

The English Language of Norwegian-Americans in Four Midwestern States, with Special Reference to Syntax.

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1.1 The main object of this study was to find out whether and to what degree a Norwegian substratum would influence the speech of people of purely Norwegian descent, and, if so, for how many generations this influence would last. In 1986¹ I carried out an investigation on the pronunciation of this type of informant in the same areas.¹ This study will be concerned mainly with syntax, but some comments on idiom will also be included.

To find informants who might show evidence of Norwegian influence on their speech, the obvious place to go is a rural community which is still more or less solidly "Norwegian," or at least was like that when these informants grew up. Consequently, places like Hillsboro, North Dakota; Coon Valley and Westby, Wisconsin; Spring Grove in southern Minnesota and Decorah, Iowa were chosen for the field work. At the outset of the interviews the informants were told that I was interested in the language situation among Norwegian-Americans, how much Norwegian is still spoken in their homes and neighbourhoods, and how much Norwegian they themselves know. This was, of course a mild deception, since it was first and foremost their English I was interested in. But if they knew that, they might start thinking about what is "correct" English and not produce the kind of English they speak every day.

Most of those who could speak Norwegian fairly fluently were given a questionnaire with 78 sentences that they were asked to translate into

¹ See "The English Pronunciation of Norwegian-Americans in Four Midwestern States," *American Studies in Scandinavia*, Vol. 20, 1988, pp. 105-121.

English. They were asked to do this, ostensibly to reveal how good their command of Norwegian was. Those who knew less, or no Norwegian were encouraged to talk about topics like the situation of the Norwegian language in their communities, past and present, school and church life or other topics that the informants were interested in. 23 interviews consist of free conversation only. But all the informants got a separate set of questions about their sociological background at the beginning of the interview.² The tape was kept running during the whole interview so that the informants could be more relaxed and less aware of the recorder during the conversation/questionnaire part of the interview.

Most of the 23 informants who got no questions on grammar/idiom did not have a sufficiently good command of Norwegian to answer this questionnaire. Some of those with a good command of the language still only had free conversation, for the following reasons: they were especially "interesting" informants, for instance clergymen who had fascinating things to tell about the transition period when Norwegian was replaced by English in church services, or it could be an FIS judge who had interesting information about skiing in America for an interviewer with sporting interests. Also, it was necessary to have a control group to test the reliability of the questionnaire.³

This corpus consists of recorded interviews with 85 informants. There are 4 first generation Norwegian-Americans, 21 second generation, 38 third, 20 fourth and 2 fifth generation speakers. Of these, 32 are women and 53 are men.⁴

The sentences used for translation are of various types, and the selection is based on a contrastive analysis of the two languages, the assumption being that Norwegian immigrants in the US would make the same types of mistakes as people learning English in Norway make. The results of this investigation seem to show that this is not assuming too much.

The questionnaire covers the following areas of grammar/idiom: 1 Use of the Articles; 2 Tenses; 3 Passives; 4 skal/skulle in Norwegian; 5 -Ing

2 In addition to the questions listed in Tables I and II the informants were asked about their age, place of birth, occupation, where their parents and grandparents were born, how often they had been to Norway, and in the case of first generation Norwegian-Americans, their age when they left Norway.

³ For reliability of the questionnaire, see 6.1.

⁴ This gender imbalance is largely the result of the fact that my contacts were men, and when they were asked to find informants they first thought of other men. But then it often proved that these men also had wives that were the type of informant I was looking for.

forms/Infinitive; 6 It/There; 7 Word order; 8 Idioms, Prepositions/Adverbs.

1.2 English and Norwegian have many similarities in their article systems, but there are also some notable differences. English uses the the indefinite article with complements that express membership in groups, professions, etc., Norwegian does not. A common mistake for Norwegians studying English is to leave out the article in these situations. One of my 3rd generation informants said

1. Olsen is engineer

Olsen er ingeniør

Seven 3rd and 4th generation informants said

2. She became Catholic

Hun ble katolikk

By leaving out the article in, e. g., "She is Catholic", "He is Jewish" (rather than "He is a Jew") the speaker is assured of political correctness. It softens the response. But it is doubtful whether these informants had political correctness in mind.

1.3 Norwegian often drops the indefinite article in descriptions of people's appearance and behaviour. But only one informant made this mistake:

3. I had bad conscience

Jeg hadde dårlig samvittighet

1.4 English uses the indefinite article with typical countable nouns more consistently than does Norwegian. Norwegian usage on this point does not seem to be a typical trait in the speech of Norwegian-Americans, but four informants said

4. The roads in the US have high standard

Veiene i Amerika har høy standard

One second generation speaker said

5. They took taxi home

De tok drosje hjem

A first generation informant who had lived in the US for 34 years said

6. He smokes pipe

Han røyker pipe

and

7. Be in bad mood

Å vare i dårlig humør

1.5 Since the indefinite article is used only before countables in the singular in English it will not be used in expressions like the following:

8. What lovely weather!

For et fint vær!

9. What heavy work!

For et tungt arbeid!

Six informants used the indefinite article in sentence 8, and 14 informants used it in sentence 9. All five generations were represented here. Most informants did not volunteer translations starting with "What ..", but rather started with "It's ..". Nine of them said

10. For a nice weather, etc.

It seems safe to assume that this is interference from Norwegian, and this construction is not heard outside the Norwegian-American communities. It can be compared to expressions like

Oh, for awful/fun/good,

where *for* means *very* (and not like *for* in the expression *for good*, which in standard English means *permanently*). As far as I know, these expressions are not used outside Minnesota. But there they are quite widespread, also among speakers of non-Scandinavian backgrounds.

1.6 Norwegian has the definite form with abstract uncountable nouns even though the reference is generic. In English the zero article is the rule. Four informants said

11. The life is short

Livet er kort

Three of them had

12. We're afraid of the death

Vi er redde for døden

And seven said

13. *The* time goes fast

Tida går fort

These speakers represent generations 1-4.

1.7 The possessive pronoun is often used with nouns denoting parts of the body, clothes and personal belongings. This construction is usually used when the "possessor" also performs the action. In these cases Norwegian has the definite form of the noun. Six informants said:

14. I have (got) it in *the* hand

Jeg har det i handa

and ten said

15. He put his hand in *the* pocket

Han stakk handa i lomma

Again, the speakers represent generations 1-4.

2.1 English and Norwegian have, by and large, very similar tense systems, but the same tense forms are not always used in identical situations. Thus, English regularly uses the present tense in expressions of the following type, where Norwegian has the past tense. For the next examples the informants were asked to imagine that the Norwegian sentences referred to the present moment, e.g. to comment on the coffee while actually drinking it. Still 45 informants said

1. It was good of you to do this for me

Det var snilt av deg å gjøre dette for meg

41 informants said

2. This coffee was very good

Denne kaffeen var veldig god

44 informants:

3. This was interesting

Dette var interessant

and 27 said

4. It was about time/high time
somebody said that

Det var på tide noen
sa det

However, they may not all have listened carefully to the instructions, and thus have been influenced by the Norwegian past tense form **var**. The results should therefore probably be taken with a pinch of salt, but they are still interesting. The unanimous reaction of a group of native (non-Norwegian-American) speakers was that **was** in sentences 2 and 3 is inappropriate, but reactions varied as to the appropriateness of past tense forms in 1 and 4.5

2.2 English Past versus Norwegian Present.

The translations of "Det *er* best at du går" were either

5. You had better leave, or

6. It's best that/if you leave

32 out of 62 informants chose the rendering in 6. Native speakers either did not accept this as correct, or said that either 5 or 6 would be all right, or that 6 would be unusual in English in informal speech.

2.3 Present Perfect in English, Present in Norwegian.

Half of the informants (33) produced the translation

7. This is the first time I am in Oslo Dette er første gangen jeg *er* i Oslo

English requires the Present Perfect here.

Both BE and HAVE are possible in the next two sentences, where 46 informants preferred BE:

8. Are you finished Er du ferdig

and 38 said

9. I am not finished yet Jeg *er* ikke ferdig ennå

5 A group of 6-7 native speakers were regularly consulted in cases where I was uncertain about American-English usage.

The majority of my informants preferred forms with BE. There thus seems to be a higher incidence of BE among these informants than is the case in American English.

2.4 Past in English, Present Perfect in Norwegian.

With past time adverbials the Past Tense is the rule in English, whereas Norwegian can have the Present Perfect. Again, there seems to be considerable influence from Norwegian on the speech of my informants in this study. 16 of them said

10. We *have met* once long ago/ a long time ago *Vi har møtt* hverandre for lenge siden

and 30 informants said

11. They *have moved* a long time ago *De har flytta* for lenge siden

The control group did not accept the present perfect in these sentences.

33 informants were asked to translate sentences 12 and 13. (These sentences were added to the questionnaire when about half of the interviews were done.)

12. Who *has invented* the telephone *Hvem har oppfunnet* telefonen

13. They *have moved* three years ago *De har flytta* for tre år siden

The answers in sentences 12 and 13 were the choices of seven and nine informants respectively. The unanimous reaction of the control group was that the present perfect in these situations is unacceptable. In the following sentences (14 -17) the control group accepted both the simple past and the present perfect.

Grammars that deal with differences between British (BrE) and American English (AmE) point to the tendency to use the simple past tense in AmE where BrE prefers the present perfect. Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik: "In AmE, the simple past is often preferred to the present perfective for the variants of the indefinite past discussed in this section."⁶ Leech and Svartvik: "There is also a tendency to use the

⁶ Randolph Quirk, *et al.* *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (London and New York: Longman, 1985), p. 194.

simple past tense in AmE where in BrE the present perfect is used. For example, with yet or **already**.⁷ And Johansson and Lysvåg: "A particular complication is that American English shows a stronger preference for the Past than British English, especially with certain adverbs (already, yet, just) and in expressions referring to the immediate past."⁸

Almost all my informants chose the present perfect in sentences 14-17: 60 in no . 14; 57 in no . 15; 59 in no . 16 and 57 in no. 17:

14. <i>I haven' t said</i> a word	<i>Jeg har ikke sagt</i> et ord
15. <i>I haven' t said</i> anything	<i>Jeg har ikke sagt</i> noe
16. <i>Have you eaten</i> yet	<i>Har du spist</i> ennå
17. <i>I've already eaten</i>	<i>Jeg har spist</i> allerede

94% of my informants chose the present perfect in sentences 14-17. The percentage among non-Norwegian-Americans would presumably be much lower. If this is the case it seems reasonable to assume that the explanation is influence from Norwegian.

2.5 Future time reference in English and Norwegian.

After the **will/shall** construction, the simple present is the most common means of referring to future actions in English. However, this use of the simple present is frequent only in dependent clauses. Quirk *et al* state that in main clauses "this typically occurs with time-position adverbials to suggest that the event is unalterably fixed in advance, and is as certain as it would be, were it taking place in the present."⁹ One would not, therefore, expect the simple present in the following examples: "We'll talk about that later", and "We'll meet soon". But five of the informants said

18. <i>We talk</i> about that later	<i>Vi snakker</i> om det senere
19. <i>We meet</i> soon	<i>Vi treffes</i> snart

⁷ Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik, *A Communicative Grammar of English*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1994), p. 28.

⁸ Stig Johansson and Per Lysvåg, *Understanding English Grammar* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1987), p. 133.

⁹ Quirk *et al*, *A Comprehensive Grammar*, p. 182.

In Norwegian, the prevalent expression used in referring to the future is the present tense. These five informants, representing generations 1-4, seem to have been influenced by their Norwegian language background.

2.6 In Norwegian the auxiliaries **skal/skulle** are often used where the corresponding English auxiliaries **shall/should** would not be used. **Skal/skulle** may correspond to a variety of expressions referring to the future. Norwegian students of English tend to use **skal/skulle** incorrectly, but this does not seem to be a characteristic of the speech of Norwegian-Americans. Two second generation informants said

20. He *shall* be a very wealthy man

Han *skal* være en svært rik mann

where one would expect a construction like "He's *said/reported to be* a very wealthy man". Only one speaker (2nd generation) had *shall* in the following sentence:

21. What *shall* you *do* tonight

Hva *skal* du *gjøre* i kveld

for "What *are* you *doing* tonight?"

Two 1st generation speakers said

22. He said he *should* come

Han sa han *skulle* komme

for "He said he *was coming/was going to come*".

As many as 18 informants used *should* for *would* in

23. One *should* think so

En *skulle* tro det

and two said

24. I *shall* hope that

Jeg *skulle* ønske det

for "I wish/I do wish ..."

2.7 The passive.

Comments on the passive will be limited to situations where Norwegian uses the so-called **stative** passive and English has past tense forms. In the following two examples English would have the past tense form of the auxiliary, whereas in Norwegian one has the stative passive. Of my informants, 24 and 18, representing all five generations, used the present tense in sentences 20 and 21 respectively:

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 25. The picture <i>is</i> taken in Decorah | Bildet <i>er</i> tatt i Decorah |
| 26. She is born in North Dakota | Hun <i>er</i> født i North Dakota |

None of the control group accepted the present tense form in these constructions.

2.8 Ing-forms and the infinitive.

In Norwegian prepositions are followed by infinitives, whereas in English they must be followed by *ing*-forms. Quite a few of my informants, representing generations 1-3, made mistakes that are frequent among Norwegian students of English. Eleven of them said

- | | |
|--|--|
| 27. We look forward to <i>meet</i> you next week | Vi ser fram til <i>å treffe</i> dere neste uke |
|--|--|

Seven chose the infinitive in

- | | |
|---|---|
| 28. I'm used to <i>work</i> late at night | Jeg er vant med <i>å arbeide</i> lenge utover kvelden |
|---|---|

and two of them said

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 29. We thought of <i>travel</i> to Paris | Vi tenkte på <i>å reise</i> til Paris |
|--|---------------------------------------|

In the questionnaire one of the many English verbs that must be followed by the *ing*-form was included. Eleven informants (again representing generations 1-3) used the infinitive:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 30. We avoided to <i>meet</i> them
when we were in New York | Vi unngikk <i>å møte</i> dem
da vi var i New York |
|--|--|

On the other hand, all the informants used the *ing*-form in

31. He stopped smoking when he was 25 ~~Han~~ sluttet å røke da han var 25

Expressions with "stop smoking" are so common that it would have been very strange indeed if anybody had used the infinitive in this situation. (**Stop** can of course be followed by the infinitive, but then with a different meaning.)

3.1 It and there.

The use of it and there is a stumbling-block for many Norwegian learners of English. The most frequent mistake is to use it instead of there. Informants representing generations 1-4 used forms that the control group did not accept. Twelve of them said

1. If it is something you don't understand, just ask	Hvis det er noe du ikke forstår, bare spør
---	---

Eleven informants said

2. It wasn't the slightest protest	Det var ikke den minste protest
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Eight of them said

3. Was it a thunderstorm at your place yesterday	Var det tordenver hos dere i går
---	----------------------------------

Four informants used it in

4. Zi's a cup on the table	Deter en kopp p i bordet
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(The stress- and intonation pattern decides the choice of it or there in this case. With the nucleus on "cup" it would be used, but the informants heard the sentence pronounced with the nucleus on "table".)

Finally, two informants had it in

5. It's a telephone in the kitchen	Det er en telefon p i kjøkkenet
------------------------------------	---------------------------------

(Again, this sentence was read to the informants with the nucleus on "kitchen".)

4.1 Word order.

Word order is not among the big problems facing a Norwegian student of English. There are differences between English and Norwegian, but the basic principles are similar. Some of the most striking differences concern the role of the adverbials. Initial adverbials in main clauses in English do not cause inversion of subject and verb. In Norwegian they are followed by inverted word order. Eight informants said

1. A few days later *came a friend* of mine Noen dager senere *kom en venn* av meg

None of the informants had inverted word order in the syntactically similar sentence "Yesterday the whole family went down to the sea-side", where Norwegian has inversion of subject and verb. Three informants placed the adverb in the position it has in Norwegian in

2. America *became now* a a land of capitalists Amerika *ble nå* et land av kapitalister

In conditional clauses inversion is much more common in Norwegian than in English. Of the 62 informants only one had inversion in

3. *Can you* prove it, I'd be grateful *Kan du* bevise det, ville jeg være takknemlig

But the informant was probably influenced by the word order in the Norwegian example in this case.

5.1 Idioms and prepositions/adverbs.

This is a vast area, and it has not been my intention to examine it thoroughly. The informants were just asked to translate a small handful of sentences where the structure is different in English and Norwegian. Forty-five of the 62 informants who answered the questionnaire (73%), representing all five generations, said

1. The clock is five minutes *too* fast Klokka er fem minutter *for* fort

Five informants said

2. Work oneself up Hisse seg opp

for "Lose one's temper/Get worked up". Four informants said

3. I'm used to *go* to church

Jeg er vant med å gå i kirken

(Cp. 2.8, sentence 28) Eleven informants chose the present infinitive for the perfect infinitive in

4. There's nothing *to do* about it

Det er ikke noe å gjøre med det

Finally, a few sentences where prepositions/adverbs are used differently in the two languages, where some of the informants seemed to have been influenced by their Norwegian background. In sentences five, six and seven the following were the solutions of six, seven and six informants respectively:

5. *After* my opinion he should have had the Nobel prize

Etter min mening skulle han ha hatt Nobelprisen

6. They were looking *after* mushrooms

De leita *etter* sopp

7. *For* 200 years ago Norway was under Danish rule

For 200 år *siden* var Norge under dansk styre

6.1 Reliability of the questionnaire.

A relevant objection to my approach—asking informants to translate sentences from Norwegian into English—is that they may be influenced by the Norwegian text. This is of course a real possibility which a researcher must take into account. One precaution is to disregard answers which are clearly inconsistent with the rest of the informant's performance and where the likely explanation is influence from the Norwegian text. This has been done in some cases. Even so one can not rule out this type of influence. But I feel fairly confident that the results are reliable, for the following reasons. Only a very few of the informants read the questions, because they were not used to reading Norwegian. Consequently they just listened to me saying the sentences. This should make influence from Norwegian structure less than if they had read the questions.

Less than 30% of the informants had any education beyond 8th grade, and it is not likely that they were preoccupied by grammatical correctness when answering the questionnaire, or that they were thinking about the grammatical construction of the Norwegian sentences.

Many informants made no mistakes in article usage. Thus they were not influenced by the Norwegian text in the sentences in 1.2-1.6. But the same informants made mistakes with, e.g., tense forms.

Informants made the same type of mistake in free conversation as they did when answering the questionnaire. There were a great many examples of this, and they are too numerous for me to include all of them. In the following the relevant section in the questionnaire will first be referred to, followed by what the informant said in free conversation. (Informant 32): 2.7: "She is born over here".

(Informant 33): 3.1: "It's nothing to be done about it."

A few informants even made no mistakes in the questionnaire, but got identical constructions wrong in free conversation: (Informant 30):2.7: Got all five sentences in questionnaire right, but said in free conversation: "Ja, they are both born here".

(Informant 39): 3.1: "It was no hospital or doctors".

(Informant 47): 3.1: "Yes, it was a little log house and a little barn". The context made it clear that it had no anaphoric reference in this utterance.

(Informant 65): 2.4: "I've lost my wife two years ago".

Could the explanation for this be that the informant was more concentrated when answering the questionnaire, but more relaxed in free conversation?

7.1 In 7.1 - 7.4 random mistakes made in free conversation by speakers from four generations will be listed, without reference to the questionnaire.

First generation speakers:

It's just two of us in Coon Valley
It's nothing to do about it
There isn't much to do with it (=to be done about it)
I'm used to go to the church

7.2 Second generation speakers:

They promised they would see to that they'll keep me going
We heard stories about that they couldn't...
It's a lot of mechanised work now
For a heavy work
My brothers and sisters were confirmed on Norwegian
It's on time (= high time)
Scared for death
They built on the barn 40 feet (= added)

7.3 Third generation speakers:

And *it* was a girl from Norway there
It's not many hills and stuff here
 ... my cousin that lives on my *homeplace* now
I've lost my wife two years ago
 My mother was good enough *in* German
 What was the name of the town *again*? I know it so well

(**Again** is not a request for repeating information. In that case it would have been standard English.)

They *were with* up to Montevideo
 I couldn't say a word *on* Norwegian
 Not very good *on* Norwegian

7.4 Fourth generation speakers:

Nothing *to* do about it
It was ten of us
 He *is* born in January
 Oh *for* fun
 Anna was the sister *to* my dad
 When they started *to* school
 I *was to* Norway ten years ago

None of the two fifth generation speakers made any syntax mistakes in free conversation.

7.5 Speakers of all five generations, and informants whose speech showed little or no influence from Norwegian, frequently used the expressions “ja”, “å ja”:

Å *ja*, they could
 A little bit, *ja*
 They did, *ja*
 Just worked on the **farm**, *ja* (See footnote 8).

7.6 This section deals with the 62 informants who answered the questionnaire, and shows what syntax errors seem to be most common. Various mistakes in the tense system are at the top of the list:

1. This coffee *was* very good (66% of the informants)
2. This is the first time I *am* in Oslo (53%)
3. They *have moved* a long time ago (48%)
4. The picture *is* taken in Decorah (39%)

5. She is born in North Dakota (29%)

Norwegian influence from "En *skulle* tro det" is evident in

6. One should think so (29%)

Use of the articles:

7. What/For a heavy work (21%)

It / there:

8. If it's something you don't understand, just ask (19%)

9. *It* wasn't the slightest protest (17%)

-ing forms - infinitive:

10. We avoided to meet them when we were in New York (18%)

11. We look forward to meet you next week (18%)

Word order:

12. A few days later came a friend of mine (13%)

The most common error of all was the idiom

13. The clock is five minutes too fast (73%)

8.1 No matter how well one analyses the syntactic systems of the two languages involved, the behaviour of bilingual speakers will not be precisely predictable.¹⁰ The same thing is true for the bilingual speaker when we attempt to establish the connection between the speakers' sociological characteristics and linguistic behaviour.¹¹ However, it is still possible to see a general pattern. The following table shows the background of the informants who made syntax mistakes.

10 In his discussion of bilingualism Einar Haugen understands it to begin at the point where the speaker of one language "can produce **complete, meaningful utterances** in the other language. Most informants in this study are well beyond this point, and a few are close to the point where they can pass as a native in both languages. But as stated in section 8.2 their vocabulary may be more limited than their accent indicates. Einar Haugen, *The Norwegian Language in America. A Study in Bilingual Behavior* (Bloomington, In.: Indiana University Press, 1969), p. 6.

11 See Moen "English Pronunciation of Norwegian-Americans...". pp. 114-116.

Table I

		women	men average	
1. Education	8th grade	18%	47%	36%
	High School	41%	32%	36%
	College/Univ	41%	21%	28%
2. Norw. spoken in home when info. was a child	Regularly	59%	77%	70%
	Frequently	21%	17%	18%
	Occasionally	17%	4%	10%
	Rarely	3%		1%
	Never		2%	1%
3. Norwegian spoken	by mother only	3%	6%	5%
	by father only	10%	2%	5%
	by both parents	86%	91%	89%
	by others also	65%	83%	76%
4. Norwegian spoken in home now	Regularly	7%	13%	11%
	Frequently	10%	11%	11%
	Occasionally	24%	25%	25%
	Rarely	28%	21%	23%
	Never	31%	30%	30%
5. Norw. spoken in neighborhood when info. was a child	Regularly	59%	68%	62%
	Frequently	21%	15%	20%
	Occasionally	17%	13%	11%
	Rarely	3%	4%	7%
	Never			
6. Norw. spoken in same neighborhood now	Regularly			
	Frequently	3%	13%	9%
	Occasionally	7%	26%	18%
	Rarely	49%	38%	42%
	Never	41%	23%	31%
7. Info.'s own command of Norwegian	Fluent	24%	62%	47%
	Good	45%	24%	31%
	Fair	21%	6%	12%
	Poor	7%	6%	7%
	None	3%	2%	3%
8. Grew up in a rural area		90%	94%	92%
	Grew up in an urban area	10%	6%	8%
9. Before school info. spoke	Only Norwegian	48%	66%	59%
	Norwegian first	14%	19%	17%
	Both Norwegian and English	31%	28%	29%
	Only English	21%	9%	13%

8.2 Comments on sections 1-9 in Table I

1. More women than men had been to High School and College/University. The explanation for this is that 64% of the men had been/were farmers and many of them had had to start working on the farm as soon as they had finished grade school. Of the women 31% were farmers wives. The others had jobs that required more education than just grade school.

2. Norwegian was spoken regularly in 70% of the informants' homes when they were children. Since the average age of the informants is 69 years (64 for the women and 72 for the men) it means that this was the situation in these rural communities in the 1920s. This indicates that my informants are not a cross-section of Norwegian-American society, nor were they intended to be.

3. In almost all of these homes Norwegian was spoken by both parents. There were only a couple of the spouses who were not of Norwegian family. Generally there were three generations living on the farm, so there were also Norwegian-speaking grandparents and sometimes unmarried uncles and aunts.

4. There is a dramatic difference in the position of the Norwegian language in homes now compared to about 60 years ago: roughly 10% speaking it regularly now compared to 70% then. Some Norwegian used to be spoken in nearly all of these homes, whereas now it is never spoken in 30% per cent of the homes. One still finds elderly couples who speak Norwegian rather than English among themselves, and not only first generation speakers, but this is becoming very rare.

5 and 6. One second generation informant said: "Everything was Norwegian. There was one Irishman in the neighbourhood, and he got to understand Norwegian, because that was all he heard". We see a development in the neighbourhoods similar to that in the homes: whereas Norwegian used to be spoken regularly in just over 60% of the neighbourhoods it is no longer spoken regularly in any of the communities covered by this study.

7. The informants were asked to rate their own command of Norwegian. Since very little Norwegian was spoken during the interviews the interviewer did not hear enough to evaluate their fluency reliably. But working with the informants on the questionnaire made it clear that their assessment of their own performance was somewhat optimistic. Especially the men's: Over 60% of them regarded themselves as fluent. But except for a very few of them they had problems with many of the words in the questionnaire. Only a few read Norwegian regularly (See 6.1). They might therefore have problems with the sentence "Han har stort *hode*" (He has a big head), but not if they heard *huggu* for *hode*. Similarly, some of them were stumped by "Livet er *kort*" (Life is short), but they understood "Livet er *stutt*". Dialect terms like *huggu* and *stutt* were familiar, but not the Bokmål terms *hode* and *kort*. (The families of many of my informants had emigrated from the Hadeland/Toten/Gudbrandsdal area.)

There seems to be a striking discrepancy between the speakers' accent and their vocabulary: Because they may have a quite genuine Norwegian pronunciation—for instance mastering the highly complex phenomena of Toneme one and Toneme two—the listener gets the impression that their mastery of Norwegian is better than it actually is. Within the limited vocabulary of everyday terms the informants may sound very fluent and competent in

Norwegian, but on less familiar ground the same speakers can be rather helpless because of their limited vocabulary.

The informants who spoke Norwegian usually mixed in many English words. One third generation speaker, who mastered for instance Toneme two, and had a "thick" /l/ (a voiced retroflex flap), said: "Vi fekk ticketen for å komma p i fair'n t i skulen da, vet du" (We got the ticket for the fair through our school, you know).

But time and again the informants surprised the interviewer with their mastery of Norwegian. A third generation Norwegian-American described the reactions of native Hadeland speakers when she was visiting relatives in that part of Norway. They thought she spoke an old-fashioned Hadeland dialect, and one of them said: "Den slesker litt p i Totning" (It sounds a bit like the Toten dialect). The family on her mother's side came from Toten.

8. Over 90% of these informants had grown up in a rural area. Odd Lovoll (1984:153) has shown that Norwegians, more than most immigrant groups, settled in rural areas. But, as already stated, these speakers were not selected with a view to investigating the speech of a cross-section of the Norwegian-American population in the Upper Midwest.

9. Even if almost all of these informants had grown up in rural areas in the 1920s and 30s it is surprising that as many as 59% of them spoke only Norwegian before they started school. Even one of the two 5th generation informants spoke Norwegian before he spoke English. Norwegian was spoken regularly in the homes of all of these speakers, except for two of them who said it was spoken frequently.

8.3 Nine of my informants, six men and three women, did not make any Norwegian-influenced syntax mistakes.¹² Although this is a small number, it is interesting to compare their sociological background with that of the informants in Table I. In Table II only the number of speakers will be listed, since percentages are not very informative with such small numbers.

12 Two of these men said "Ja, ja", "Å, ja". I doubt if these expressions are used among non-Scandinavians even in Minnesota. American English uses "Yeah" or "Yep", but these are not standard equivalents, since they are not used in the same contexts. However, these expressions have not been classified as syntax mistakes.

Table II

		women	men
1. Education	8th grade	-	
	High School	2	1
	College/Univ.	1	5
2. Norw. spoken in home when info. was a child	Regularly	2	
	Frequently	-	1
	Occasionally	1	3
	Rarely	-	2
	Never	-	
3. Norwegian spoken by	mother only	-	
	father only	-	1
	both parents	3	3
	by others also	2	4
4. Norwegian spoken in home now	Regularly	-	
	Frequently	-	
	Occasionally	-	
	Rarely	-	1
	Never	3	5
5. Norw. spoken in neigh- borhood when info. was a child	Regularly	1	2
	Frequently	-	1
	Occasionally	1	2
	Rarely	1	1
	Never	-	
6. Norw. spoken in same neighbourhood now	Regularly	-	
	Frequently	-	
	Occasionally	-	
	Rarely	2	5
	Never	1	1
7. Info.'s own command of Norwegian	Fluent	-	
	Good	1	2
	Fair	-	3
	Poor	2	1
	None	-	
8. Grew up in a rural area Grew up in an urban area		2	3
		1	3
9. Before school info. spoke	Only Norwegian	1	
	Norwegian first	-	
	Both Norwegian and English	-	1
	Only English	2	5

A comparison of tables I and II shows that the informants who made no syntax mistakes had more education than those who did; they had grown up in homes and neighbourhoods where Norwegian was less frequently spoken; their own command of Norwegian was poorer; almost half of them had grown up in an urban area as compared to less than 10% of the other group; and most importantly: seven out of nine spoke only English before they started school whereas almost 60% of the other group spoke only Norwegian before starting school. In Moen it was shown that, with a few individual exceptions, there is a close correspondence between sociological characteristics and language use, and the single most important factor in the informants' background which helped explain their present language use was the language they spoke before starting school.¹³ This applied to accent, but the present study shows that the situation is the same when it comes to syntax.

9.1 There is a wealth of evidence in sociolinguistic literature for sex differences in language.¹⁴ There is thus plenty of evidence that women prefer the "standard" language to dialect/slang in monolingual situations. In Moen it appeared that almost three times as many men as women had an accent, indicating that this preference also extends to bilingual situations.¹⁵ The present study shows strikingly similar figures: of the men who made syntax mistakes 90% spoke with an accent, whereas only 28% of the female informants had an accent. None of the informants who did not make syntax mistakes had an accent.¹⁶

9.2. This being the situation, it would seem reasonable to assume that fewer women than men would make syntax mistakes. But this does not seem to be the case. In the present study 47 of the 53 men made syntax mistakes (88%), and 29 of the 32 women (90%). Also, of the informants who answered the questionnaire 39% were women. Between them they made 38% of the syntax mistakes. In other words: There is no difference in this study between men and women when it comes to handling the

13 Moen, "English Pronunciation of Norwegian-Americans....", pp. 115-117.

14 See, e.g., Jennifer Coates, *Women, Men and Language* (London: Longman, 1986); Barrie Thorne & Nancy Henley, eds., *Language and Sex* (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House Publishers, 1975); Peter Trudgill, *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society* (Harmondsworth, Engl.: Penguin Books, 1983).

15 Moen, "English Pronunciation of Norwegian-Americans....", pp. 118-9.

16 Accent here means "Norwegian accent", where the English pronunciation of the informants had such characteristics as, e.g., a Norwegian intonation pattern, /s/ for /z/ in a word like "easy", or /t/ and /d/ for the unvoiced and voiced sounds respectively.

syntax. But, as has been shown in 9.1, more than three times as many men as women speak with an accent. There is no reason to doubt the numerous findings in sociolinguistic literature showing that women seem to be more preoccupied with correctness than men are, or that this should not apply to syntax as well as to accent. How can one then explain the discrepancy between the many syntax mistakes and the few occurrences of accent among the female informants? One likely explanation might be that an accent is more noticeable than the odd syntax mistake. An accent gives the speaker away immediately, and is there all the time, but the speaker may go on for quite some time before he or she needs to use a grammar construction where there may be influence from a Norwegian substratum.¹⁷

¹⁷ I would like to thank Professor Peter Trudgill for valuable advice at the outset of this project, Professors Robin Fulton Macpherson and Alex Vardamis for their comments on the manuscript; and not least my contacts and informants in the Upper Midwest who made the fieldwork possible and enjoyable.