evidence from the Corpus of American Norwegian Speech (CANS, see Johannessen 2015) to show beyond doubt that these lexical innovations are part of a common language variety and not individual innovations. Then we will see how we can classify this variety.

Bertram from Rushford, Minnesota, has all four grandparents from Sogn, western Norway. Importantly, he uses many of the same loanwords as our other informants: *portrett, farm, høgskola, mil, nå* ('no'). John from Webster, South Dakota, has three grandparents from northern Norway, and one (his mother's mother) from Sogn in western Norway. Importantly, John uses our special words: *mil, høgskule, farm, travle*.

Finally, we present some bulk data. The CANS corpus (by April 2014) contains the recordings of 34 speakers from the Midwest. These are also relatively short, and as before, it cannot be expected that each speaker will use all (or even any) of the words in our survey. Without going into detail for each speaker, the number of occurrences for some of the words are the following (presented alphabetically): *farm/farme/farma* 'farm.N/ V.INF/V.PRET' (22), *live/livde* 'live.V.INF /V.PRET' (21), *nekste* 'next' (14), *nå* 'no' (261), *rådn* 'road.N.DEF' (18), *travle/travla/travler/travlende* 'walk.V/INF/PRET/PRES/PRES.PART' (20), *vegen/vægen* 'way.N.DEF' (15).

We think our data show that it is very clear that the words we have investigated, which are all different from European Norwegian, indicate that there is a Norwegian variety defined, at least, at word-level. The syntactic data we investigated in Section 4 show that the language of our informants is otherwise relatively stable. But could we classify the Heritage Norwegian language as a dialect? Recall from Section 3 that definitions of dialect require there to be some grammatical system or features in addition to the distinguishing words. In Section 4 we presented syntactic data, but these were traditional and stable, and nothing indicated that they constituted a particular and new dialect. On the contrary, Table 1 shows that their ancestors came from the same areas of eastern Norway. These general original dialect features should not, then, be used to support an idea of a Heritage Norwegian dialect.

But how about the additional two speakers we have introduced in this chapter? They come from western and northern Norway. If their language has developed in the direction of our other informants, this might mean a kind of convergence towards a new dialect. However, this is not supported by the data. Bertram has quite a few features that are typical of the western dialect, for example infinitives ending in *-a* (compared to a split system of *-e* and *-a* in the eastern parts of the country), and a first person plural pronoun of the form *me*, rather than eastern form *vi*. However, he also has the occasional *vi* and even a flap *l*, a typical eastern feature. John has typical northern dialect features, like the so-called high tone intonation pattern and apocope. Sometimes he slips into an adaptation of the eastern common dialect even if his ancestors are from the northern parts of Norway. There was a clear difference in his Norwegian language depending on whether he spoke to his friend Carman, who had ancestors from the same place as his, or when he spoke with the present authors (who are from eastern Norway). Even if both these informants have dialect features from other places than eastern Norway, both grammatically and phonologically, they have the same vocabulary as our other

informants. There is thus a common lexical variety in the Midwest, even if we cannot support the idea of a common new dialect. We have not had the chance to study all parts of the Midwest or even outside the Midwest. It seems that some Canadian Norwegians in Saskatchewan (which is just north of the border of the American Midwest) have the same lexicolect, as Map 1 may indicate.

We would also like to mention Magne Oftedal's (1947-48) notes on Haugen's informants (available at the web page of the Text Laboratory, UiO, *Norsk i Amerika*). Here we find examples of American Norwegians that adapt their language to the common dialect in the Midwest. One of these is Joronn from Stoughton, Wisconsin. Her mother is from Telemark (eastern Norway) and her father from Sogn (western Norway). She speaks her mother's dialect. Oftedal notes about Joronn's father: "Her father speaks the Telemark dialect; the Sogn dialect only with other people from Sogn." It suggests that it was the dialect from the eastern parts that was the main one.

Our data suggest no common new dialect, but there does seem to be a bidialectal, almost diglossic situation, in which those who speak the least common dialect (Sogn Norwegian, like Joronn's father and our Rushford speaker, or North Norwegian, like our speaker from Webster) also have learnt to speak a more major one, which happens to be that of Eastern Norway. Diglossia (Ferguson 1959) is defined as a situation in which two language varieties are used in the same community, but where one is 'high' (formal) and the other 'low' (colloquial). The eastern Norwegian majority dialect (the South Eastern variety) must have constituted a variety that other dialect users had to use to be taken seriously, or at least to be understood. We can call it a bidialectal situation, since in the Norwegian American Midwest there is no situation of high and low variants that would be necessary to defend using the diglossia term.

We must also investigate briefly the question of koiné with respect to Heritage Norwegian. Kerswill (2002) posits that there are two types: regional and immigrant koiné. In both of these, one or more dialects together form a new dialect, i.e. some structural changes need to have taken place. In our case, English has caused consistent vocabulary changes in Norwegian, i.e. one language has influenced another. Since these changes are not structural, but pertain to the lexicon, we do not want to classify it as koiné. Hjelde (2015) investigates dialect variation in the old Norwegian settlement around Coon Valley and Westby in Vernon County, Wisconsin. He focuses on how the Norwegian dialects spoken here have changed over time. He argues that among the youngest speakers, i.e., those born in the 1940s or later, a koiné has formed. However, Hjelde's study differs from the study in this article. Hjelde has focussed on a small dialect area in Wisconsin, while our study focuses on a vast area covering five states. According to Siegel (1985:365), Siegel (2001) and Kerswill (2013:519) koineization is a contact-induced process. The speakers must be in contact with each other for the koiné to arise. Since all the speakers of Hjelde's study live in a small area, this is a more typical koiné situation. In our study the speakers live across five different states (as well as Canada). There is hardly any contact situation since most will not have been in contact with each other. Other processes than koineization must have played a role in the occurrence of the lexically common Heritage Norwegian variety.

Haugen (1953:337-360) describes how the different dialects from Norway were spread across the Midwest. He emphasises the fact that many of the 800 000 immigrants that left Norway in 1825–1920 had not encountered other dialects until they came to

America. The level of mutual understanding was low, especially between eastern and western Norwegians, in which case it was always the eastern ones that could not understand the others (op.cit. p. 346). Haugen further describes how the language changes from one generation to the next, due to the settlement of several different dialect speakers in one region, and how "where the children have grown up together, they all talk alike" (op.cit. p.350). Haugen concludes: "It was inevitable that these social forces should have tended towards the development of a generalized or central dialect in those settlements where many different dialects were spoken" (op.cit. p. 351). Although this could point in the direction of a koiné, we instead take this to support our observation that indicates a bidialectal situation, where people knew two dialects if they were not amongst those that spoke the main eastern Norwegian variety.

Haugen (1953:351-2) actually concludes that "speakers have departed from their native speech in the general direction of the BL [book language]". This is a statement we do not share, and which we have argued against in Johannessen and Laake (2015).

We do not find evidence for a complete and new dialect in the Midwest. Neither do we see a new koiné, which would also have been surprising given the limited contact situations between the populations in this vast area a hundred and more years ago. However, we do see some evidence that there has been a bidialectal situation between Norwegian dialects. What we really would like to bring forward, though, is that there is a common variety, which is geographically distinctive and has common, innovative vocabulary. We coin this kind of variety a *lexicolect*, i.e. where a linguistically otherwise diverse group dialect-wise share some vocabulary that is not shared by other speakers of the language. Thus a lexicolect requires some contact, but far from the amount that is needed to form a new koiné or a new dialect.

## 7. Conclusion

In this paper we have presented work that mainly builds on fieldwork by the authors in the Midwest in March 2010, supplemented by some other newer and older material. We found many similarities in the American Norwegian language across this vast area, and therefore chose to study closer the vocabulary of five selected informants from three states, and compare with the one documented by Haugen (1953) and Hjelde (1992).

The vocabulary obviously consisted of a lot of new words, which we divided into three types. What was immediately striking was that so many words were the same across the whole area. This is a strong indication that we can talk about one common variety across the whole area. Two facts are especially strong indicators. First, there are many words that have replaced existing Norwegian words. This is common in multilingual settings, but when it is exactly the same words that have been thus substituted in a big area amongst several people, this should not be attributed to chance, but to the fact that these have been in common use and been part of a shared variety. Second, some words have got an idiosyncratic, unpredictable meaning that is neither present in European Norwegian or in American English, apart from perhaps in certain dialects that are far from the mainstream or standard ones. These words are extremely unlikely to have developed separately across this big area. Here, too, it must be concluded that the informants across the Midwest have shared vocabulary.



While the five informants that we have studied in detail have been from a big area, and are thus suitable for arguing for the wide distribution of the words discussed, they are only five, and their recordings last a limited amount of time. There are many of the words, therefore, that have only been used by one or two of them. In order to substantiate our claim, we have looked at the lists provided by Haugen (1953) and Hjelde (1992), who have found most of the same words important enough to include in their published lists. We have further studied two more informants whose Norwegian ancestors were from other parts of Norway than our five main subjects, and we have looked up some of the words in the Corpus of American Norwegian Speech. These additional investigations support our contention that there is a common vocabulary, which for a large part is idiosyncratic and unpredictable. There are no other features that are shared, and the two extra informants that we looked at, have in common that their original dialect are linguistically (including prosodically) distinct from the eastern Norwegian type of majority dialect in the Midwest. These two even slipped from their original dialects into the majority one at various times. We take the situation not to be one of koiné or a new dialect, but of a diglossic situation.

We conclude that there is a common language variety that is shared by the American Norwegians across the American Midwest, and suggest the term *lexicolect* for this kind of variety.

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