

## **The Diffusion of a New Morphology in Norwegian dialects**

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### **Abstract**

The most obvious tendency in modern Norwegian dialect change is regional levelling. The aim of this paper is to discuss the pattern of this levelling process, and I aim to test a hypothesis of *urban jumping*. This will be tested in detail for the region of Mid-Norway, with Trondheim at the top of a hierarchy and other towns and centres as subordinated nodes.

The noun morphology of five dialects in Mid-Norway is compared, and we see that the regional capital of Trondheim has a fairly complex system compared to its subordinated towns and centres. The subordinated towns have been exposed to simplifications independent of the Trondheim dialect.

The modern changes themselves are dependent on the urbanisation process, which has prevailed at different times in the various communities. Linguistically – in our case in noun morphology – the process seems to be more in the nature of simplification than of adapting the prestigious standard or central system.

Accordingly, the new hypothesis suggests the following: Within a region, the dominating centre exerts some influence on the direction of language change, but the simplification processes manifest themselves first in new centres, i.e. in subordinated nodes in the regional hierarchy.

Today the Trondheim dialect seems to be adopting certain simplifications. In the other towns and centres these changes were known generations ago. From these bare facts one could perhaps deduce that the regional centre of Trondheim is sensitive to changes in the subordinated towns. This conclusion is strengthened by data from Northern Norway, but not from Eastern Norway, where the changes seem to follow a different route.

## **1. Introduction**

### *1.2 The myths*

The history of a language is often described as a river, in which runs and waterfalls follow in quick succession in some parts, while in other parts the river broadens and therefore moves very slowly. There is some dispute among Norwegian colleagues on where our dialects are in this river today. Most of them are of the opinion that our language is being exposed to many rapid and dramatic changes at the moment: that we are in the midst of a waterfall. I feel principally obliged to be opposed to such a description. People are inclined to

dramatise the changes they observe, because they feel uncertain about everything that differs from what they experienced as a stable, harmonic and safe world in their childhood. I do not wish to deny that changes may occur at a rapid pace, but it seems clear that the speed of change differs considerably from place to place. And such was the case earlier as well, e.g. in the 15th century. What should be interesting to study is why rapid change is found in some places and great stability in others.

### *1.2 Standard vs. dialects*

It is hard to tell to what extent Norway has a standard spoken language. Technically, the spoken versions of our two written standards (Bokmål and Nynorsk) may be said to function as such, and many people use the written language as their model when speaking, at least in some situations. Nevertheless, the same people will maintain most traits of the phonology of their dialect; so normally it is easy to tell what region they come from. Because of the great tolerance of dialect usage, the actual spread of these standards is restricted.

In Eastern Norway, especially in the Oslo area, Standard Eastern Norwegian is found. This variety is of more sociolinguistic interest, as it is the mother tongue of some people. It is called standard because speakers from many places in that region speak it in a way that disguises their exact birth place. It is impossible to hear whether they come from west, east, north or south. This Standard Eastern Norwegian is no more than a regional standard, but because of its considerable resemblance to the Bokmål written standard, some regard it as a national standard.

Also in towns in other regions there are middle class groups with a language variety that takes Bokmål as its model. But phonetically these varieties are quite regional, and may in some cases even have traditional peculiarities, so that they may be referred to as middle class dialects, to be precise.

What is of interest here, is, firstly, that the notion of a standard spoken language is problematic in the Norwegian language society. It is of limited significance. Secondly, it should be noted that we normally assume that the only varieties that may influence other dialects are those with great resemblance to Bokmål, and not to Nynorsk. Both of these points are relevant for a project on dialect convergence and divergence.

All Norwegians have some passive knowledge of the Bokmål standard language, and this knowledge may form a model in situations where people feel it necessary or desirable to modify their language in such situations. A smaller proportion of the people can rely on their passive knowledge of the Nynorsk standard. Moreover, using Nynorsk orally may convey an ideological or political standpoint, as Nynorsk is not a "neutral" language.

## 2. Aims

### 2.1 *Grammatical simplification?*

One important feature of the modern development of Norwegian society since the 1960s is the growth of hundreds of municipal centres, and this may have had an impact on sociolinguistic patterns and thereby on language change. As one of the obvious causes is geographic mobility, one could look upon the Norwegian speech community as a big melting pot, and assume that the effect on the new dialects arising from the language mixture should be linguistic simplification. This is, actually, the effect that may be observed in the new towns and industrial centres that have grown up this century, for example Odda, Tyssedal and Høyanger.

The concept of simplification is, of course, open for discussion (cf. Trudgill 1986). For our purposes, I take it for granted that there is such a concept, and that it represents some immanent tendency in language change. The focus here is on the loss of variants, which simplifies the process of language learning. Linguistic distinctions which do not correspond to semantic distinctions tend to disappear, which means that phonological and morphological variants tend to be done away with.

### 2.2 *Influence from a centre? One or more regions?*

What comes out of a melting pot may be quite random. But one may expect to find tendencies which reflect influence from geographic centres. If so, the question arises: Is there a national trend in the changes that could be traced back to one influential source, most probably the Oslo region? Or are there various regions with their own dominating centres? Is it possible to establish a hierarchy of influential centres, with Oslo, of course, at the top? (Cf. Trudgill 1974 on Brunlanes.)

My own hypothesis is that Norway is regionalized to a very great extent, and that the alleged Oslo influence is exaggerated. I believe that the dialect changes in Eastern Norway follow a pattern which is different from the ones we find elsewhere in the country.

### 2.3 *National project on dialect changes*

It is our aim to test these hypotheses in a project launched by five Norwegian universities this year. The objectives of the collaboration include increasing efficiency in collecting data and comparing results from different dialect communities. The topic in what follows, i.e. noun morphology, is my part of the project.

### 3. Method and data

Taking a closer look at noun morphology can be an efficient way of drawing a map that may answer some of the questions posed above. Morphology is advantageous in that it is possible to make the notion ‘simplification’ manageable: it is possible to define and operationalize the concept. In addition, Norwegian noun morphology, more than e.g. verb morphology, can be quite complex, and it differs very much from dialect to dialect, as will be demonstrated below.

Thus far, I have collected data from the relatively extensive dialect literature, and observed the tendencies in centres in particular. Moreover, for several years I have collected data using a questionnaire distributed each year among students at our department. My results, so far, have been based on these data, but the next step is to benefit from the national project, and collect data more systematically from all over the country. As yet, some parts of our long and extended country have been underrepresented.

### 4. Results

#### 4.1 The contrasts

Noun morphology can be very complex in some dialects. One of the most complex dialect systems is the one from Sunndalen in the county of Møre og Romsdal (cf. map 1), which can be rendered as in table 1:

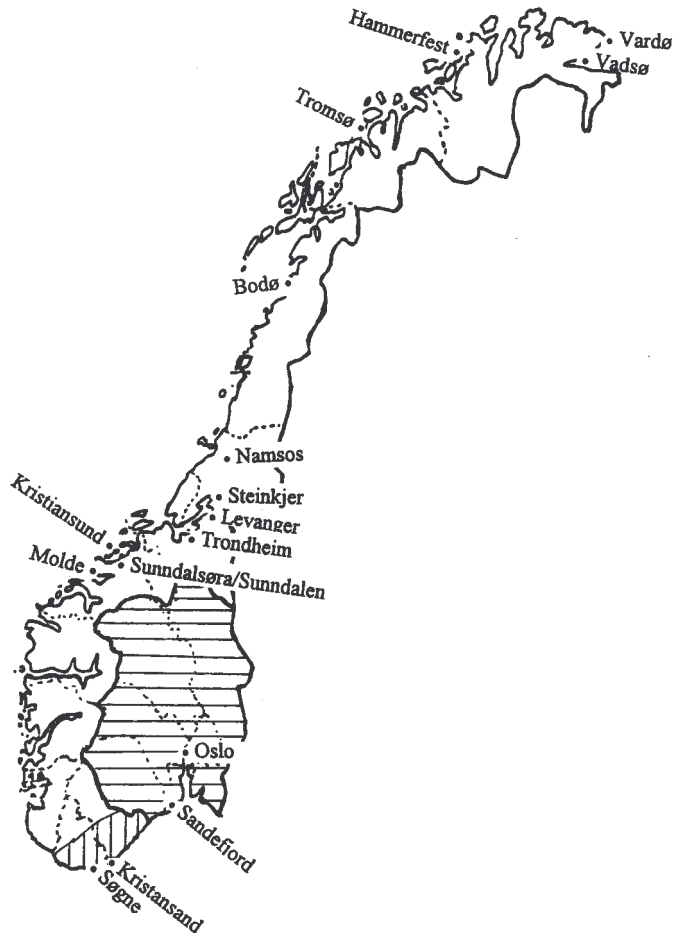
Table 1: *Sunndalen* (-Ø indicates no suffix)

Class	Singular			Plural		
	Indef.	Definite		Indef.	Definite	
		Nominative	Dative		Nominative	Dative
M-ar	-Ø	-en	-a	-a	-aɲ	-Ø
M-er	-Ø	-en	-a	-e	-iɲ	-Ø
M-weak1	-e	-iɲ	-Ø	-a	-aɲ	-Ø
M-weak2	-a	-aɲ	-Ø	-a	-aɲ	-Ø
F-er	-Ø	-a	-en	-e	-iɲ	-Ø
F-ar	-Ø	-a	-en	-a	-aɲ	-Ø
F-weak1	-Ø	-a	-ɔɲ	-Ø	-ɔɲ	-Ø
F-weak2	-Ø	-Ø	-ɲ	-Ø	-ɲ	-Ø
N-Ø	-Ø	-e	-a	-Ø	-a	-Ø
N-weak	-e	-e	-a	-e	-a	-Ø
10 classes 6 infl. categories	3 variants	6 variants	7 variants	5 variants	5 variants	1 variant

In Table 1, certain smaller irregular declension classes have been excluded, most of which are referred to as consonant stem classes in Germanic historical linguistics. They are common to all dialects, and belong even to the written standard Bokmål. The focus here is on the rest of the nouns and on the bigger

classes. Because of the preserved case inflection, this dialect has six inflectional categories. With ten declension classes, this matrix comprises 60 cells, which represents an impressive number of forms.

Map 1: Map of Norway



The diachronically interested linguist will, of course, notice the simplifications in this system compared to the Old Norse inflectional system. Still, I may point out that there are some complications as well, because of the fact that the vowel quality reduction in suffixes was dependent on the Old Norse syllable quantity in this region. This has caused a split of the weak noun classes, here marked with *weak 1* and *weak 2*. In the strong declension I have named the classes by referring to the plural allomorph in Nynorsk; thus, in the left-hand column, *Masculine -ar*, *Masculine -er*, *Feminine -er*, *Feminine -ar* and *Neuter-Ø*.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, this dialect demonstrates a palatalization process on word stems ending on a velar consonant. This process, however, no longer represents a phonological rule, but a morphophonological one because of various changes in the suffix vowel. However, the palatalization is preserved for the most part in the same morphological categories as in Old Norse. These categories in the various classes are displayed in Table 1 above by shading the relevant cells. The formulation of the morphophonemic rule is, in fact, a very complex one:

Morphophonemic palatalization rule:

Final *g*, *k* and *ŋ* become *j*, *cç* and *ɲ* respectively before inflectional suffix in

- singular strong classes
- plural forms in *er*-classes
- singular forms in the masculine weak class
- plural definite form in the neuter  $\emptyset$ -class.<sup>2</sup>

If we add one cell for each suffix that triggers a palatalization of the preceding consonants, we have 80 cells in the declension system of this dialect.

In contrast to this system, Table 2 represents the corresponding matrix of standard Bokmål in its most classical and prestigious variant, which from now on shall be referred to as Conservative Bokmål:

Table 2: *Conservative Bokmål I*

Class	Singular		Plural	
	Indefinite	Definite	Indefinite	Definite
U-strong <sup>3</sup>	- $\emptyset$	-en	-er	-ene
U-weak	-e	-en	-er	-ene
N- $\emptyset$	- $\emptyset$	-e	- $\emptyset$	-ene
N-er	- $\emptyset$	-e	-er	-ene
N-weak	-e	-e	-er	-ene
5 classes 4 infl. categories	2 variants	2 variants	2 variants	1 variant

We note here that Conservative Bokmål has only one suffix vowel: the reduced *e* (or schwa).

Sometimes this system is accounted for by adding a phonological rule that merges a final *-e* of the stem with the initial *e* of the suffix. The same system can thus be displayed in this simple matrix of Table 3. There is no palatalization rule here. And compared to the 80 cells in the Sunndalen system, this system has only 12! (In Table 2, the Conservative Bokmål system has 20 cells.)

Table 3: *Conservative Bokmål II*

Class	Singular		Plural	
	Indefinite	Definite	Indefinite	Definite
U	-0	-en	-er	-ene
N-0	-0	-e	-0	-ene
N-er	-0	-e	-er	-ene
3 classes 4 infl. categories	1 variant	2 variants	2 variants	1 variant

There is an obvious contrast in complexity in these two systems, and in between there is a wide range of varieties. The simplest hypothesis would state that modern Norwegian dialects are drifting in the direction of the latter system, and two explanations could be close at hand:

- (a) It is grammatically the simplest system, and
- (b) It is the most prestigious system because of its domination in written media, and because it corresponds to a large extent to the language variety of the social elite in the capital of Oslo. (This specific social dialect was developed in the last decades of the 18th century from the model of written Danish.)

Outside this particular social class in Oslo this system (cf. Table 3) exists only in the Bergen dialect, in both high and low speech. There is good reason to assume that the Bergen dialect developed its simple noun morphology as early as in the Middle Ages, quite independently of Danish, as an effect of the social melting pot in this international commercial metropolis. It is thus historically accidental that the Bergen system corresponds to the prestigious written standard.

On the basis of a somewhat rudimentary collection of data I will first try to argue that the hypothesis which argues for a drift towards the prestigious system is not plausible. The next step is to try to interpret the direction of the drift in Norwegian dialect morphology.

Two preliminary remarks are necessary. First of all, the dative category is certainly on the defensive, but it has been so for several hundred years. In this century the retreat of this category has been most striking in Northwest Norway. This area represents the "hard core" of the Nynorsk movement, which also means that it is one of the areas characterized by a strong anti-centre-ideology. The most conservative area with regard to the dative is the valleys of East and Mid Norway. But in the last generation the dative has shown signs of disappearing across this area as well.

The same seems to be true for palatalization. The retreat is not dependent on, for instance, the distance to Oslo, but more on the degree of urbanisation. Both the dative and palatalization are most resistant in the rural parts of the communities, where the traditional way of life and the traditional pattern of



contact still prevail. In the following discussion I shall ignore these two features.

#### 4.2 East Norway

What features are on the offensive today? The two-gender system of prestigious Conservative Bokmål is not spreading. The spoken variety called Eastern Norwegian Standard, which has many similarities to a moderate and modern variant of written Bokmål and is, in fact, by many interpreted as spoken Bokmål, is spreading rapidly in Central East Norway. It has a three-gender system:

Table 4: *Eastern Norwegian Standard*

Class	Singular		Plural	
	Indefinite	Definite	Indefinite	Definite
M-strong	-0	-en	-er	-ene
M-weak	-e	-en	-er	-ene
F-strong	-0	-a	-er	-ene
F-weak	-e	-a	-er	-ene
N-strong	-0	-e	-0	-a
N-weak	-e	-e	-er	-a(/-ene)
6 classes 4 infl. categories	2 variants	3 variants	2 variants	2 variants

There are two main differences from the previous simple system of Conservative Bokmål: The *-a* to denote feminine definite singular, i.e. the sociolinguistically important mark of the third gender, feminine. The *-a* is also used in the definite neuter form plural. Elsewhere the plural suffixes have been levelled out.

The diffusion of the Standard East Norwegian system follows the pattern of urban jumping. It is also characteristic that the Standard Eastern Norwegian seems to become part of a stylistic variety, i.e. that more people acquire a style register with Standard Eastern Norwegian at the one end and a traditional dialect with a more complex morphology at the other end. This acceptance of bidialectalism is a typical East Norwegian language change.

It is interesting to note that the traditional urban, as well as the rural dialects in the relatively urbanised district along the Oslofjorden, i.e. in the vicinity of Oslo, have maintained their traditional system with eight classes, even in the casual style among young people. Consider the following from Sandefjord in the county of Vestfold as shown in Table 5. (As the system with a three gender marking in the singular is dominant in the Norwegian dialects, we shall from now on focus on the plural. As a consequence, only complicating suffices in the plural paradigm will be highlighted in the Tables.) In Sandefjord, it is the distribution of plural suffixes that complicates the system.



Table 5: *Sandefjord*

Class	Singular		Plural	
	Indefinite	Definite	Indefinite	Definite
M-ar	-0	-en	-ær	-ane
M-er	-0	-en	-er	-ene
M-weak	-e	-en	-ær	-ane
F-er	-0	-a	-er	-ene
F-ar	-0	-a	-ær	-ane
F-weak	-e	-a	-e	-ene
N-strong	-0	-e	-0	-a
N-weak	-e	-e	-er	-a
8 classes 4 infl. categories	2 variants	3 variants	3 variants	3 variants

East Norway – which is horizontally hatched in map 1 – is thus characterized by both a rather simple and a rather complex noun morphology.

#### 4.3 *Sørlandet*

Moving along the coast to the Southwest, we come to a dialect area called ‘sørlandsk’ (southern language), which is vertically hatched on the map. It has several characteristics which indicate that this dialect is hardly under direct influence from Oslo. Here the dialects have e.g. a back *r*, and their outstanding feature is the voiced plosives after vowels: *båd* for *båt*. This area displays the simplest noun morphology in Norwegian dialects, for instance the following from Søgne in the county of Vest-Agder (Lunde 1968: 6-8) depicted in Table 6.

This system is the dominant one in a wide rural area along the southern coast of Norway, and it is the system of the regional centre of Kristiansand as well (cf. Johnsen 1954: 113-118). Is this pattern a consequence of influence from the prestigious Bokmål standard? There are, in fact, two responses to this question. First, when a Norwegian dialect has a three gender system, it is hardly possible to demonstrate a simpler system than this. It is even simpler than the Standard Eastern Norwegian one, because of the plural suffixes, which comprise one in the definite, and "almost one" in the indefinite form. Thus, it is not obvious that the city of Kristiansand has taken over this simple system from the written prestigious standard (either the Conservative Bokmål or the Standard Eastern Norwegian). The deviating form of the plural definite allomorph (*-ane*) enhances the doubt that this is a case of urban jumping from Oslo to Kristiansand.

Table 6: *Søgne*

Class	Singular		Plural	
	Indefinite	Definite	Indefinite	Definite
M-strong	-0	-en	-e	-ane
M-weak	-e	-en	-e	-ane
F-strong	-0	-a	-e	-ane
F-weak	-e	-a	-e	-ane
N-strong	-0	-e	-0/-e	-ane
N-weak	-e	-e	-e	-ane
6 classes 4 infl. categories	2 variants	3 variants	1-2 variants	1 variant

Second, this simple system was documented several generations ago, as far back as we are able to trace a continuous tradition. And the same rural dialects have quite a few archaic traits, especially in their phonology. Thus, a more probable theory is that this simple morphology is a consequence of an independent development in this coastal area, caused by intensive mobility in the population over hundreds of years.

#### 4.4 Mid-Norway

Above I discussed the most complex Norwegian noun morphology, that of Sunndalen in the dialect area called *trøndersk* in Mid-Norway. In the municipality of Sunndalen, an industrial (aluminium) centre emerged in the 1950s, Sunndalsøra. Over a period of 20 years, its population grew from 500 to 5000. This new centre has received immigrants from a wide area of Norway, and has naturally established its own new dialect. The noun morphology of Sunndalsøra demonstrates the following system (Jenstad 1983):

Table 7: *Sunndalsøra*

Class	Singular		Plural	
	Indefinite	Definite	Indefinite	Definite
M-strong	-0	-en	-a	-aɲ
M-weak1	-e	-en	-a	-aɲ
M-weak2	-0	-n	-0	-ɲ
F-strong	-0	-a	-e	-aɲ/iɲ
F-weak	-e	-a	-a	-aɲ
N-strong	-0	-e	-0	-a
N-weak	-e	-e	-e	-a
7 classes 4 infl. categories	3 variants	4 variants	3 variants	2-3 variants

There is no dative category in this system, and no palatalisation. Compared to the rural dialect some kilometres outside the centre, this system has been considerably

simplified. But still, the system is much more complex than the one from the southern coast.

In addressing the question of urban jumping, we should consider the structure of the Kristiansund dialect, the nearest urban dialect (Jenstad 1983):

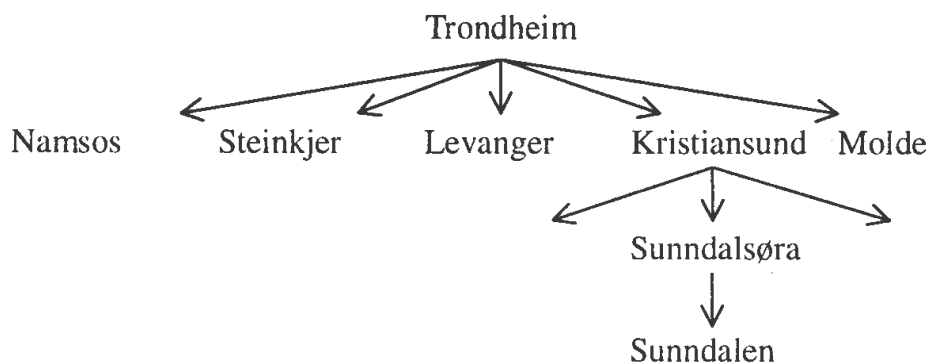
Table 8: Kristiansund

Class	Singular		Plural	
	Indefinite	Definite	Indefinite	Definite
M-strong	-0	-en	-a	-an
M-weak1	-e	-en	-a	-an
M-weak2	-0	-n	-	-n
F-strong	-0	-a	-e	-en
F-weak	-e	-a	-a	-an
N-strong	-0	-e	-0	-an
N-weak	-e	-e	-a	-an
7 classes 4 infl. categories	3 variants	4 variants	3 variants	2 variants

Table 8 provides evidence of a simplification of the definite plural in which the neuter forms have received a new allomorph from the masculine, i.e. *-a* and *-an*. This is, in fact, the traditional plural system of Trondheim, the city one step further up in the hierarchy. A peculiarity of this Kristiansund system is the differentiation of the strong and weak feminine in the plural, where weak nouns receive the unmarked plural suffixes *-a* and *-an*. (Dalen 1978:9-14.)

Until I started this project I viewed Mid Norway as a striking example of so-called *urban jumping*, with Trondheim on top of a hierarchy and the other towns and centres as subordinated nodes, here Kristiansund and Sunndalsøra (cf. Fig. 1).

Figure 1: *Urban jumping in Mid-Norway*



There is no doubt that Trondheim is the regional centre of Mid-Norway, economically and culturally speaking. However, consider the Trondheim matrix in Table 9.

Table 9: *Trondheim*

Class	Singular		Plural	
	Indefinite	Definite	Indefinite	Definite
M-ar	-∅	-en	-a	-an
M-er	-∅	-en	-e/-a	-en/-an
M-weak1	-e	-en	-a	-an
M-weak2	-	-n	-∅	-n
F-strong	-∅	-a	-e	-en
F-weak1	-	-a	-a	-an
F-weak2	-∅	-∅	-∅	-n
N-strong	-∅	-e	-∅	-an
N-weak	-e	-e	-a	-an
9 classes 4 infl. categories	3 variants	4 variants	2-3 variants	1-2 variants

It is clear from the above table that the noun morphology of Trondheim has nine classes, i.e. only one less than the Sunndalen rural system in Table 1. By comparing the three systems from Mid Norway, and concentrating on the plural subsystem, we see that the system of Kristiansund corresponds to the Trondheim system in using the unmarked *-a* and *-an* in neuter plural, whereas Sunndalsøra sticks to the rural ending *-a* in the definite form. Both Sunndalsøra and Kristiansund have lost the masculine *er*-class (with the suffixes *-e* and *-en* in the plural) and the split weak feminine. Trondheim retains them. Kristiansund retains the feminine *er*-class, as does Trondheim, but Sunndalsøra displays a tendency to level it out, cf. the variant *-aŋ* in the definite plural form. This means that the two "subordinated" dialects exhibit a simplification vis-a-vis the Trondheim system, but in different directions (Kristiansund: *-en*, Sunndalsøra: *-aŋ*). I should add here that on the basis of size and administration, Kristiansund would be expected to be superior to Sunndalsøra in the hierarchy, with Trondheim at the top.

At the end of this section, it might be of interest to take a look at the dialect of Molde, the southernmost town in this region (and therefore furthest from Trondheim) (Nødtvedt 1991: 50-52).

Table 10: *Molde*

Class	Singular		Plural	
	Indefinite	Definite	Indefinite	Definite
M-strong	-0	-en	-a	-an
M-weak	-e	-en	-a	-an
F-strong	-0	-a	-a	-an
F-weak	-0	-a	-a	-an
N-strong	-0	-e	-0	-an
N-weak	-e	-e	-a	-an
6 classes 4 infl. categories	2 variants	3 variants	2 variants	1 variants

The Molde dialect demonstrates, in fact, one of the simplest systems in Norway. If it is interpreted as some kind of derivative of the Trondheim system, one might say that the Molde dialect has taken the suffixes from Trondheim, but has made the system much simpler. The system must be fairly old, because a more complex morphology has not been reported for any time in the history of the town of Molde.<sup>4</sup>

The morphology of the five dialects I have mentioned from Mid-Norway can be compared as in Table 11, where it is clear that the regional capital of Trondheim has a fairly complex system compared to its subordinated towns and centres.

Table 11: *Definite plural in Mid-Norway*

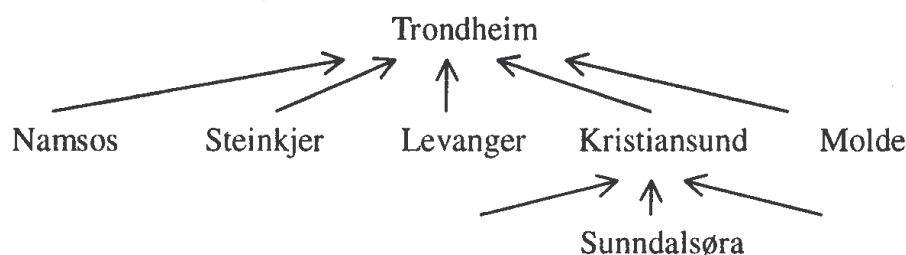
Class	Definite plural				
	Sunndalen	Trondheim	Sunnd.øra	Kristiansund	Molde
M-(strong)-ar	-aɲ	-an	-aɲ	-an	-an
M-(strong)-er	-iɲ	-en			
M-weak1	-aɲ	-an			
M-weak2		-n	-ɲ	-n	
F-(strong)-er	-iɲ	-en	-iɲ/aɲ	-en	
F-(strong)-ar	-aɲ				
F-weak1	-ɔɲ	-an	-aɲ	-an	
F-weak2	-ɲ	-n			
N-Ø	-a	-an	-a		
N-weak					
	10 classes	9 classes	7 classes	7 classes	6 classes
	5 variants	3 variants	4 variants	3 variants	1 variant

Against this background of these results, a new hypothesis is necessary, replacing the 'urban jumping' hypothesis: Within a region, the dominating centre exerts some influence on the direction of language change, but the simplification processes manifest themselves first in the new centres, which occupy subordinated nodes in the regional (geographical) hierarchy. As for this specific region of Mid-Norway, Trondheim is a town dating back to the early Middle Ages, while Kristiansund dates from the 17th century. Molde is formally of the same

age, i.e. from about 1700, but before the turn of the last century the population was very small (about 1650 in 1900). Sunndalsøra was founded in the 1950s.

This outline may be completed by mentioning that today the Trondheim dialect seems to be adopting certain simplifications; the masculine *er*-class, the feminine *er*-class and the feminine weak2-class are tending to disappear. These are new changes there, i.e. found in the youngest generation. In the other towns and centres they were known generations ago. From these bare facts it could, perhaps, be deduced that the regional centre of Trondheim is sensitive to changes in the subordinated towns. If that is the case, it would suggest the model of Fig. 2 with an influence flow in the opposite direction of what is suggested in Figure 1 above.

Figure 2: *Alternative hierarchy*



#### 4.5 Northern Norway

In Northern Norway too, there are several traditional dialects with a complex noun morphology including a gender system and class system in both singular and plural. However, for the purpose at hand, it is modern tendencies and urban systems, that are of interest.

Again, the plural may be most revealing, as the singular has three genders in all dialects. What seemed to be characteristic of the urban dialects of Mid-Norway was the conservatism concerning the feminine *er*-class, which kept its special suffixes in the plural. This is not the case in Northern Norway. More often, we encounter a gender system in the plural, i.e. the feminine, both strong and weak, has the plural *-e* and *-en*, whereas the masculine and neuter have the unmarked *-a* and *-an* (except for the neuter 0-class, which comprises the neuter nouns of one syllable, which have no suffix in the plural indefinite form). This fact could be interpreted as counter evidence to a hypothesis that Trondheim should exert influence on the dialects of Northern Norway.

The most important city of Northern Norway is Tromsø. The morphology of the dialect there is shown in Table 12, where the deviating plural of the feminine nouns is underscored by the double lines.

Table 12: *Tromsø*

Class	Singular		Plural	
	Indefinite	Definite	Indefinite	Definite
M-strong	-0	-en	-a	-an
M-weak	-e	-en	-a	-an
F-strong	-0	-a	-e	-en
F-weak	-a	-a	-e	-en
N-strong	-0	-e	-0	-an
N-weak	-e	-e	-a	-an
6 classes 4 infl. categories	3 variants	3 variants	3 variants	2 variants

Our next step is to test this system of the regional capital against the "subordinated" dialects, and we focus on the feminine plural in Vadsø (Elstad 1982: 79), Vardø (Elstad 1982: 80), Hammerfest (Elstad 1982: 80) and Bodø (Fiva 1990: 213). (The other suffixes, including the zero suffix of the strong neuters, show the same pattern in all these towns.)

Table 13: *Hammerfest*

<i>Plural (F)</i>	
<i>Indefinite</i>	<i>Definite</i>
-e	-en/-an
-e	-en/-an

In the Hammerfest system there is a vacillation in the definite form which certainly reflects a tendency towards a simpler morphology. This simplification has evolved one step further in Vardø, where the definite plural has only one variant: *-an*. But the indefinite form *-e* still deviates from the dominant indefinite plural suffix which is *-a*.

Table 14: *Vardø*

<i>Plural (F)</i>	
<i>Indefinite</i>	<i>Definite</i>
-e	-an
-e	-an

The last towns in this region are Bodø and Vadsø, where the homogenisation of plural suffixes is total in both indefinite and definite forms (Table 15):

Table 15: *Bodø and Vadsø*

<i>Plural (F)</i>	
<i>Indefinite</i>	<i>Definite</i>
-a	-an
-a	-an



Once again the conclusion must be that the regional capital does not seem to be the initiator in the simplification process. And I venture once more to claim that the newest towns have developed the simplest morphology. Vadsø, Vardø and Bodø have grown in size over the last 150 years, roughly speaking, Tromsø and Hammerfest somewhat earlier.

This last hypothesis about the age is, of course, too simple. Important factors affecting a simplification process in a dialectal melting pot are both the size of the original community before the urbanisation, the speed of the growth in population, and the origins of the immigrants. I have not done a comparative study of these processes as yet. However, the point is that it is difficult to apply the urban jumping model to the regions of Northern Norway and Mid Norway.

#### *4.6 Western Norway*

I do not intend to describe the situation of noun morphology in Western Norway. In short, however, it may be mentioned that the morphology there is more complex. For example, the southernmost and the northernmost towns, Egersund and Ålesund, both have had two allomorphs in the definite feminine singular, while all other urban dialects have only one. The changes and tendencies seem to be more complex, as well. It is, for instance, difficult to see how this area can be called one dialect region. One of the aims of the project on Norwegian dialect changes will be to take a closer look at this area.

### **5. Conclusions**

In concluding, I shall comment on some of the questions raised in the proposal for the ESF Network on dialect convergence and divergence. In these comments reference will be made to relevant data from the above pilot study.

1. Several minor studies on Norwegian dialects have indicated that dialect changes in Eastern Norway are following a pattern which is different from that in the rest of the country. In Eastern Norway a regional standard variety is expanding rapidly to all towns and centres, and the inhabitants of an increasing number of communities are developing a more complex speech repertoire, with at least two variants. Intraindividual variation was previously a pattern shown by town and city inhabitants; now people of smaller centres are taking over this pattern. In noun morphology this results in variation between a simple system and a rather complex traditional system.

In sociolinguistic reports from cities and towns elsewhere in Norway, the usual conclusion is that the traditional social stratification of language variation is vanishing. People from different social groups in towns tend to speak in the same way, and they do so in both formal and informal situations. This new common dialect across classes is based on the old low-status dialect, but with some modifications from the higher speech. It is this dialect I have referred to in the morphological overview above.<sup>5</sup>

2. There are obvious tendencies towards regionalization in dialectal Norway. In Eastern Norway this is reflected in the expansion of the regional East Norwegian Standard. In the other regions of Norway the impression is that there is a drift in one direction in each region. Until now I have believed in urban jumping along a hierarchic pattern. This pilot study on noun morphology has convinced me that there must be some interactional pattern between the various centres of the region. The modern changes are dependent on the urbanisation process which has prevailed in our communities since the late 1960s. Linguistically – in our case in noun morphology – the process seems to be more in the nature of simplification than of adapting the prestigious standard system, though the structural consequences in the plural system are much the same because of the simple morphology of the standard Bokmål. The correspondence might be conceived as historically accidental, just as the correspondence between the Bergen dialect and the Conservative Bokmål obviously is.

This problem will be highlighted in the upcoming project on dialect changes. The plan is to study communities both with and without obvious dialect changes, and both with and without mobility and urbanisation, in order to obtain insight into social conditions for language change.

3. We seem to be witnessing two contradictory tendencies at the same time. On the one hand, there is a homogenisation process at work in the Norwegian language (above called regionalization). On the other hand, we are freer than ever before to use local dialects anywhere and at any time. I have no profound understanding or explanation for this. But this change in the sociolinguistic climate in Norway has coincided with economic growth in regional economies. Norway's gross domestic product is increasingly dependent on the resources of the periphery. This may indirectly have influenced people's self-esteem and consequently their attitudes towards language varieties, and, at the same time, reduced the pressure from a national standard.

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> For those interested in the Norwegian details, I have added Table 16 in the Appendix. This table contains examples.

<sup>2</sup> As the neuter weak class has a palatalised consonant in all forms, this feature is more easily accounted for as part of the lexical entry.

<sup>3</sup> The U refers to *utrum*, which means that this language variety has a common gender – a coalescence of the older masculine and feminine genders.

<sup>4</sup> the rural dialects surrounding Molde have a rather complex morphology, more like the first one representing Sunndalen.

<sup>5</sup> Even in Eastern Norway the span of variation seems to be narrowing. The point is that situational variation as a phenomenon seems to be spreading to more members of the society there.

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## Appendix

**Table 16:** *Examples of inflection, Sunndalen*

Class	Singular			Plural			Gloss
	Indef.	Definite		Indef.	Definite		
		Nominativ e	Dative		Nominativ e	Dative	
M-ar	fesk	<sup>v</sup> fiʃc̥c̥en	<sup>v</sup> fiʃc̥c̥a	<sup>v</sup> feska	<sup>v</sup> feskaŋ	<sup>v</sup> fesku	'fish'
M-er	bæŋk	<sup>v</sup> beŋc̥c̥en	<sup>v</sup> beŋc̥c̥a	<sup>v</sup> beŋc̥c̥e	<sup>v</sup> beŋc̥c̥iŋ	<sup>v</sup> beŋc̥c̥u	'bench'
M-weak1	<sup>v</sup> flaŋe	<sup>v</sup> flaŋiŋ	<sup>v</sup> flaŋu	<sup>v</sup> flaŋa	<sup>v</sup> flaŋaŋ	<sup>v</sup> flaŋu	'hose'
M-weak2	<sup>v</sup> ha:ga	<sup>v</sup> ha:gaŋ	<sup>v</sup> ha:gu	<sup>v</sup> ha:ga	<sup>v</sup> ha:gaŋ	<sup>v</sup> ha:gu	'garden'
F-er	sa:g	<sup>v</sup> sa:ja	<sup>v</sup> sa:jen	<sup>v</sup> sa:je	<sup>v</sup> sa:iŋiŋ	<sup>v</sup> sa:jʊ	'saw'
F-ar	hærg	<sup>v</sup> hæ:rja	<sup>v</sup> hæ:rjen	<sup>v</sup> hærga	<sup>v</sup> hærgaŋ	<sup>v</sup> hærgu	'week-end'
F-weak1	<sup>v</sup> gry:t	<sup>v</sup> gry:ta	<sup>v</sup> gry:tɔŋ	<sup>v</sup> gry:tu	<sup>v</sup> gry:tɔŋ	<sup>v</sup> gry:tu	'pan, pot'
F-weak2	<sup>v</sup> fʀø:gʊ	<sup>v</sup> fʀø:gʊ	<sup>v</sup> fʀø:gʊŋ	<sup>v</sup> fʀø:gʊ	<sup>v</sup> fʀø:gʊŋ	<sup>v</sup> fʀø:gʊu	'fly'
N-0	ta:k	<sup>v</sup> ta:c̥c̥e	<sup>v</sup> ta:c̥c̥a	ta:k	<sup>v</sup> ta:c̥c̥a	<sup>v</sup> ta:c̥c̥u	'roof'
N-weak	<sup>v</sup> mærc̥c̥e	<sup>v</sup> mærc̥c̥e	<sup>v</sup> mærc̥c̥a	<sup>v</sup> mærc̥c̥e	<sup>v</sup> mærc̥c̥a	<sup>v</sup> mærc̥c̥u	'mark'