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**Language Contact
and Language Conflict**

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The International Ivar Aasen Conference was held in Oslo 14–16 November 1996 to mark the centenary of Norway's great language planner and ideologist, Ivar Aasen (1813–1896). The conference was organized by the Ivar Aasen Foundation and the Department of Scandinavian Studies and Comparative Literature at the University of Oslo.

As the title of this volume indicates, the main theme of the conference was *language contact* and *language conflict*. We wanted to emphasize multilingualism in a minority/majority perspective, and language norms, status and standardization. Approaches to these themes were multidisciplinary as well as interdisciplinary. The themes during the first two days focused on current linguistic research and language policies in both Europe and Southern Africa, while the final day was devoted to an overview of Ivar Aasen's work in a Norwegian and European perspective.

Hence, the articles of this volume address a wide range of issues. Some of them, like the articles by Suzanne Romaine, Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Ingerd Muncio Larsson, Lars Vikør, Peter Trudgill and Rolf Theil Endresen deal with somewhat theoretical aspects. Others present language contact and conflict situations in different parts of the world. Aija Priedite, Terje Mathiassen and László Keresztes discuss the situation in the Baltic states. Miquel Strubell writes about the Catalan experience and Herbert Chimhundu presents Zimbabwe as a case study. Ole Henrik Magga and Odd-Inge Schröder present the status and rights of different minority language groups in Norway. The leader of The European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages, Dónall Ó Riagáin, gives an overview of the language policies in the new Europe while Sigve Gramstad presents the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The intellectual basis of the Norwegian language movement in the 19th century is dealt with from different angles by Arne Apelsest, Stephen Walton and Oddmund Løkensgard Hoel. Last but not least Dag Thorkildsen, Tove Bull, Torill

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Language Traditionalism and the Nationalism Conflict after 1814

1 Introduction

The writings during this century concerning the history of the Norwegian language during the 1800's have concentrated mainly on how Norway achieved her own literary language. The lingo-political participants have been divided into two groups – we can call them the nationalists and the non-patriots. Those with their national disposition in order can in twin be divided along two broad groupings found in most accounts of language history: There were those who followed Ivar Aasen and worked to achieve a new Norwegian literary language based on the dialects, and those who supported Knud Knudsen and wished to make the Danish more Norwegian. Those lacking a national disposition in the linguistic domain, the traditionalists who wanted to protect the Danish literary language, have not been discussed much. One of the few exceptions is professor of history Peter Andreas Munch who, true enough, was an aggressive opponent of Knudsen and Norwegianization, but who salvaged his posthumous reputation because he accomplished other good things for the nation. In this way the 1800's become an account of how the nation slowly, but surely, emancipated herself linguistically from Denmark.

Although this is how the 1800's appear to many people living in the 20th century, this was not how the linguistic dispute was perceived by the people participating in it at the time. The traditionalists that we regard as unpatriotic did not look upon themselves like that. They believed they represented a healthy nationalism, and that the Danish literary language was an excellent expression of Norwegian nationality. The language battle was therefore a dispute concerning the essence of the national – as much about the power of definition and ideological hegemony, a controversy between alternative ideas of nationalism and nation-building projects as a battle for or against the national.

I intend to concentrate on the traditionalists and their nationalism, that is to say the moral losers, the ones to whom no one today acknowledges or dedicates celebratory commemorative years. What they represented was not only one of many nationalistic alternatives, it was the dominating alternative, and was the official Norwegian language policy during most of the 1800's. In other words

I shall concentrate on the atmosphere of language ideology under which Ivar Aasen and other adherents of New Norwegian lived and worked, not on Aasen and the adherents themselves.

2 The loser Steenbuch

Henrik Laurentz Nicolai Steenbuch (1774–1818) was a typical loser – as realized from the German-Danish name alone. Steenbuch was a government official's son from Melhus in Trøndelag and lived from 1774 to 1839. He was a judicial candidate in Copenhagen from 1810 and a law professor at the newly opened University of Christiania from 1818. He was at the same time interested in languages and history, and was central in the small milieu that founded Norwegian historic research in the 1820's and 30's.¹

Steenbuch stubbornly claimed that the Danish written language in Norway was Norwegian. And this was not just a casual remark – in 1834 he published the largest of his historical publications and one of the largest Norwegian works on language history up to that time: “Afhandling om hvilke Benævnelser Landet, Folket og dets Sprog findes tillagte”.² In more than 120 pages he presented a very thorough and detailed historical argument for the Norwegians having just as valid a reason to call the written language Norwegian as the Danish had to call exactly the same literary language Danish. Briefly explained, his point was that the literary language in Norway in the 14-, 15-, and 1600's had developed independently, without influences from Danish. The final confluence did not occur before the 1700's, and then was a result of centralization in the Danish-Norwegian state. That very centralization and the cultural dominance was also the reason why the Norwegians in the 1700's started using the erroneous name ‘Danish’ for the language they wrote.

Today, no one would seriously claim that the written language in Norway was ‘Norwegian’ in the 1800's. The subsequent judgement of Steenbuch has not been of the best. Even such a careful man as professor of literature Edvard Beyer concludes in Cappelen's *Norges Litteraturhistorie* that “there was patriotic self-assertion, but no real will to Norwegianize” behind Steenbuch's works (Beyer 1975:31).

But for the Norwegians living at the time, Steenbuch represented the best of ‘the will to Norwegianize’. He was among the foremost on the Norwegian

1 On Steenbuch, see *Norsk Biografisk Leksikon* and J. B. Halvorsen's *Norsk Forfatter-Lexicon*.
2 [“A Dissertation on the Name of the Nation, People and their Language”], Steenbuch 1834. Previously printed in provisional form in the newspaper *Morgenbladet*, 1833–34. In 1828 Steenbuch had taken up the same subject in *Morgenbladet* no. 20, 21, 22 og 23.

side in the purely linguistic dispute the Norwegians have conducted with opponents beyond their own physical borders. After Norway had been forced into union with Sweden in 1814, it became important for the Norwegians to build barriers against linguistic and cultural influences from Sweden. The 1814 November Constitution contained laws stating that ‘The Norwegian language’ should be used in the administration of the state. When Johan Storm Munch included a few Norwegian dialect words in a translation of a Danish saga in 1816, this was perceived as an attempt to make the language more Swedish, and there was so great an outcry that the issue found its way into the Storting (The Parliament). National self-assertion against Sweden was in this way closely connected with the written language. The cultural élite in Denmark looked with contempt upon Norwegians starting to call their written language ‘Norwegian’ after 1814, and harsh words and moral condemnation poured forth from prominent Danish linguists and cultural personalities, such as Christian Molbech, Rasmus Rask and N. F. S. Grundtvig, something that obviously made the Norwegians determined to cling on even more to the right to call the language ‘Norwegian’.³

The dispute over the name of the written language after 1814 is often seen in a certain comical light in language history, and it is Wergeland we remember, for it was he who proclaimed around 1830 that “it is no longer the name of a Norwegian written language and a Norwegian literature the Norwegians would like to win ... now it is the reality of an independent written language that will elevate the Norwegian spirit” (from Beyer 1975:32).

There is nevertheless every reason to emphasize the name controversy: In a pressured situation, in a transitionary phase between Swedish and Danish influences, there developed traditionalism and linguistic nationalism. In addition to the social prestige the literary language already held, it now attained a national prestige, and to question the nationality of the written language was seen both as unpatriotic and Swedish-friendly. What one wanted to achieve was to legitimize the state as a vehicle, to portray Norway as a linguistically ordinary state and the Danish as a legitimate national language, something one could justify linguistically by pointing to the fact that the distance between written and spoken language was no larger than in many other countries. In addition it was important to demonstrate, as Steenbuch tried to do, why the written language could be called Norwegian historically. It was mainly a defensive battle. The first nationalistic cultural offensive came in a different field: the historical sphere (see Dahl 1990:20–42).

3 Cf. Seip 1913, Andresen 1994:54–65 and Skjæveland 1996.

1814 is seen as a parenthesis in language history, because the political events that year lead to no distinct linguistic changes, neither in spoken nor in written language use in Norway. 1814 is still important lingo-politically, not because it can be said that the language problem was created, as some have stated it recently (see Jahr 1989:9; Torp & Vikør 1993:217,240), but because the problem was redefined. From late in the 1700's and early in the 1800's there are many examples which show that linguistically interested Norwegians considered the literary language as 'Danish' and reserved the name 'Norwegian' for the dialects. In 1807 the Norwegian student Gregers Fougner even prepared a plan for a dissertation, in which he proposed to account for why Norway did not have her own national language, and even more interestingly, if it were possible to create a Norwegian national language built on several dialects, that is to say to do what Aasen accomplished half a century later (Lundh 1954:37-42).

The events of 1814 appear to have had a paradoxical effect which made such plans politically impossible and put the lid on these types of linguistic experiments. Not until the 1830's, when the pressure from Sweden had ceased, was a new generation, among whom we find Wergeland and P. A. Munch, able to engage in the notion of creating a Norwegian language. Therefore it is a somewhat inexact to say that Norwegians felt comfortable with the Danish language after 1814. They felt comfortable with a language they conceived as Norwegian.

3 Traditionalism and the losers after 1850

It was not lingo-political provocateurs like Wergeland who formulated the terms for the Norwegian linguistic change, although Wergeland created some animation in the 1830's. The traditionalism that stated that the literary language was 'Norwegian' constituted the official Norwegian language politics from 1814/15, and in the 1820's and 30's the notion that the literary language *was* Norwegian and an excellent expression of Norwegian nationality was secured.

This was the attitude which faced Ivar Aasen, Ole Vig, Knud Knudsen and others, who after 1850 formulated lingo-separatist demands. The argument that had been used against the Danish during the first 20 years after 1814 was now directed against the Norwegian language opposition, and Steenbuch and his dissertation were used to give scientific authority to the resistance against linguistic reformism of any kind.

We can observe the same trend in connection with another loser within language history, the professor of philosophy Marcus Jacob Monrad (1816-

97) – one of the most central ideologists and activists among the traditionalists in the 1850's and 60's. In the major dispute concerning New Norwegian in the autumn of 1858, Monrad and Aasen quarrelled. Aasen had gone to great lengths to assert that the literary language was Danish, and Monrad then found Steenbuch a useful source of reference: "...nevertheless one will find, as Steenbuch's well known dissertation has shown, also from that era [the Danish era], many traces of this language being called and regarded as Norwegian." (Monrad 1858: sp. 2). It was during this dispute that Monrad made clear that New Norwegian, as an everyday language, as used by Aasmund O. Vinje in the weekly magazine "Dølen" in the same year, was "an infatuation that contends all culture-developing principles."

For the Hegelian romantic Monrad, the literary language did not only have the same legitimacy as New Norwegian and the country dialects, it was even more national. The difficulty with New Norwegian and the country dialects was the very fact that they lacked 'true national validity' (Hoel 1996:284) "...The parishes are not the state and the common people are barely the nation", wrote Monrad,⁴ "the country also includes, for example, the towns, and the nation also comprises the cultured élite, and it is precisely among these that one finds the natural diversion of real unity and correlation, in them one finds real self-consciousness as a nation" (from Hoel 1996:281).

By and large, during the first half of the 19th century, Norwegian élite of officials administered nationalism and what was national without any disturbing interference from representatives of the people and the opposition. It was an *Élitist* nationalism, which saw the folk culture as a reservoir and the farmers as suppliers of raw materials, and who felt that the town and official civic culture and the Danish literary language had to form the basis and become the starting point for the national culture and the national language. New Norwegian and the dialects "belongs mainly to the idyllic", wrote Monrad. Stephen Walton has aptly characterized Monrad as the spiritual progenitor of all who believe New Norwegian to be well suited for poems (Walton 1996:646).

Not until after 1850 did the real challenge to the established view of the national occur.⁵ At that time Ole Vig launched a New Norwegian edition of a popular *Grundtvigian nationalism*, which he related to Knud Knudsen's work of Norwegianization during the 1850's. It was the teacher-organizer Vig who managed to combine a radical version of the plans to Norwegianize with the

⁴ He did not mention that only about 5% of the people in Norway lived in towns at that time.

⁵ In the following, see Hoel 1996 for detailed references.

linguistic technocrat, Knudsen, to create an alternative and oppositional cultural ideal, 'the folk league' ['folkedannelsen'] as Rune Slagstad (1996) has named it. After Vig's death in 1857, it was Aasen and the New Norwegian supporters, rather than Knud Knudsen and the followers of a process of Norwegianization, that led the folk league project further and gained entry into important teaching circles. Knudsen did not manage to elevate the work of Norwegianization on his own, into something larger than a more effective way of spreading the prevailing urban middle and upper class cultural ideals. Something that also was to present problems from the start was a literary language that was to be built upon 'the cultured everyday speech' in the towns. Not until the end of the 1800's did the plans for Norwegianization come to the forefront again, and then primarily as a form of mobilization against New Norwegian.

In the conservative parts of the élitist circles there developed contemporaneously a stronger scepticism against nationalism generally, and in the dispute over the union in 1860's there developed a stark antagonism between Scandinavianism and nationalism, which on the whole had not existed before. When in 1869 the Parliament passed a Bill which introduced Old Norse as an optional subject in college, three of the conservative cabinet ministers voted against the resolution. They could "... not agree with the justification of supporting an arrangement which had the intention of reinforcing a national sentiment, which possibly might cause damage or harm in other respects. If there is any area of emotional life which, in the Norwegian nation in general, and among our studying youth in particular, is strongly developed and that is not in need of further support, then this is the love for, an interest for and a belief in the nation." (From Skard 1980:72).

4 Conclusion

The New Norwegian supporters played key roles in the 1850's and 60's in shaping the radical cultural nationalism that achieved its breakthrough when the Left Wing Party came to power in the 1880's. It is this association between nationalism and democratic ideas, social equalization and a folk league, that has enabled Norwegian nationalism to develop its positive aspects.

In this paper I have tried to show that this was not as obvious as we are sometimes led to believe. This opinion of the nation was fought for against a dominant conservative and élitist view of what was national by a group which in the 1850's had only marginal support from the small Norwegian public.

One can imagine that a radicalism with a stronger scepticism for the national ideal or even an anti-national content had won support during the second

half of the 1800's. Marcus Thrane and many of the leaders in the Thrane movement around 1850 supported such a view, which points in the direction of the international socialism that gained a foothold in Norway half a century later (see Hoel 1996:377-380). If the radical and democratic forces of the mid-1800's had chosen such a path, and had not joined the dispute about the national, it is reasonable to assume that the nation concept and the nationalism that prevailed towards the end of the 1800's would have been much more elitist and conservative than it actually was. It may be worth noting that, when right-wing extremists today strive to turn to national symbolism to account for racism and fascism. That they have problems is due to the democratic and popular manifestations that have been a consistent feature of Norwegian nationalism, and the chances of their being successful depend very much on whether or not they are allowed to continue in peace.

The 19th century traditionalists and their nationalism were forced to concede, along with the State Bureaucracy. Although the reasons for this development were social and political rather than ideological, it should be mentioned that the historical and ideological cards in their favour were never of the best. The supporters of New Norwegian and others who firmly maintained that the literary language was 'Danish' found support in the common use of the language before 1814, and had few problems in dismembering the contentions of Steenbuch, Monrad and others regarding language history.

The new knowledge of nation-building and the theories of nationalism presented during the last decades should lead us to look at Norwegian language history in the 19th century again, and especially Dano-Norwegian traditionalism. The question is no longer whether the language conflict was a 'national' or 'social' one, and whether we have impelled typical constructivist points of view. We should now ask how the conflict about forming a national identity became an important part of the language conflict, and how Norwegian linguistic nationalism in its different forms is shaped in the tension between old conceptions of 'the Norwegian' and newer international models and ideological movements.

The International Ivar Aasen Conference 1996 has shown too, that experiences from the large empires of the Western Europe may not be the best background for discussing Norwegian nationalism. In Norway, as in most earlier colonies and small nations, this phenomenon should be discussed in an anti-imperialistic context.

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The Struggle for the Past. Comments on Løkensgard Hoel's Paper

305 Language history occupies a central place in teaching and research in Nordic Studies. Traditionally, modern language history is what we call the external history of the language, or the history of the language in society, which often means in effect the history of language policy. It is therefore to be expected that the history of the Norwegian language in the nineteenth century should be all about linguistic nation-building. The story of how the young nation was constructed by various means, language included, is related in language history after language history, and in article after article. To be sure, this is a theme with only minor variations. As Løkensgard says, the point at issue was how Norway was to acquire a written language of its own. In his view, the nineteenth century then becomes the story of how the nation slowly, but surely and inexorably, freed itself from Denmark. If we read two or more such accounts, we are struck by just how alike they are; one account builds on the other, or rather one paraphrases the other. Therefore any divergences and differences of opinion found in such works are especially interesting, because the story then becomes one of a struggle for the past. And that, as we know, is always about the present.

The most *original* element of Oddmund Løkensgard Hoel's account is his shift of focus, away from the actors who stood for change, i.e. those who desired total or partial Norwegianisation of Danish in one form or another, to those who defended the linguistic status quo. It is commendable that Løkensgard Hoel highlights these actors, and tries to view their times through their eyes, as he puts it. On the other hand, we may ask whether it is at all feasible to do so.

It is probably the case that history, the external history of languages included – like their internal history – is largely about development and change. For this reason, those who propose arguments for, or fight on behalf of, the status quo will always remain in the shade when the history of their times comes to be written.

By giving prominence to Steenbuch and Marcus Jacob Monrad, Løkensgard Hoel manages to shift the focus away from questions of the relationship between Danish and Norwegian to questions of the relationship between Nor-