

The English Pronunciation of Norwegian-Americans in Four Midwestern States

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The story of the Norwegian emigration to America is a fascinating chapter in our history. This story has been ably recounted by historians like Theodore C. Blegen, Ingrid Semmingsen and, more recently, by Odd Sverre Lovoll. But one aspect of the immigrant's experience has received scant attention. If it had not been for scholars like George T. Flom and Einar Haugen we would not have known too much about the language situation among the immigrants.¹ The most important study in this field is without doubt Haugen's *The Norwegian Language in America*. This impressive study, a classic among works on language contact, has a wealth of information on a bilingual situation. In the first volume Haugen deals with the bilingual community, and in the second volume with American dialects of Norwegian.

In the preface to the second edition Haugen writes: "Among the topics which were not adequately treated in the book was . . . the English spoken by my informants, since this was not part of the original plan" (1969:xv). In private correspondence Haugen has said; "I have always regretted that I did not include a description of Norwegian-American English in my study of the Norwegian language in America." This is the topic of the present article.

The object of the study was to find out whether and to what degree a Norwegian substratum will influence the speech of people of purely Norwegian descent, and, if so, how long they continue to speak English with a Norwegian accent. For this purpose, 71 Norwegian-Americans representing five generations were interviewed, and the interviews recorded. To keep the study within manageable scope, I chose not to deal with morphology and syntax, and to concentrate on the English pronunciation of my informants.

Apart from a few pages in Haugen's book (1969:46-49) I am aware of only one study dealing with the English pronunciation of Norwegian-Americans, Ann Simley's "A Study of Norwegian Dialect in Minnesota"

(1930). Ann Simley was a teacher at Crookston in northern Minnesota. Half of the students enrolled at the Northwest School during the school year 1927–28 were of Norwegian parentage. One hundred and fifty students from 50 widely separated communities were studied. Simley's interesting results will be compared with my own findings.

The fieldwork for my study was carried out in the four Midwestern states of Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Wisconsin in the autumn of 1986. These states were chosen first because they are situated in the heart of Norwegian America, and also because this is a dialect area with which I have some familiarity. I am grateful to the 71 informants who agreed to be interviewed, and first and foremost to helpers in Decorah, Iowa; Minneapolis, Northfield and Spring Grove, Minnesota; Hillsboro, North Dakota; La Crosse and Westby, Wisconsin.² Although this study makes no claims to be built on a statistically reliable sampling of the speech community, it nonetheless represents a substantive investigation in a field that has been little explored.

To find informants who might show evidence of Norwegian influence on their speech the obvious place to go was a rural community which was still more or less solidly "Norwegian." But in order to study a cross-section of the Norwegian immigrant community, speakers who grew up in an urban environment have also been included in the study – 26.8% of all informants.

When the interviews started the informants were told that I was interested in the language situation generally among Norwegian-Americans. Only after the completion of the interview were they told that I was primarily interested in their English pronunciation. This mild deception was deemed necessary in order that their performance not be influenced by attempts to give the investigator what he wanted, or by notions of correctness.

The informants were first asked questions from a questionnaire about their own family background and about the society they grew up in, as in the following samples:

- Norwegian spoken in your home when you grew up, and by whom?
- Norwegian spoken in your home now?
- Norwegian spoken in your neighbourhood when you grew up?
- Norwegian spoken in your neighbourhood now?

The choices were whether Norwegian was spoken regularly, frequently, occasionally, rarely or never. They were also asked which language(s) they spoke before they started school, whether Norwegian was their only language, their first language, whether they spoke Norwegian and English, or only English. They were then asked to assess their own command of Norwegian as fluent, good, fair, poor or non-existent. There followed a free conversation on a topic/topics that the informants were

thought to be interested in, and they were generally very forthcoming. Finally, they were asked to read an excerpt from *Lake Wobegon Days*, by Garrison Keillor. (Keillor's radio show "A Prairie Home Companion" stimulated many of the older informants to talk freely.)

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 part of the interview.

Of the 71 informants, 27 were women and 44 were men. There were 7 first generation Norwegian-Americans, 19 second generation, 21 third, 22 fourth and 2 fifth generation speakers. The average age of the informants was 60 years.³ All were of Norwegian descent, on both sides of the family.

Table I.

Error	Generation				Number/ percentage of infs. committing errors	
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th		
Consonants						
				(x)		
1. [t] for [θ]	4 (5)	9 (11)	6 (8)	5 (9)	24	73%
2. [d] for [ð]	4	9	6	4	23	70%
3. [s] for [z]	3	7	3	2	15	46%
4. [j,dj] for [dʒ]	2	3	2		7	21%
5. flapped [r]	3	1	1		5	15%
6. "clear" [ɹ]	1	1	3		5	15%
7. dental [t]	1	2	2		5	15%
8. dental [d]	1	2	2		5	15%
9. [ʃ,tʃ] for [ʒ,dʒ]	1	1	1		3	9%
10. "thick" [ɹ]	2				2	6%
11. [w] for [v]	1				1	3%
Vowels						
12. [ʊ] for [u]	3	1	4	1	9	27%
13. fronted close spread [ɪ]	3	2	1		6	18%
14. rounded [a]	3	2	1		6	18%
15. fronted close [i]	2	2		1	5	15%
16. [ʊ] for [u]	2		2	1	5	15%
17. rounded [ɒ]	2		1		3	9%
18. rounded [ɔ]	2				2	6%
19. rounded [[A]]	1				1	3%
20. too wide glide in [eɪ]	1				1	3%
21. too wide glide in [aɪ]	1				1	3%
22. too wide glide in [ɔɪ]	1				1	3%
23. Intonation	5	10	7	7	29	88%

(x) = total number of informants in each generation in brackets.

Close analysis of the material showed that 33 of the 71 informants spoke with a discernible Norwegian accent.⁴ The informants were judged to have an accent if they consistently made one or more of the substitutions in Tables I and II, or had a Norwegian intonation pattern. The results are summarised in the table on the preceding page, which comprises only those informants who had an accent.

Table I shows what types of "errors" were made, and their percentages. It also shows the number of informants in each generation and how many of them made which types of "mistake."⁵ My comments on these figures will address generational differences first.

The two first-generation informants who spoke without any trace of an accent had lived in the U.S. for 49 and 82 years, and were one and eight years old respectively when their families emigrated. The five who had an accent had lived in the U.S. from 32 to 74 years, and were from 9 to 22 years old when they emigrated. The two with the strongest accent came to the country 58 and 74 years ago, aged 18 and 16 respectively, and still prefer to speak Norwegian. Between them these five speakers make all of the 23 types of mistake recorded. They also make four types of mistake which are not observed in later generations:

- the so-called "thick" l (voiced retroflex flap), in *school* [skul]
- [w] for [v] in *TV* [ˈtɪvɪ], *visit* [ˈvɪzɪt]
- rounded [ɜ] in *early* [ˈɜrli], *learn* [lɜrn]⁶
- rounded [ʌ] in *study* [ˈstʌdi]

One would have expected that later generations would also have had problems with English /v/, since this is a fricative, and since, in most types of Norwegian, /v/ is a frictionless continuant. The /v/ is probably the most difficult sound for Norwegian students of English, but it does not seem to be a problem for Norwegian-Americans.

All five informants had an intonation pattern that was more or less strongly coloured by their Norwegian background. Intonation was the only feature that gave one of them away.

Of the 19 second-generation informants, 11 had some evidence of a Norwegian accent. Between them they made 14 different types of mistake. The figures for the third generation may seem somewhat surprising in that 16 different types of mistake were made, two more than were made by the second generation informants. This is, however, explained by the fact that informant 14 made just about every mistake in the book. He was the only third generation speaker with a flapped /r/, rounded /ɔ/ and /ɒ/, and too close, front /i/ and /ɪ/. Informants 2 and 8 also had very strong accents.

Norwegian-language influence is present right down to the fourth generation, as evidenced by six different types of mistake that the informants made among them. The study did not determine whether

fifth-generation speakers also retain an accent, since there are only two informants in this category. Neither of these had an accent, however. But from what the informants told the writer about the status of Norwegian in their communities today (see also Table 111), it is highly unlikely that there are fifth-generation Norwegian-Americans who have an accent. "There's very few younger people now that can talk Norwegian." This is the situation in a place like Spring Grove, which still seems to be one of the most "Norwegian" speech communities. In Spring Grove non-Norwegians might have to learn Norwegian to communicate with their neighbours when my 60–70-year-old informants grew up.

Which, then, are the most common types of error? The following order may be extrapolated from Table I.

Table II.

1.	Intonation: 88%	
2.	[θ]	73% substituted [t] (x)
3.	[ð]	70% substituted [d]
4.	[z]	46% substituted [s]
5.	[u]	27% substituted front [ʊ]
6.	[dʒ]	21% substituted [j] or [dj]
7.	[ɔ]	18% substituted rounded [ɔ]
	[ɪ]	18% substituted advanced, close, spread [ɪ < ^]
8.	[r]	15% substituted flapped [r]
	[ɹ]	15% substituted "clear" [ɹ]
	[t]	15% substituted dental [t̪] for alveolar [t]
	[d]	15% substituted dental [d̪] for alveolar [d]
	[v]	15% substituted fronted [ʋ]
	[i]	15% substituted advanced, close [ɪ < ^]
9.	[ɒ]	9% substituted rounded [ɔ]
	[ɜ, dʒ]	9% substituted [ʃ, tʃ]
10.	[ɜ]	6% substituted rounded [ɔ]
	[ɪ]	6% substituted "thick" [ɪ]
11.	[v]	3% substituted [w]
	[ʌ]	3% substituted rounded [ɔ]
	[eɪ]	3% substituted [æj] (With a wider glide than expected)
	[aɪ]	3% substituted [aj] (With a wider glide than expected)
	[ɔɪ]	3% substituted [ɔj] (With a wider glide than expected)

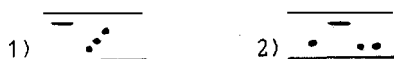
(x) This means that 73% of the speakers regularly substituted [t] for [θ], not that 73% of the [θ]'s in the discourse of all speakers were pronounced as [t] rather than [θ]. The same goes for 3–11 above.

How do these figures agree with the results of other studies? For intonation, no previous studies exist that might serve as a comparative base for the present study. This represents no serious lacuna, however, since a detailed comparison of my informants' tone patterns and Mid-western intonation would fall outside the scope of this paper. Conse-

quently I will limit my comments to the most striking intonational features. These were the typical "ups and downs" of Norwegian, with the unstressed syllable(s) pronounced on a higher pitch-level than the preceding stressed one. In American English the unstressed syllables typically have a lower pitch-level. There is also a tendency for the voice to go up before a pause more frequently than is typically the case in American, not only in for example questions and incomplete utterances, but also in statements. The effect to the English-speaking listener produced by this pattern can be one of tentativeness, diffidence and of asking questions rather than making a statement. The rise before a pause is a characteristic feature of eastern Norwegian and of Trønder speech, and these are the areas that the families of my informants came from.

The following examples from the recordings illustrate both of these phenomena (the dots stand for unstressed syllables and the dashes for stressed ones. 1) = informants' intonation patterns; 2) = likely American patterns in the same contexts):

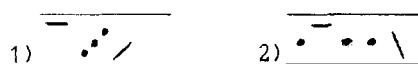
America



Only half a mile



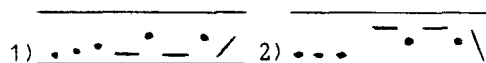
Norwegian in church



He's still in town here



I've been a farmer all my
life



As already mentioned, Einar Haugen (1969) deals only marginally with the problem which is being investigated in this article. Quoting from Ann Simley's study, he comments: "The most persistent difficulty of Norwegian Americans is the inability to pronounce a proper z, especially at the end of words" (1969:48). In his review of Uriel Weinreich's *Languages in Contact* Haugen elaborates on this observation by noting that the /z/ is "empirically the last English sound learned by a Norwegian" (1954:383). In the present study the /θ/ and /ð/ seem to present even more persistent difficulties. But there is probably no conflict

here. Haugen stresses that it is especially at the end of words that Norwegian Americans produce /s/ for /z/. At the beginning of this investigation all the instances of /s/ for /z/ substitution were recorded, including the so-called "inflectional"s: the plural and the genitive s, and the third person singular present verb ending. The traditional rule says that the inflectional ending is pronounced [z] after voiced (lenis) sounds, [s] after unvoiced (fortis) sounds and [ɪz] after sibilants. Devoicing then operates in varying degrees in final position. It turned out, however, that also the informants who had no trace of an accent in their English regularly pronounced a completely devoiced sibilant in this position. Twenty-one of the 38 informants without an accent spoke only English before they started school, and most of them had grown up in urban areas where they heard little or no Norwegian. It would thus have been very surprising if they had shown any evidence of a Norwegian influence on their language. I therefore felt it safe to use these as a control group. One can probably argue that these speakers pronounced a devoiced lenis [z] and not a fortis [s]. This distinction is easy to perceive in pairs like lies – lice, peas – peace where the vowel length is reduced by about 50% in front of the fortis [s]. When the devoicing of [z] is complete in words like organs, reads, John's, however, where a fortis [s] would not have a shortening effect on the vowel, it is problematic to distinguish between the two sibilants. I therefore decided not to regard the pronunciation of final s as an accent marker. But if the informant pronounced an [s] between voiced elements in words like busy, cousin, husband, losing, result, visit, this was regarded as an accent marker. In Ann Simley's study the substitution of [s] for [z] occurred in the following words: *grows*, annoys, was, zebras, cars, says, i.e. in final position, as well as in other words in the list she used, and this may account for the difference in relative frequency.

One interesting conclusion that Ann Simley reached is that the error which popular humour commonly associates with Norwegian-American speech, the confusion of /j/ and /dʒ/ (Yonny Yonsen), is not very frequent. The relative frequency is somewhat higher in the present study, this substitution being the sixth most frequent error. But only about every fifth informant made this substitution. How could this misconception about the confusion of /j/ and /dʒ/ have come about? It may be a question of prominence: J is an initial letter, while the /z/ pronunciation of s is usually medial or final and thus less prominent to the ear. It is only in the few words beginning with z that we have initial /z/. The use of /t/ and /d/ for /θ/ and /ð/ are less conspicuous than the use of /j/ for /dʒ/. Also, the song

May name is Yonny Yonsen
 Ay come from Wisconsin . .

may very well have stimulated the stereotype that Norwegian-Americans regularly pronounce j as /j/.

Ann Simley also included what she called "the substitution of [w] for [hw]" in white (1930:471). She claims that there is little reason to think that this substitution is a result of Norwegian dialect and that "if a test was made, undoubtedly this error would occur in as great a proportion of cases among those who know no foreign language" (1930:471). Although a distinction is quite commonly made between, e.g., whine and wine, which and witch, one cannot regard the pronunciation of about half the American population as an "error," and it is not dealt with in this study.

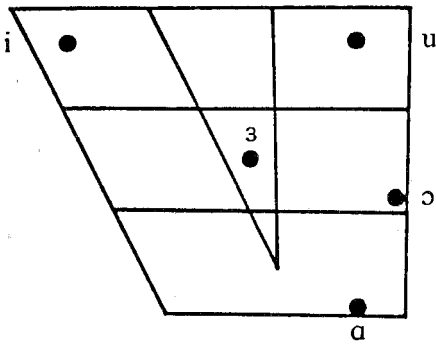
The types of error committed are largely predictable. A contrastive analysis of the phonemes of the two languages and the way they are used will yield a list of the forms which are a result of phonic interference.⁷ The differences between the English and Norwegian consonant systems can be illustrated in the following way (the English phonemes in boxes have no Norwegian counterparts):

ENGLISH				NORWEGIAN						
p	t	tʃ	k	p	t		k			
b	d	dʒ	g	b	d		g			
f	θ	s	ʃ	h	f		s	ʃ	ç	h
v	ð	z	ʒ							
w	l	r	j		v	l	r	j		
m	n		ŋ	m	n		ŋ			

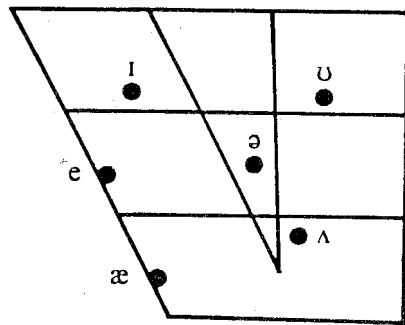
The above diagram shows that there are seven English consonant phonemes which have no Norwegian counterparts: /tʃ, dʒ, θ, ð, z, ʒ, w/. It is, therefore, obvious that the informants who learned Norwegian first and perhaps spoke only Norwegian before starting school would have problems with these sounds, and would tend to substitute those consonants in the Norwegian system which most closely resemble the unfamiliar English ones (cp. Table I, nos. 1-4, 9).

Another problem is caused by phonemes like /r, v, l, t, d/, which occur in both languages but are pronounced differently (Table I, 5-8, 10, 11).

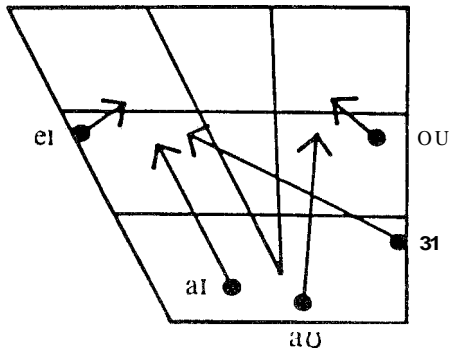
Similarly, a comparison of the two vowel systems will also pinpoint problem areas. Vowel charts showing approximate tongue positions for GA (General American)⁸ and SEN (Standard Eastern Norwegian) vowels are shown here.⁹



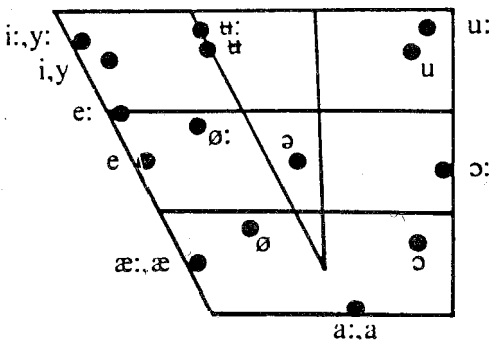
GA unchecked monophthongs



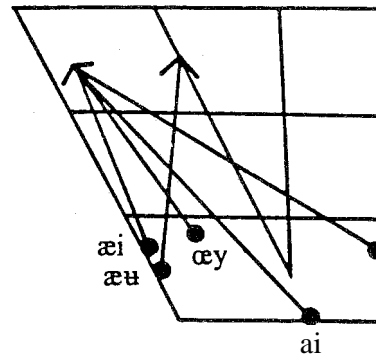
GA checked monophthongs



GA diphthongs (unchecked, closing)



Approximate position of the highest point of the tongue for the 19 SEN monophthongs.



Approximate movement of the highest point of the tongue for the 5 SEN diphthongs.

Illustrative words for GA vowels:

/i/ bee, /ɜ/ bird, /a/ ah, /ɔ/ jaw, /u/ fool;
/ɪ/ bid, /e/ bed, /æ/ bad, /ʌ/ bud, /ə/ sofa, /v/ bush;
/eɪ/ bait, /aɪ/ bite, /ɔɪ/ boy, /av/ bowl

One pronunciation may not be a result of interference. Informants 37, 41, 44 and 47 pronounced *code*, *home*, *snow*, *most*, with a long, close, rounded monophthong: [ko:d], [ho:m], [sno:], [mo:st]. This sound is very close to the Norwegian vowels in *bok*, *sko*: [bo:k], [sko:], but it is an Upper Midwest regional pronunciation. Harold B. Allen (1976:23) found that "there appears to be a trend to the pure [o] as a result of the progressive weakening of the upglide in [ov] . . . This trend towards monophthongization seems stronger in Northern speech territory." The cause of this trend remains open to question. It could also be argued that it might be a result of Norwegian/Swedish influence. But a discussion of this type of problem falls outside the scope of this paper.

It would seem reasonable to predict that the informants who pronounced /i/ too front and close, and /ɪ/ too front, close and spread (cp. vowel charts) would also mispronounce the diphthongs /eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ/. But only one of them actually did, making the glide too wide and pronouncing *day*, *high*, *boy* [dæj], [haj], and [baj].

One might also expect that those informants who substituted [s] for [z] would also substitute unvoiced /f/, /tʃ/ for voiced /z/, /dʒ/. But only three of them made this substitution, pronouncing occasional [p'keɪ/nl] and *college* ['kɒlɪʃ].

Nor can a contrastive analysis predict the curious vacillation between an American and a Norwegian pronunciation of the same phoneme demonstrated by especially two of the informants: retroflex /r/ in *right*, *farm*, *never*, and flapped /r/ in *remember*, *married*, *after*, and retroflex and flapped in *roadwork*. Contrastive analysis can predict a flapped /r/ in these words, since this is the realization of /r/ in the Norwegian dialects that the informants in question were influenced by. But the vacillation between the flapped and the retroflex /r/, and the use of both in the same word, cannot be predicted. One is reminded of an observation by Einar Haugen: "No matter how well one analyzes the respective phonemic systems, the behavior of bilingual speakers will not be precisely predictable" (1954:384).

The same thing is true for the bilingual speaker when we attempt to establish the connection between the speaker's sociological characteristics and linguistic behaviour. The English dialectologist K. M. Petyt says that "probably anyone who has been engaged in detailed fieldwork on any scale . . . will agree that individuals who have the same sociological characteristics (e.g. sex, age, education, occupation, income, etc., etc.) may nevertheless differ in speech patterns" (1986:48). They

Table III.

		Informants	
		with an accent	with no accent
1. Education	8th grade	39%	8%
	High school	39%	13%
	College/univ.	21%	79%
2. Grew up in a rural area		97%	55%
	Grew up in an urban area	3%	45%
3. Norwegian spoken in home when informant was a child	Regularly	88%	32%
	Frequently	—	13%
	Occasionally	9%	18%
	Rarely	3%	16%
	Never	—	21%
4. Norwegian spoken	by mother only	—	—
	by father only	6%	3%
	by both parents	91%	71%
	by others also	88%	58%
5. Norwegian spoken in home now	Regularly	3%	—
	Frequently	3%	—
	Occasionally	15%	11%
	Rarely	24%	16%
	Never	52%	74%
6. Norwegian spoken in neighbourhood when informant was a child	Regularly	76%	21%
	Frequently	9%	18%
	Occasionally	6%	11%
	Rarely	6%	13%
	Never	—	37%
7. Norwegian spoken in same neighbourhood now	Regularly	—	—
	Frequently	18%	8%
	Occasionally	12%	11%
	Rarely	49%	24%
	Never	15%	55%
8. Before school informant spoke	Only Norwegian	61%	5%
	Both Norwegian and English	36%	40%
	Only English	3%	55%
9. Informant's own command of Norwegian	Fluent	52%	26%
	Good	33%	18%
	Fair	15%	21%
	Poor	—	26%
	None	—	8%

may differ, but it is possible to see a general pattern. The following table shows the background of all informants, both those who spoke with a Norwegian accent (Type I) and those who had no accent (Type II):

(1) The interesting point here is that so many with a college/university education retain a Norwegian accent, while speakers with very little formal education may have none. Informant 37, a second-generation speaker with a Ph.D., has spent most of his working life as a college professor, much of the time teaching Norwegian, and has a very strong accent. Informant 23 emigrated when she was eight years old, has no formal education beyond 8th grade, has lived in a home and a neighbourhood where everybody spoke Norwegian, and yet has no trace of an accent. But this situation is the exception; the general tendency is, not unexpectedly, that the more formal education the speaker has, the less likelihood of a Norwegian accent. However, one is dealing with individuals, not just types of informants. They do not all conform to a "group norm," because of differences in aspirations, experience, personality, their facility of verbal expression in general and ability to keep two languages apart, and also attitudes towards each language.

(2) The Norwegians, more than most immigrant groups, settled in rural areas. Odd Lovoll states that "in 1910 . . . the urban percentage for all Norwegian-born was still only 42.2 per cent . . . The percentage of town-dwellers among native-born Americans was 46.3, and among foreign-born an astonishing 72.1 per cent" (1984:153). And, in 1940, "over half of all Norwegian Americans in the Middle West were still living outside urban areas of more than 2,500 inhabitants" (1984:153). This definition of urban-rural has been adopted for this study also. The percentage of rural dwellers in my study is higher: 74.6%. (See p. 106 for comment on statistical reliability.)¹⁰

Of the informants who spoke with an accent, all but one had grown up in a rural area. However, more than half of the informants who had no accent had also grown up in the countryside. It evidently takes more than growing up in a largely Norwegian-speaking environment to acquire an accent.

(3) Almost 90% of the informants who have an accent grew up in homes where Norwegian was spoken regularly. All of them heard some Norwegian at home when they grew up. Almost one third (32%) heard it regularly without acquiring a lasting accent.

(4) In a few families Norwegian was spoken by the father only, but generally both parents spoke it. In the case of informants with an accent, others in the family also spoke Norwegian: Children (see (8) below), grandparents, uncles and aunts, in almost 90% of the homes.

(5) When it comes to Norwegian being spoken in the homes of the informants now, we see that a marked decline has taken place over the last couple of generations. In only 3% of homes of Type I informants is Norwegian spoken regularly, and in over half (52%) of them it is never spoken.¹¹ With Type II informants Norwegian is spoken occasionally in about every tenth home, and in about three out of every four it is never spoken.

(6) The great majority of the informants grew up in neighbourhoods¹² that were solidly Norwegian: It was spoken regularly in about 75% of the communities where the Type I informants grew up and in over 20% of the neighbourhoods where Type II informants lived as children.

(7) We see a development in the neighbourhoods similar to that in the homes: Whereas Norwegian used to be spoken regularly in 76% of the neighbourhoods of Type I informants ("Oh, it was all Norwegian in them days") it is no longer spoken regularly in any of the communities covered in this study. But this does not necessarily mean that Norwegian is not spoken regularly anywhere. (The figures in (6) and (7) do not add up to 100% because some informants could not answer the questions.)

(8) "I didn't know a word of English when I started school." This was quite a common utterance heard in the interviews. An astonishing 61% of Type I informants spoke only Norwegian when they started school, but only 5% of Type II informants. Of those Type I informants who spoke both languages, 75% said that they spoke Norwegian first. The rest were not quite sure which language came first. Of those Type II informants who spoke both Norwegian and English, 67% said they spoke Norwegian first. Only English was spoken by 3% of Type I informants, and by over half of the other group. As one might expect there is a very close correspondence between language spoken before school and permanent accent: Only one Type I informant spoke only English, and just two Type II informants spoke only Norwegian. This factor is more important than, for example, which generation Norwegian-Americans the speaker belonged to. It is the single most important factor in the informants' background which helps explain their present language use.

The influence of Norwegian did not necessarily stop when school began. One informant volunteered: "All talked Norwegian during recess." Students were generally discouraged from talking Norwegian, but not all of them, particularly those who attended one-room country schools where the teachers themselves were often Norwegian. And later many of them were confirmed in Norwegian. As one informant put it: "We went for the Minister." As late as around 1930 there was still some confirmant instruction in Norwegian.¹³

(9) "Talking English makes me sweat," said an 88-year-old second-

generation speaker jokingly. Some speakers, and not only first generation, still found it easier to talk Norwegian. About half of Type I and a quarter of Type II informants rated their own Norwegian as fluent, and very few spoke no Norwegian at all. With a few exceptions the fluent speakers were all over 40 years of age, and none of the young speakers had a Norwegian accent.

Of the 71 informants in this study, 27 (38%) were women. Only six (22%) of the women had an accent. Of the 44 male informants, 27 (61%) had an accent. In other words, the percentage of men who have an accent is almost three times as high as that of women. Also, the female informants who did have an accent committed fewer errors than the men. Among the ten speakers who had the strongest accent in terms of the variety of different mistakes they made, there was only one woman. Among the 20 "top scores" there were three women.

Is there anything in the informants' background to explain this very marked difference? There are no significant differences between the sexes as to language(s) spoken before starting school, which has proved to be the single most important influencing factor (see p. 117). As for education, 82% of the women and 75% of the men went through High School, which represents no significant difference. But a substantially higher proportion of the women had a college/university education: 67 as against 43%. This alone, however, cannot explain the marked difference in accent.

There were seven married couples among the informants. Three of the couples had near-identical backgrounds: They spoke Norwegian first or only Norwegian before starting school. Norwegian was spoken regularly in their homes. They were farmers or farmers' wives and had received the same schooling. A difference in accent may therefore be ascribed to sex. All these men had an accent, but only one of the women, which reinforces the picture of sex difference.

A woman of 77 told how when she came home after her first day in school she said to her mother: "We don't talk right." It took her three days of hard work, listening and watching the teacher's mouth, to learn to say father properly: "I worked so hard to try to get that th in father." Her mother told her to pay special attention and "come and help us." But when she tried to teach her younger brother to say them and not damn, he was more interested in birds' nests than in correct pronunciation. This situation may exemplify a phenomenon which is not unknown among sociolinguists: Women seem to be more preoccupied with correctness than men are. In different parts of the English-speaking world women have been found to use forms that are considered to be more "correct" than forms used by men. Peter Trudgill (1983:92-93) writes: "In those cases where there is some kind of high-status variety or national norm, then changes in the direction of this norm appear to

be led more frequently by women – largely, one supposes, because of the importance of 'correctness' as a feminine characteristic." Sociolinguistic studies have provided overwhelming evidence for sex differences in language. Trudgill maintains that it is "the single most consistent finding to emerge from sociolinguistic work in the past two decades" (1983:96).¹⁴ There is thus plenty of evidence about female preferences for the "standard" language over dialect/slang in monolingual situations. My evidence suggests that this preference also extends to bilingual situations.

The death of the Norwegian language in the United States has been predicted many times over. In 1913 Knut Takla wrote in *Det norske Folk i de Forenede Stater*: "As long as Norwegian emigration continues at the same undiminished pace as hitherto, the Norwegian language will survive in America, . . . But when immigration ceases . . . , it will not take a generation before the Norwegian language is a thing of the past in the N-A settlements" (quoted from Haugen 1969:260). Immigration practically ceased more than two generations ago in the settlements in this study, but we have seen that the Norwegian language is still alive there. Takla's statement is just another illustration of how difficult it is to predict the death of languages. Uriel Weinreich calls this type of prediction "a hazardous business" (1953:108). And as long as there are speakers of Norwegian in the Midwest and other areas we are also likely to hear English spoken with a Norwegian accent.¹⁵

NOTES

1. Literary language has been dealt with by, for example, Solveig Zempel: *Language Use in the Novels of Johannes B. Wist: A Study of Bilingualism in Literature*. University of Minnesota dissertation, 1980.
2. I would especially like to thank Elisabeth and Dennis Jones, Luther College, Decorah; Solveig Zempel, St. Olaf College, Northfield; Walter Langland, Spring Grove; Arthur Klemetson, Hillsboro; Arne Kruse, University of Wisconsin, La Crosse; Ray Holte, Westby, who spent hours on the telephone or days travelling around the district with me on unmarked country roads to look for informants. They made the fieldwork easier and more pleasant.
3. Four of the informants lived in a nursing home, and their ages varied from 88 to 91 years.
4. Everybody speaks with an accent. Accent here and later in this study means "Norwegian accent." If a speaker pronounces, for example, *cousin* /kʌsɪn/ once, substituting [s] for [z], but has [z] regularly in *visit*/'vɪzɪt/, *busy* /'bɪzɪ/, etc. I have chosen to regard it as a slip and not as a sign of a Norwegian accent, although it could be argued that it is a residual feature.
5. The terms "error" and "mistake" are used about deviations from the standard norm, and not in any prescriptive sense.
6. Diacritics used in this article:
For vowel symbols:
 [ʷ] This symbol denotes a greater degree of lip-rounding than is normal for a particular sound in the Upper Midwest.

- [~] Denotes a greater degree of lip-spreading than expected.
- [<] Denotes that the tongue is more advanced than expected.
- [^] Denotes a closer variety than expected.

For consonant symbols:

- [_◌] Denotes complete or partial voicelessness.
 - [_◌] Denotes dentalization.
7. A much-quoted definition of interference is Weinreich's: "Those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language, i.e. as a result of language contact" (1953:1).
 8. General American (GA) is a kind of mythical beast. The USA, unlike England, does not have one well-defined standard pronunciation. Instead of describing one or more individual American dialects, I have chosen to compare Norwegian vowels with a kind of American compromise system, consisting of the phenomena which are common to the majority of American dialects – corresponding largely to what is usually called General American.
 9. The charts have been taken from Niels Davidsen Nielsen, Barbara Bird & Per Moen, *English Phonetics* (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1977).
 10. The effect on the findings of this high percentage of rural dwellers may be partly offset by the fact that more of these informants have a college/university education than a typical cross-section of the Norwegian-Americans.
 11. Nineteen of the informants are living alone.
 12. The term "neighbourhood" is used in the meaning of "geographical entity, surrounding community."
 13. By 1928 confirmant instruction in Norwegian in the Norwegian Lutheran Church was down to 10%, from over 60% in 1917 (Haugen 1969:262).
 14. For relevant literature, see, e.g., Barrie Thorne and Nancy Henley (eds.), *Language and Sex* (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House Publishers Inc., 1975). This book has a very useful and extensive annotated bibliography.
 15. I am grateful to Professors J. L. Mitchell and Gerald Sanders, Professor Emeritus Harold B. Allen, University of Minnesota; Professor Emeritus Einar Haugen, Harvard; and Professors Gregory Nyboe, UC, Berkeley; and Robin Fulton Macpherson, Rogaland Regional College, who have read the manuscript of this article and suggested numerous improvements.

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