
Dialect change and diffusion in South-East Norway

Overview:

- In South-East Norway, linguistic features diffuse from the capital Oslo. But do they diffuse from the upper class or lower class dialect? The literature claims they diffuse from the upper class dialect.
 - I have surveyed the available literature on dialect change in this region and analyzed all the linguistic data. The results show that the new features have spread from the lower class dialect of Oslo.
 - Attitude studies from the same region show that speakers here have negative views about the upper Oslo dialect and its speakers. In accordance with the *communication accommodation theory*, I suggest that these negative views have prevented diffusion from the upper Oslo dialect.
 - The disagreement between the empirical linguistic data and the sociolinguistic theories of language change is a strong indication that sociolinguistic theory should focus more on linguistic data and linguistic analyses.
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1 Linguistic diffusion in South-East Norway – from where?

1.1 The sociolinguistic literature

- (1) It is generally acknowledged that language features in south-eastern Norway are spreading from the capital Oslo (Vikør 1999).
- (2) But Oslo has two dialects: the “upper Oslo dialect”, spoken by the upper social classes, and the “lower Oslo dialect”, spoken by the lower classes (Larsen 1907).
- (3) The sociolinguistic literature generally concludes that features of the upper Oslo dialect are diffusing directly to the local dialects in South-East Norway, and that these dialects as a result are being leveled towards this variety (Sandøy 1998, Akselberg 2005, Askedal 2005, Mæhlum 2007b, 2009, Røyneland 2009).

- (4) This happens because the upper Oslo dialect is “prestigious” by virtue of being spoken by the socio-economic upper class, and speakers of local south-eastern dialects want to identify with a more “prestigious” speech community (Papazian & Helleland 2005, Mæhlum 2007a,b).

1.2 Empirical basis

- (5) In the mentioned sociolinguistic literature, there is hardly any linguistic data presented to support the claim that dialects in south-eastern Norway are adopting features from the upper Oslo dialect.
- (6) To establish where new linguistic features in the south-eastern dialects in Norway are being adopted from, I have surveyed all the available literature on language change in this region (Stausland Johnsen 2015b).

2 Meta-analysis

2.1 Linguistic area

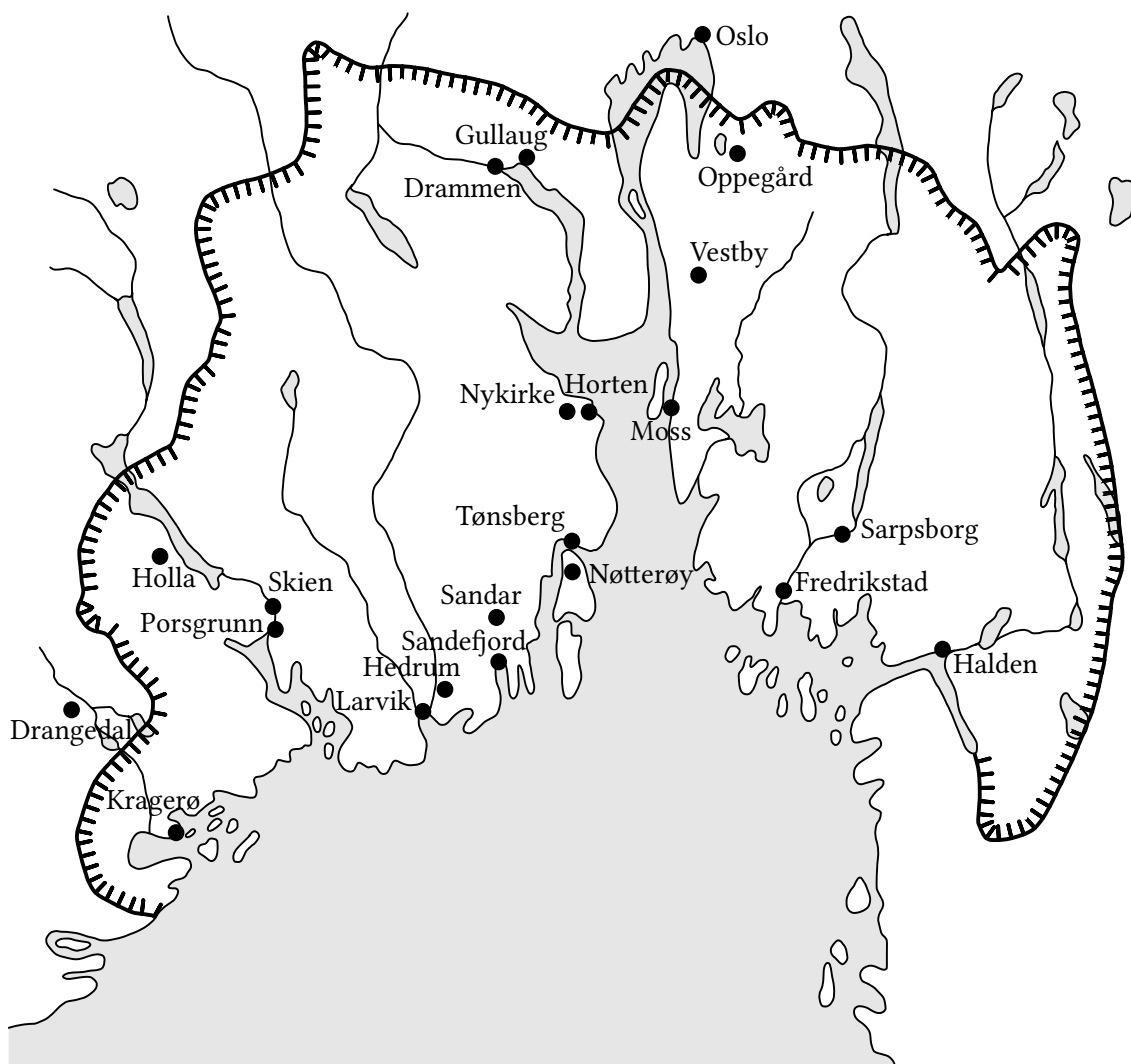


Fig. 1: Vika region

The map in Figure 1 shows:

- (7) The boundaries for the *Vika* dialect group.
- (8) The location of all known investigations of dialect change within this region.

2.2 Criteria

- (9) There are 25 independent studies of dialect change in the Vika region.
- (10) They span from 1947 to 2011.
- (11) I have set three criteria for including a documented change in the analysis:
 1. The change is observed in at least two urban dialects.
 2. At least two researchers have described the change.
 3. The change affects the grammar (phonology, morphology, syntax).

2.3 Results

- (12) There are nine such changes in all, cf. Table 1.

Linguistic change	Diffused from
[æ] > [ɑ] in unstressed syllables	Lower Oslo/Urban Vika
Stress shift in loanwords	Lower Oslo/Upper Oslo
Merger of /ç/ and /ʃ/	Lower Oslo
M.PL.DEF. [-ɑnə] > [-ɑ]	Lower Oslo
Merger of neuter noun classes	Lower Oslo
[æ/ɑ] > [ə] in unstressed syllables	Lower Oslo
Loss of level stress	Lower Oslo
M.SG.DEF. [-ən/-ə] > [-æn]	Lower Oslo
Merger of interrogatives	Lower Oslo

Table 1: Documented changes in south-eastern Vika dialects

- (13) Seven of the nine documented changes have their immediate source in the *lower*, not the upper, Oslo dialect.
- (14) For two changes it is unclear what the source is, but it could be the lower Oslo dialect also in these cases.
- (15) There are no cases in which a feature clearly has been adopted from the upper Oslo dialect.

3 Diffusion theories

3.1 Gravity model

- (16) The *gravity model* of linguistic diffusion predicts that features spread from the largest city to the next largest city, and so progressively downwards until it reaches the rural areas (Trudgill 1974).
- (17) The model correctly predicts that linguistic features spread from Oslo in south-eastern Norway.
- (18) But why do the features spread from the lower, and not the upper dialect?

3.2 Communication accommodation theory

- (19) According to the *communication accommodation theory* (CAT), speakers adopt linguistic features from their interlocutors through social accommodation (Gallois et al. 2005).
- (20) Negative attitudes towards interlocutors prevent accommodation.
- (21) Given the linguistic data (cf. section 2.3), CAT predicts that speakers of Vika dialects hold more negative views about the upper Oslo dialect and its speakers than they do about the lower Oslo dialect.

4 Attitude studies

- (22) A range of attitude studies have been conducted in the south-eastern region of Norway, and the overall finding is that the upper Oslo dialect and its speakers are viewed negatively (Voje 1979).
- (23) The upper Oslo dialect is often described as “pretentious, snobbish, affected, hoity-toity, tiresome, annoying” (Dybvik 1994, Lindbekk 2000, Dahl 2002, Jensen 2006, Lund 2006, Hult 2008).
- (24) Speakers of the upper Oslo dialect are described as “snobbish, suspicious, provoking, effeminate” (Smith 1968, Lindbekk 2000, Dahl 2002, Hult 2008).
- (25) In accordance with CAT, I suggest that these negative attitudes prevent linguistic features from diffusing from the upper Oslo dialect.

5 Sociolinguistics and empiricism

- (26) Theories of sociolinguistic change need to build on solid empirical data.
- (27) The linguistic data demonstrate that local dialects in South-East Norway have adopted their new features from the lower class dialect of Oslo (section 2.3).
- (28) But the sociolinguistic literature generally concludes that these dialects are strongly influenced by the *upper* class dialect of Oslo (section 1.1).
- (29) There is, however, almost no linguistic data presented in this literature to support such a claim.
- (30) This indicates that these theories of sociolinguistic change are primarily built not on linguistic data, but rather on the sociological assumption that members of the socio-economic upper class are viewed favorably by others.
- (31) I suggest that theories of sociolinguistic change should focus more on the linguistic data.
- (32) If they do not, they risk being void if their conclusions end up disagreeing with the linguistic facts.

Paper version of this presentation: Stausland Johnsen 2015a.

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