

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

The spread of uvular /r/ in
Norway
An updated survey

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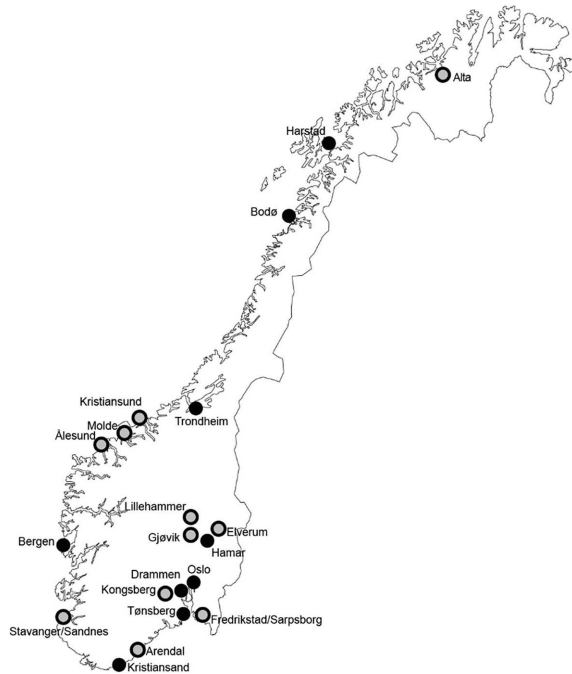


Change and spread

- Sometime during the 17th century a sound change occurred in Paris by which a front tongue tip *r* became a back tongue body *r*.
- A back articulation of /r/ has since spread north through Western Europe to Norway (Trudgill 1974).
- This back *r* is generally referred to as a “uvular /r/”.
- There are various phonetic variants of this back *r*, but we will refer to them all as “uvular /r/” here.

Uvular /r/ to Norway

- We do not know when or where the uvular /r/ first came to Norway.
- It probably came first to Bergen and Kristiansand toward the end of the 1700s.



Spread of uvular /r/ in Norway – 1800s

- A uvular /r/ is the normal, and perhaps only, realization of *r* in Bergen and Kristiansand in the 1840s (Daa 1844).
- Aasen (1864) and Storm (1884) note that the uvular /r/ is generally used in the very south of Norway (i.e. in the region around Kristiansand), but is otherwise an urban phenomenon along the south-western coast (Stavanger, Bergen).
- One exception is the use of uvular /r/ in a small rural region by the innermost branch of the Hardanger Fjord.

Spread of uvular /r/ in Norway – 1800s

- During an expedition during the 1880s, Larsen (1891) was able to pin down the eastern border of the isogloss for uvular /r/.
- Toward the west and north, however, he concludes that the borders are yet to be determined.

Spread of uvular /r/ in Norway

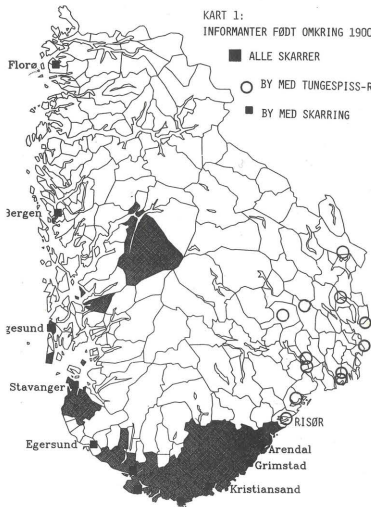
- In the dialect literature from the 1900s and up until the present, there are only sporadic observations of either more or less use of uvular /r/ in certain dialects.
- According to Foldvik (1988), the spread and distribution of uvular /r/ was not shown much interest in Norwegian dialectology.
- The exception is precisely Foldvik (1988), who presents maps of the spread of uvular /r/ in Norway.

KART 1:
INFORMANTER FØDT OMKRING 1900

■ ALLE SKARRER

○ BY MED TUNGESPISSE-R

■ BY MED SKARRING



KART 2:
INFORMANTER FØDT OMKRING 1950

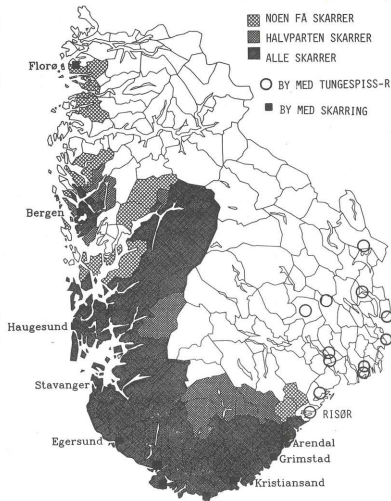
▨ NOEN FA SKARRER

■ HALVPARTEN SKARRER

■ ALLE SKARRER

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■ BY MED SKARRING



KART 3:
INFORMANTER FØDT OMKRING 1970

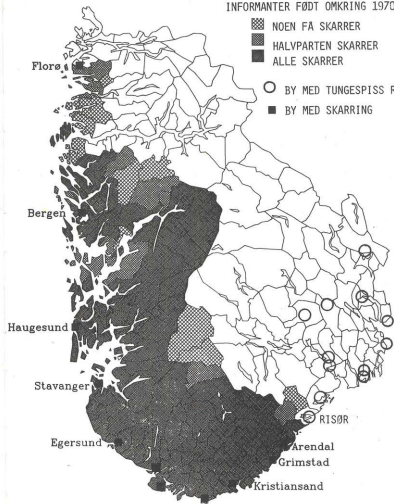
▨ NOEN FA SKARRER

■ HALVPARTEN SKARRER

■ ALLE SKARRER

○ BY MED TUNGESPISSE R

■ BY MED SKARRING



Foldvik's maps

- Foldvik's maps show that uvular /r/ has spread across the southern and western regions of Norway since 1900.
- The last map shows the spread of uvular /r/ in 1987 among school children born around 1970.
- These maps have since been used in the dialect literature to illustrate the spread of uvular /r/ in Norway (Vigeland 1995; Skjekkeland 1997, 2005; Papazian and Helleland 2005; Vaa 2016; Mæhlum and Røyneland 2023).

The situation today?

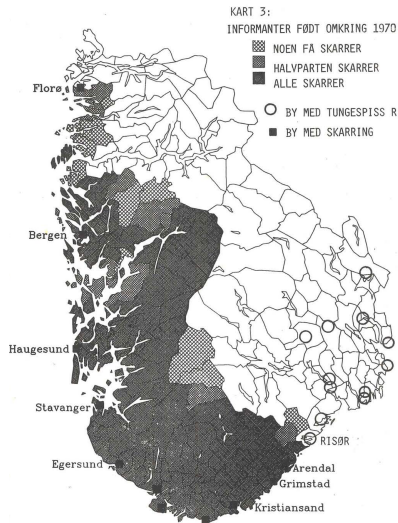
- The last survey we have for uvular /r/ in Norway is based on the pronunciation that people born 50–55 years ago had in the mid 1980s.
- Many researchers claim that the uvular /r/ is still spreading both north and inward into the country today (Hanssen 2010; Skjekkeland 2010, 2012).
- As an example, Sandøy and Nesse (2016) claim that the uvular /r/ is spreading north and is “well on its way into Sunnfjord and Nordfjord”.

New survey

- We are in need of a new survey for the spread and distribution of uvular /r/ today.
- It would be beneficial if the new overview is directly comparable with the survey by Foldvik (1988).
- As a result, we decided to survey the use of uvular /r/ in Norway among school children born around 2010.

Scope of the survey and participants

- We contacted elementary schools in a large part of southern and western Norway.
- 676 schools in total.
- We limited the survey to students aged 10-12, giving us a new map over the uvular /r/ based on people born in the beginning of the 2010s.
- We gathered the data through a digital questionnaire that was sent out to the principal at each school.



The survey

- The teachers were asked to estimate the percentage of students in their class who have a uvular /r/.
- Which students should be included?
 - Students who have grown up in the municipality/area. The student does not need to have parents from the municipality. You should not take into account whether the student speaks a dialect that is typical for the area or not.
- Which students should be omitted?
 - Students who have grown up in an other municipality.
 - Students who do not have Norwegian as their first language.
 - Students with speech impairments.

Municipal boundaries

- In the survey we have used municipal boundaries from 1947.
- The area we surveyed consists of 276 municipalities based on the boundaries from 1947, but only 121 municipalities in 2024.
- Foldvik (1988) used municipal boundaries from 1960/1961.

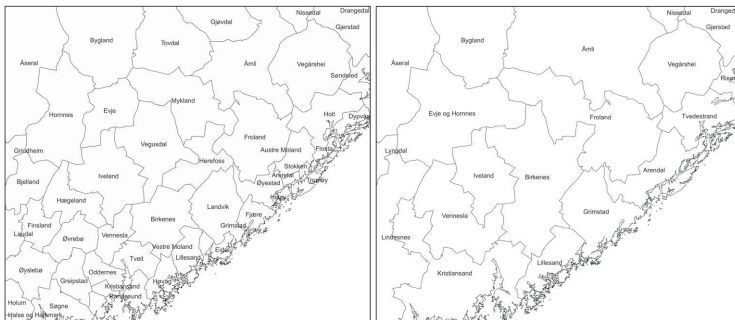


Figure: Municipal boundaries in 1947 and 2024 in pars of Agder county.

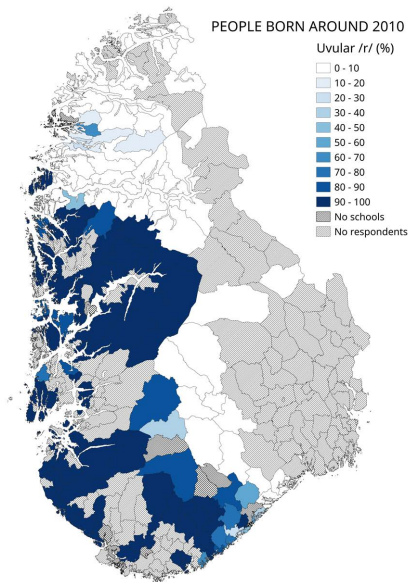
Survey responses

- We got responses from 197 schools, in 157 of 276 municipalities.
- The municipalities along the uvular /r/ border were prioritised during the data collection, and the response rates therefore vary from county to county.

County	Municipality responses	Municipalities without schools
Aust-Agder	29 / 36	4
Vest-Agder	9 / 41	5
Rogaland	30 / 55	0
Hordaland	35 / 55	2
Sogn og Fjordane	31 / 38	0
Møre og Romsdal	12 / 34	2
Buskerud	2 / 6	0
Telemark	9 / 11	0

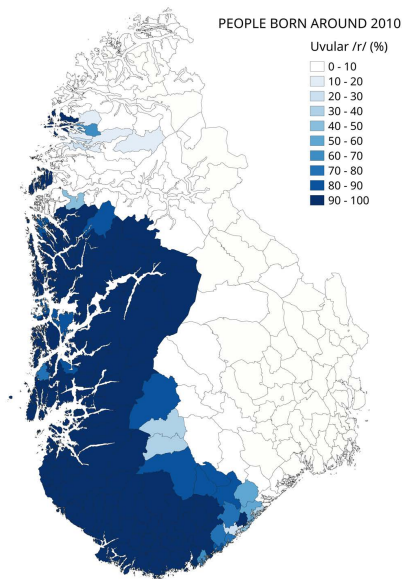
Results

- The map is filled out with the average response from each municipality.
- Each of the ten colours in the map represent an interval of 10% in percentage of uvular /r/.
- Hol and Suldal are the only municipalities along the uvular /r/ border where we have no data.

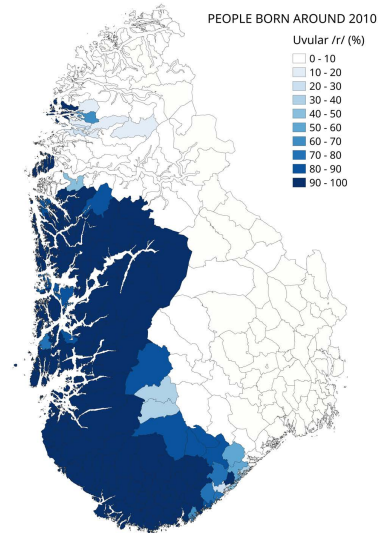
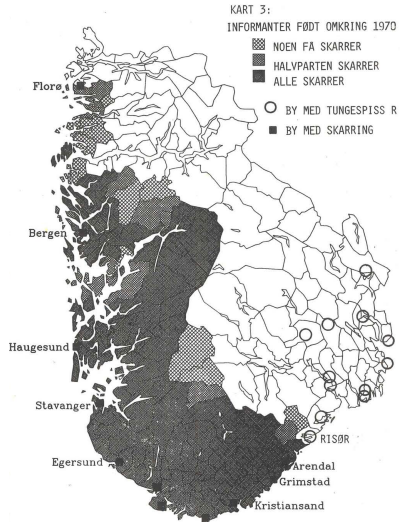


Filled-in map

- Like Foldvik (1988), we have made a filled-in version of the map to give us a better overview of the distribution of the uvular /r/.
- All municipalities in Hordaland, Rogaland and Vest-Agder, are filled in with 100% uvular /r/.
- All municipalities in Møre og Romsdal, Buskerud and Telemark, are filled in with 0% uvular /r/.



1970 and 2010

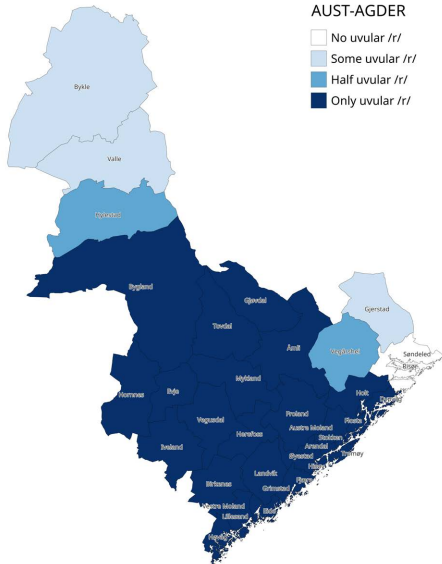


Aust-Agder

PEOPLE BORN AROUND 1970

AUST-AGDER

- No uvular /r/
- Some uvular /r/
- Half uvular /r/
- Only uvular /r/

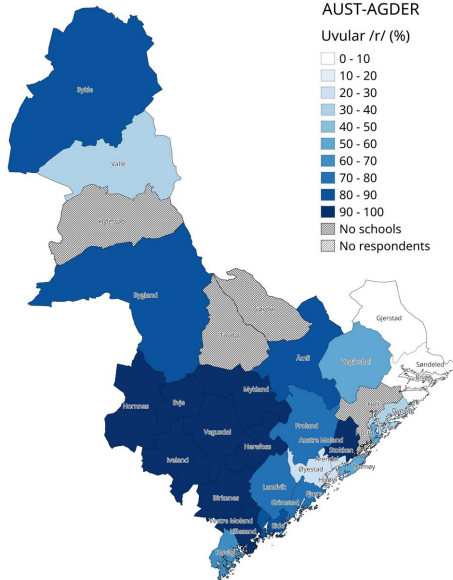


PEOPLE BORN AROUND 2010

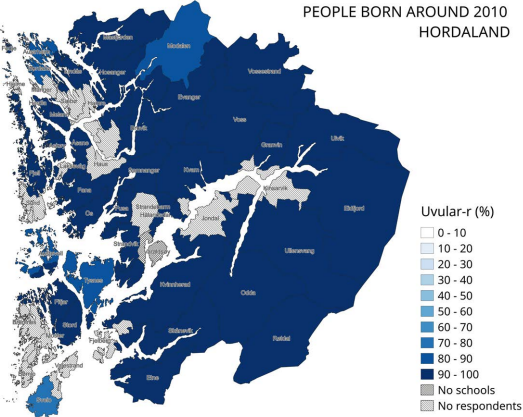
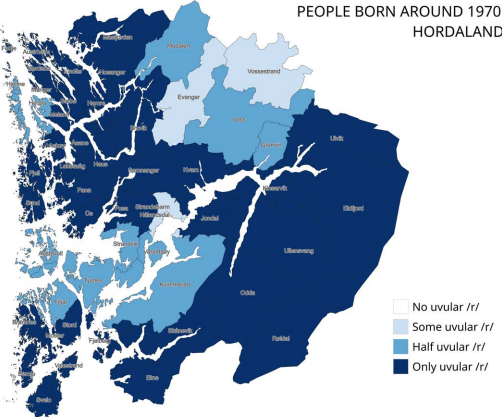
AUST-AGDER

Uvular /r/ (%)

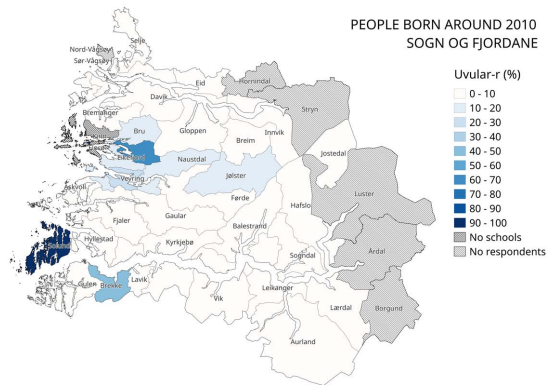
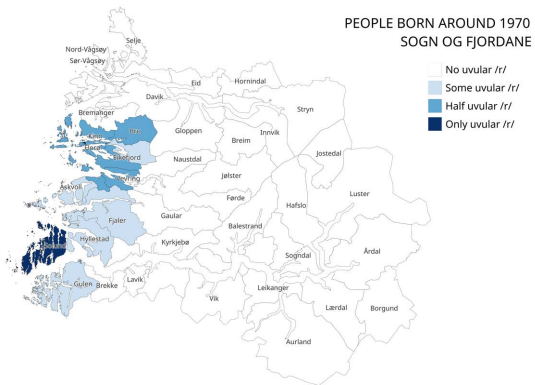
- 0 - 10
- 10 - 20
- 20 - 30
- 30 - 40
- 40 - 50
- 50 - 60
- 60 - 70
- 70 - 80
- 80 - 90
- 90 - 100
- No schools
- No respondents



Hordaland



Sogn og Fjordane



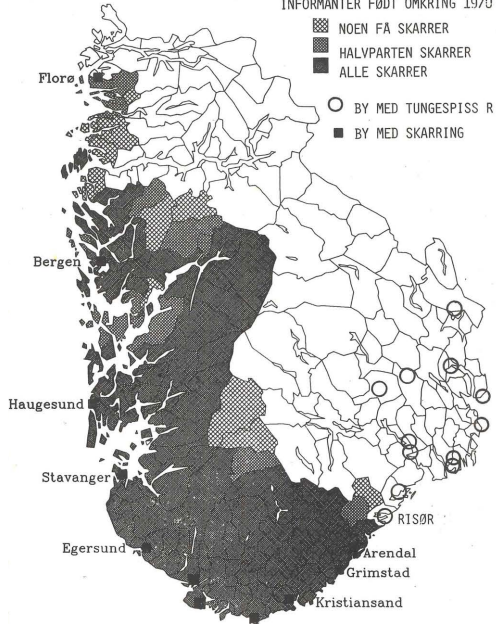
Summary of changes

- The uvular /r/ has spread a little bit since the last survey, but the rapid spread throughout the 20th century has slowed down greatly.
- Very little geographic spread, with the exception of a marginal increase in parts of Sunnfjord.
- The results show no signs of a spread further north to Nordfjord, as Sandøy and Nesse (2016) claim.

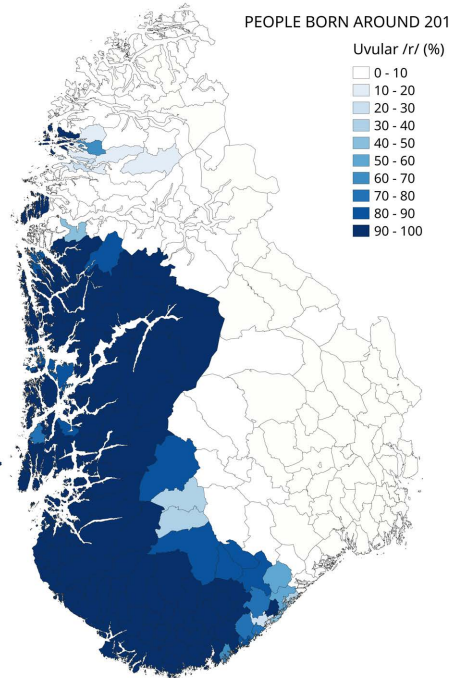
Summary of changes

- The percentage of uvular /r/ has increased in already emerging uvular /r/ areas in Hordaland and somewhat in the inner parts of Agder.
- The uvular /r/ has started to retreat in some areas, especially in the costal areas of Eastern Agder, but also in the costal area of Sogn og Fjordane.






KART 3:
INFORMANTER FØDT OMKRING 1970









PEOPLE BORN AROUND 2010








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