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# Dialectal Development and Comparison: Norwegian in the U.S. and Norway



2023 Rand Scholar Presentation  
Helen White '23

Photos: NAHA





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**01**

**Inspiration** >

**and**

**Funding**

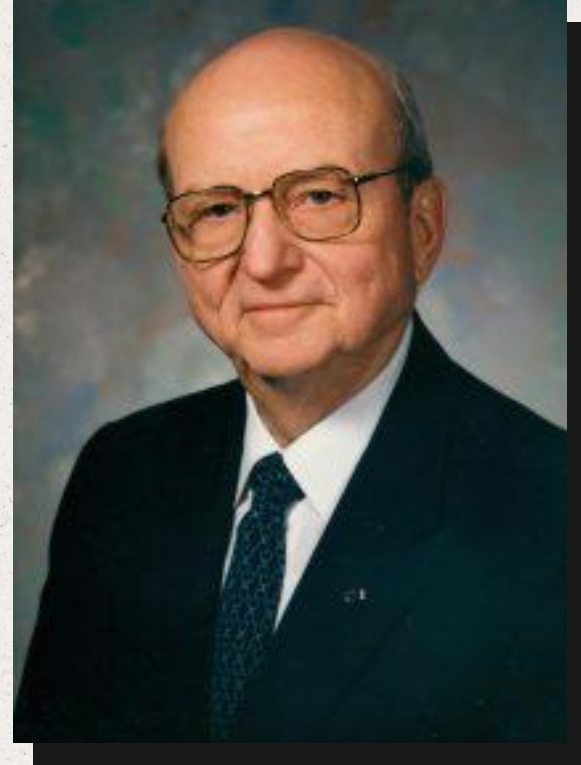
*Photo: NAHA*





# Why this research?

- Individual major and interest in linguistics and Norwegian
- Previous work with NAHA (Norwegian-American Historical Association) and archival recordings
- Rand Scholar Award: \$5,000 towards the study of Norwegian culture and life
- Independent research course with faculty advisor



*Photo: St. Olaf College*





# Research Focus

- Previous research on influence of English on American Norwegian
- Investigation of Norwegian dialects and how contact changes language
- Results of immigration beyond language “loss”
- Generational language change and maintenance
- Spoken Norwegian use



*Photo: NAHA*







# Areas for Investigation

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## Preservation

Is American Norwegian antiquated? How well was it preserved from immigration?  
(Johannessen and Laake, 2015)



## Dialect Contact

How did the Norwegian dialects affect one another in a new North American context?  
(Haugen, 1953)

## Linguistic Changes

What changes did American Norwegian undergo separate from the changes resulting in modern Norwegian?  
(Jahr, 2014)





# Areas for Investigation Cont'd

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## Identity

How do Norwegian-Americans  
feel about their language use?  
(Joranger and Lovoll, 1995-2002)



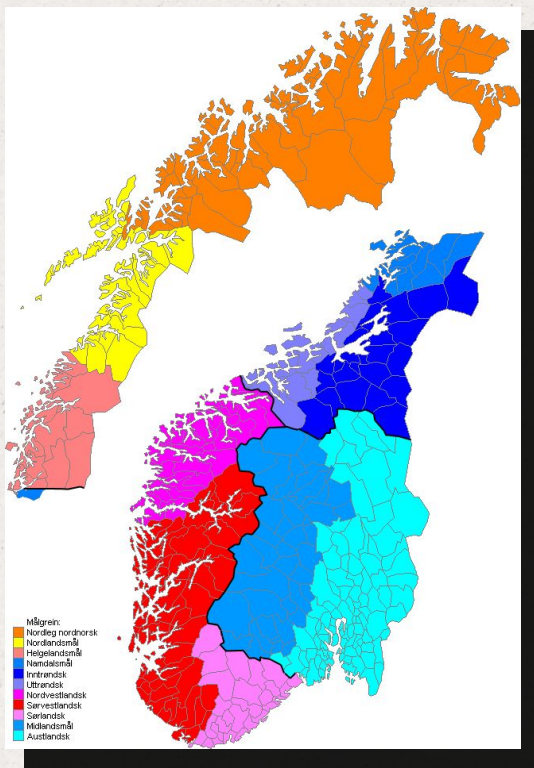
## Comparison

How does modern  
Norwegian compare to  
American Norwegian?  
(Almberg and Skarbø, n.d.)

## Implications

What do these findings tell  
us about Norwegian in  
general?  
(Lundquist et al., 2020)





*Photo: Wikipedia*

02

# About the Dialects



# Linguistic History

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## Bokmål

- “Riksmål”
- Danish influence:  
Dano-Norwegian
- Knud Knudsen (1812-1895)
- Social prestige and status
- Majority written language of modern Norway



*Photo: Wikipedia*



# Linguistic History Cont'd

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*Photo: Store  
Norske Leksikon*

## Nynorsk

- “Landsmaal”
- Influence of country dialects, especially from Vestlandet
- Ivar Aasen (1813-1896)
- Fighting for recognition
- Nationally recognized written language of modern Norway



# Norwegian Emigration

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## Departure

- 1836-1915, over 750,000 Norwegians to the United States (Nerbøvik 2022)
- Most settled in Midwest
- Many lived close to people from **same areas of Norway**



Photo: NAHA



# Norwegian Emigration Cont'd

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## Einar Haugen (1906-1994)



*Photo: Wikipedia*

- Foremost scholar on American Norwegian (linguistics)
- Noted importance of dialect contact in North America which “**upset the delicate balance of dialect against dialect**” (1953, p. 338)
- Collected recordings of heritage Norwegian speakers
- Bygdelag movement and sense of pride around dialect



# Dialect Groupings

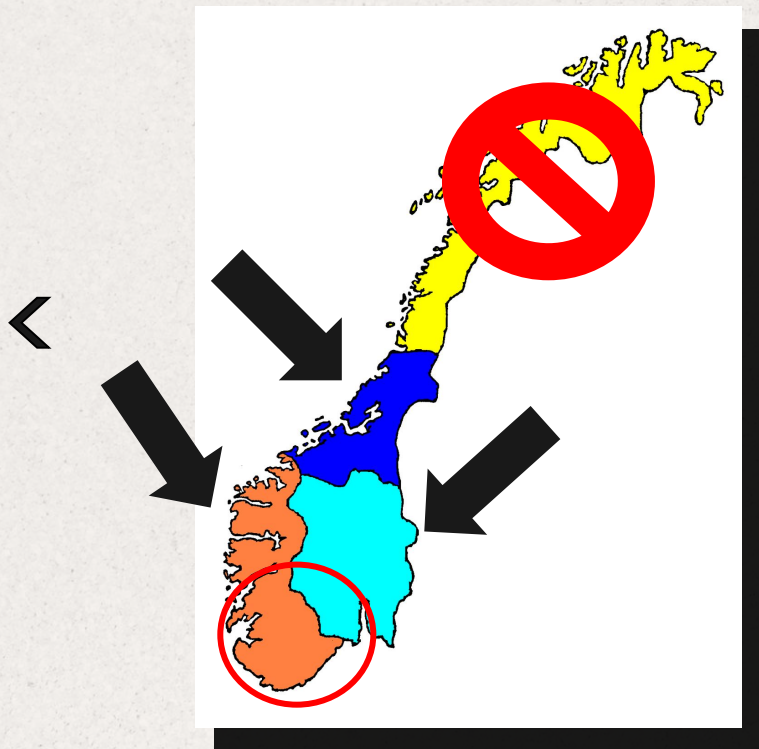


Photo: Wikipedia

## Vestlandet

Western dialect,  
most different from  
written Bokmål  
standard

## Østlandet

Eastern dialect,  
closest to written  
Bokmål standard

## Trøndelag

From area  
surrounding  
Trondheim,  
mid-Norway dialect

## Sørlandet\*

\*Southern dialect  
used, lack of  
speakers using  
Nord-Norge dialect





*Photo: NAHA*

# 03

## Methods and Data





# Datasets

## Joranger and Lovoll (1995-2002)

- NAHA archives, previously mostly unused in research
- Self-transcribed
- 15 respondents selected and matched to CANS respondents based on place of origin in Norway and generation



*Photo: NAHA*



# Datasets Cont'd

## Corpus of American Nordic Speech (CANS)

- Johannessen et al. (2010–2016), Seip and Selmer (1931), Haugen (1942) and Hjelde (1987, 1990, 1992)
- 268 informants from 63 different locations







Simple | Extended | CQP query Search

leg

Or... Show speakers

Concordance **Map** Statistics Found 19958 matches (400 pages)

Sort by position ▾ Download « < 1 > »

albert_lea_MN_01gk <small>Trans</small>		<b>jeg</b>	er an onlybarn # jeg har ikke en # noen # bror eller søs- søster # ja
	  		<b>e</b>
albert_lea_MN_01gk <small>Trans</small>	jeg er an onlybarn #	<b>jeg</b>	har ikke en # noen # bror eller søs- søster # ja
	  	e er e ånnlibarn #	<b>e</b>





# Example Recording and Transcript

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Transcript:

TJ: Går det mykje Telemarkinga som var i menigheiten?

AO: Vel, det var nok, det var nok fleire som var der, men det var forskjellige norske, veit du.

Det var jammen en par tyskarer. Ja, det var det, veit du, men **eg** har store problemer med dette gamle dorsk- danske-norske språk, (?).

Ja, det var vanskelig å treffe med, for det var **ikkje** samme tinga som **me** snakka heime, veit du. Nei, men nå kan **eg** gå på en måte og klare de... men **eg** må jo sjå boke av og til, alt **de** forskjellige (?) ord meiner, ja. Men- og så når **eg** var i Oslo, da veit du, når **dei** har være på TV-en, så **eg** liker at det høres ut som det var noko tyskere eller noko, veit du? **Eg** er ikkje vant med dette! **Eg** er vant med den dialekten de snakker ut i Dalland og fjellet i Vinje, ja.

Translation:

TJ: Is there a lot of Telemark dialect that was in the parish?

AO: Well, it was, there were several who were there, but there were different Norwegians, you know. There were certainly a few

Germans. Yes, there were, you know, but I

**have big problems with this old Danish-Norwegian language**, (?). Yes, it was

difficult to get, because **it was not the same thing we spoke at home**, you know. No, but

now I can manage it in a way... but I must look at the book now and then, all the different (?) words mean, yes. But- and then when I was in

Oslo, you know, when they have been on the TV, so I like that it sounds like some Germans

or something, you know? I am not used to this! **I am used to the dialect they speak out in Dalland and the mountain in Vinje, yes.**





# Respondents

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Demographic	Number	Percentage
Male	18	60.0%
Female	12	40.0%
Østlandet	16	56.7%
Sørlandet	2	6.7%
Trøndelag	5	16.7%
Vestlandet	9	30.0%
Unknown	2	6.7%







# Dialect Investigation

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## Negation Adverb

English	Bokmål	Nynorsk	Other dialectal forms
<i>not</i>	<i>ikke</i>	<i>ikkje</i>	<i>ittj, itte, inte</i>





# Dialect Investigation Cont'd

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Question Words			
English	Bokmål	Nynorsk	Other dialectal forms
<i>what</i>	<i>hva</i>	<i>kva</i>	<i>ka/kå, hå</i>
<i>who</i>	<i>hvem</i>	<i>kven</i>	<i>kem, håkken</i>
<i>where</i>	<i>hvor</i>	<i>kvar</i>	<i>kor, kvor, hår</i>
<i>why</i>	<i>hvorfor</i>	<i>kvifor</i>	<i>koffør, kvorfor, håfør</i>
<i>how</i>	<i>hvordan</i>	<i>korleis</i>	<i>kordan, håssen/åssen</i>
<i>which</i>	<i>hvilken/hvilket</i>	<i>kossen</i>	—
<i>each</i>	<i>hver</i>	<i>kor</i>	—





# Dialect Investigation Cont'd

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## Pronouns

Pronoun	Bokmål	Nynorsk	Other dialectal forms
1st SG ( <i>I</i> )	<i>jeg</i>	<i>eg</i>	<i>æ, i, e</i>
3rd SG ( <i>he, she</i> )	<i>han, hun</i>	<i>han, ho</i>	<i>'n</i>
1st PL ( <i>we</i> )	<i>vi</i>	<i>vi</i>	<i>me</i>
3rd PL ( <i>they</i> )	<i>de</i>	<i>dei</i>	<i>dem, døm</i>







# Dialect Mapping

◀ Maps from Skjekkeland (2015) and Christiansen (1969), Jahr (1990), and Almborg and Skarbø (n.d.)

## Personleg pronomen 1. person eintal, subjektform

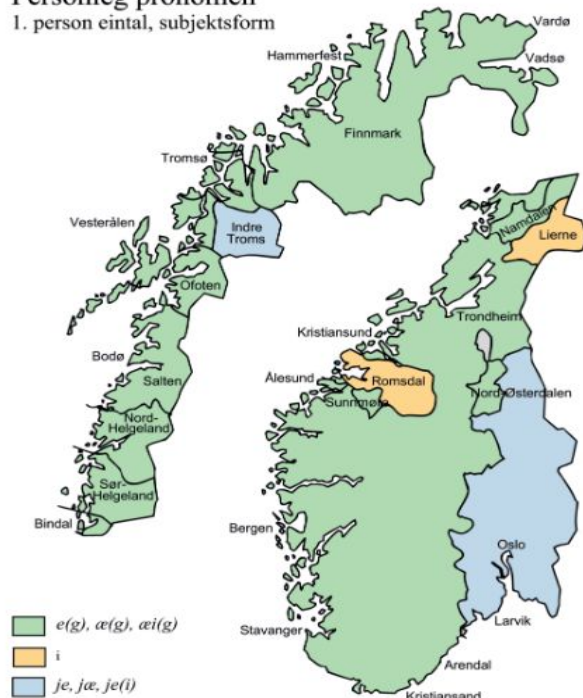


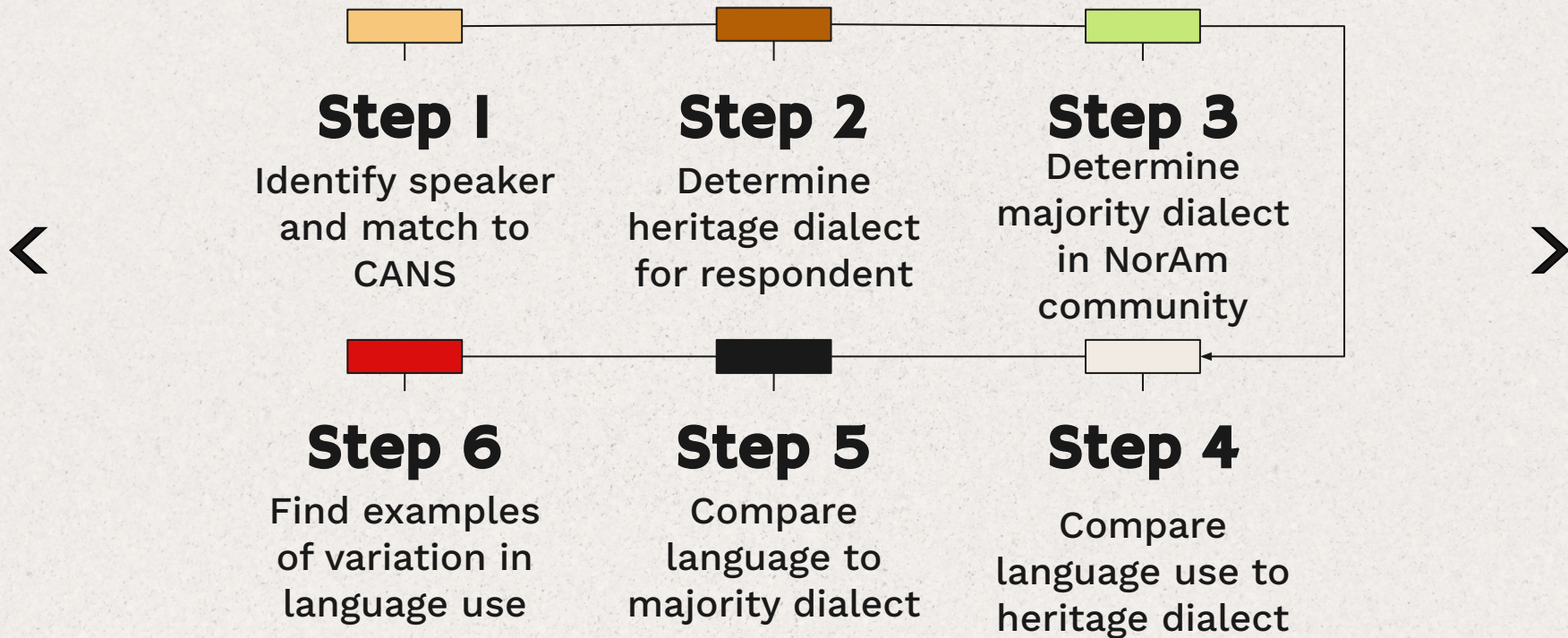
Figure 1. Mapping of dialect forms of the first person singular pronoun developed by Martin Skjekkeland (2015) and Halfrid Christiansen (1969).







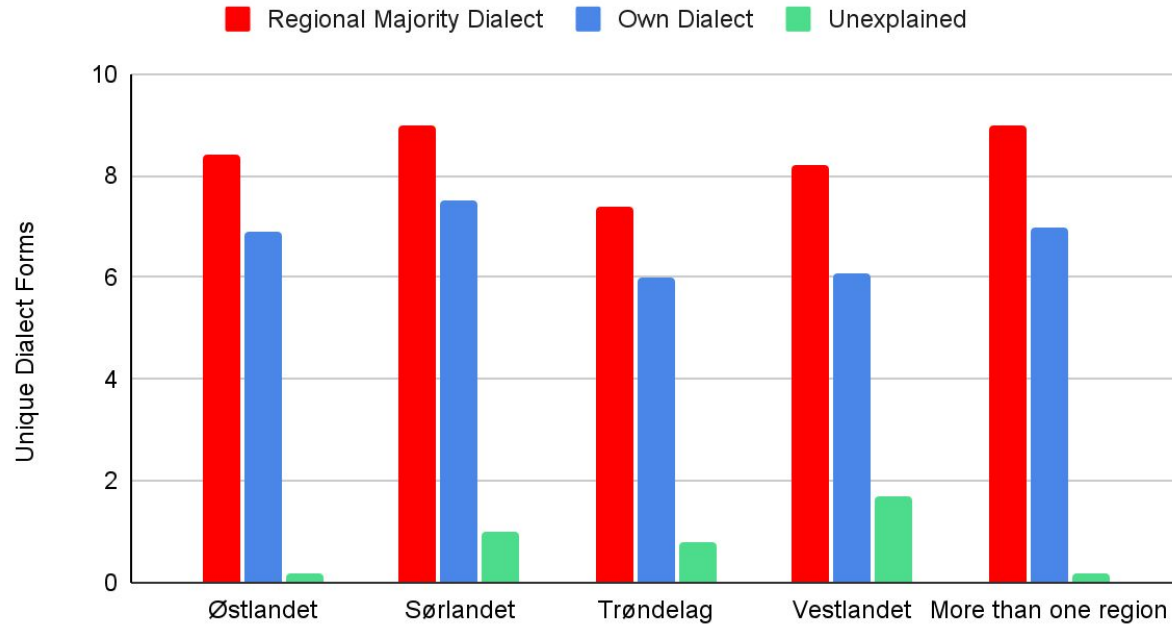
# Methods





# Results

## Distribution of Dialect Tokens by Region of Origin in Norway

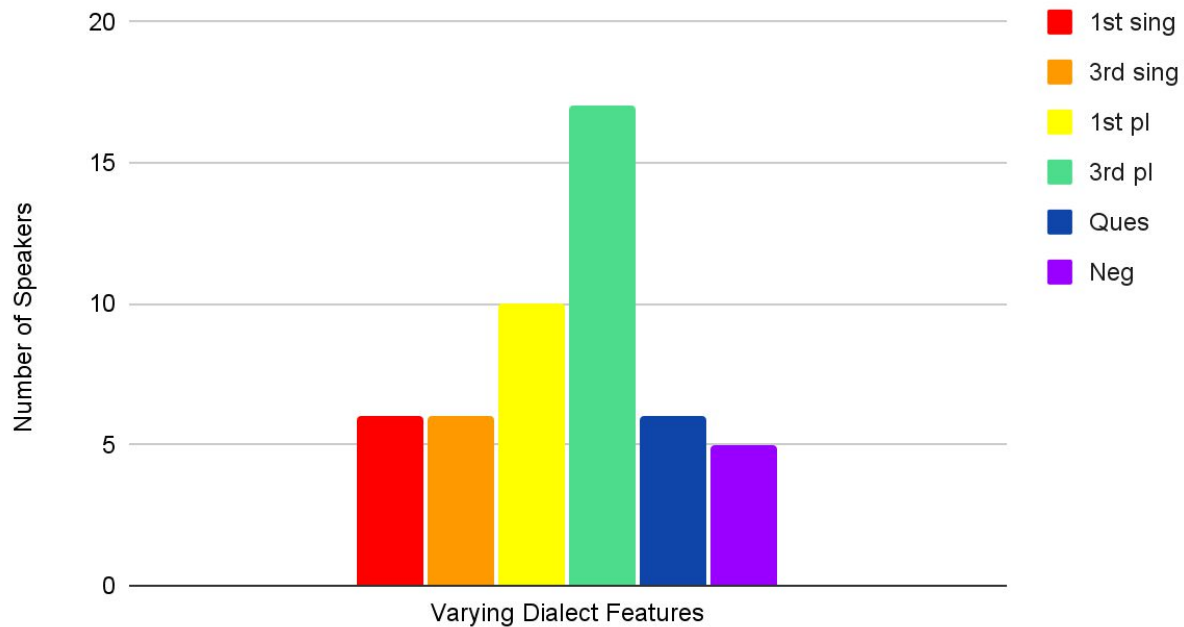






# Variation

Number of Speakers Showing Variation in Dialect Features







*Photo: NAHA*



# 04

## Discussion and Findings





# Current Scholarship

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## Johannessen & Laake (2015)

- Examined four respondents from Gudbrandsdal region
- Found incomplete **koinéization** process
- Use of **more than one dialect** in single individuals

**Koiné:** a dialect that has arisen from contact between multiple mutually intelligible forms of speech, usually a levelling process



# Current Scholarship Cont'd

## Hjelde (2015)

- Examined Coon Valley, WI settlement, also found incomplete **koinéization** process
- Variation still present, especially in individuals from Østlandet



## Johannessen (2015)

- Examined attrition and regression hypothesis (Jakobson, 1941) in one speaker
- Norwegian of heritage speakers has weakened from **generations of separation**



# Modern Norwegian

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- Lundquist et al. (2020) suggesting modern speakers of Tromsø dialect switch between dialect forms due to **more exposure**
- Gooskens (2005) finding that Norwegians are not as good at identifying dialects as they think they are
- Biggest difference still between Vestlandet and Østlandet, as suggested by Haugen (1953)
- Modern Norwegian could become more levelled with more dialect contact



*Photo: Design and Architecture Norway*





*Photo: NAHA*

**05**

**Conclusion**





# What needs to be researched more?

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## LIMITATIONS

```
graph TD; LIMITATIONS --> RESPONDENTS; LIMITATIONS --> AMBIGUITY; LIMITATIONS --> INFLUENCES; LIMITATIONS --> SHIFT; RESPONDENTS --- R["Only sample of larger population"]; AMBIGUITY --- A["Recordings poor quality, subtle speech differences"]; INFLUENCES --- I["Many unknown influences on respondent speech"]; SHIFT --- S["Speakers not passing on language"];
```

**RESPONDENTS**

Only sample of larger population

**AMBIGUITY**

Recordings poor quality, subtle speech differences

**INFLUENCES**

Many unknown influences on respondent speech

**SHIFT**

Speakers not passing on language





# Concluding Remarks

- Main finding: **intra-speaker variation**, suggesting incomplete koinéization process
- Majority regional dialect often influences speech, though heritage dialect still important
- Levelling process interrupted by introduction of English
- Modern Norwegian may be headed in a more levelled direction



Photo: NAHA





Photo: NAHA



# 06: Q&A



# Thanks for your attention!

Special thanks to:

Mary Rand Taylor and Ron Taylor

Rand Committee

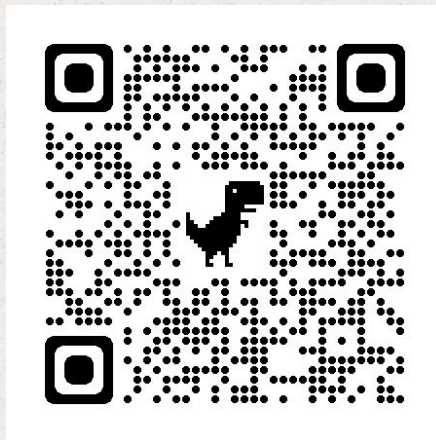
Dr. Nora Vosburg

Dr. Jeremy Loebach and Dr. Jenna

Coughlin

NAHA (Kristina Warner)

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