

Norwegian Pronunciation, Rhythm and Tone

Erik Skuggevik, 19th January – 9th March 2022

This is a brief outline of the topics to be covered. It is somewhat technical, but the classes will have a hands-on approach to what the manifestations of the various phenomena are. The mechanics below agree with South-East, Mid- and North-Norwegian sound production – geographically tracing the pronunciation of the consonant *r* at the front of the mouth, just behind upper teeth.



Rhythm and prosody: Learning what to listen for and eliminating personal tonal habits. Daring to mimic the instructor's examples ("Taking the Mickey"). "Rhythm is King" and the most stable component of any language over time.

FRONT	Wide	Round
Close	i	y
Mid	e	u
Open	æ	ø
BACK	Wide	Round
Close		o
Mid/Open	a	å

Vowels: Precise vowels are more important in Norwegian than most other languages, there are nine of them! They can be organised in a system of Front and Back of mouth, Wide or Round lips, and Close, Mid and Open jaw.

Long or short vowels and consonants. In Norwegian there is a fixed relationship between vowel/consonant length in all stressed words: short vowel + long consonants or vice versa. Takk vs. Tak, Fille vs. File, Visse vs. Vise, etc. We will clarify what is meant by long and short consonants.

Tone and tonemes: Norwegian (and Swedish) are peculiar among European languages in that tone *alone* can differentiate between otherwise identical pronunciation: There are two tonemes (strictly speaking also a third in North Norway), one has a tonal *drop* (a quarter-note) on the first syllable, the other one is *flat* on the first syllable.

1: **Løve** (lion) *drops* on Lø-. 2: **Løvet** (the leaves (silent t)) has a *flat* tone on Lø-.

Hva skal vi med **løve** i stuen? vs Hva skal vi med **løvet** i stuen?

Most importantly, toneme is not optional. Every multi-syllable word has either one or the other!

Merging consonants: Outside the West and South coast of Norway, the *r* (alveolar tap/trill) 'merges' with consonants that are also alveolar, to produce retroflex ('Punjabi') consonants: *rd*, *rt*, *rl*, *rn*, become retroflex *ɖ* - *ʈ* - *ɳ* - *ʂ*. The combination *r+s* produce a sh-sound [ʃ], and in some areas, Oslo in particular, *s+l* produces a sh+l-sound too. This happens both within words and between words, i.e. when these consonants come next to each other.

Hvordan = voɖan • *Vært* = væʈ • *Barn* = baɳ • *Herlig* = hæɭi • *Norsk* = nåʃk • *Oslo* = oʃlo

Stressed and unstressed words. All words have a stressed and unstressed version, meaning a full and a condensed version. The word *jeg* has a stressed version *jæi*, and an unstressed version, *jæ*. Most of the time you will hear the unstressed one, e.g. Jeg kan ikke *komme* (I can't **come**): *jæ kanikke-kåmme*. Only when *I* is the most important word will you hear the stressed version: *Jæi kanikke kåmme*. (**I** can't come). In order to get to grips with Norwegian spelling vs. pronunciation it is crucial to understand how differently placed stress affects speech habits.

Dropped consonants. Both *l*- and *r* are 'weak' consonants at the end of most words. When the next word starts with a *consonant*, these two disappear (unless the *r* merges with the consonant, see above). Skal du **bli** med? becomes: ska-du **bli**-me. If the word is *stressed* (full version), the *-l* is audible. Skal du-bli-med? In front of *vowels* the *r* and *l* are useful for rhythm and then audible: Skal ikke **du** bli med? Compare: Jeg har penger... = *jæ-ha-penger* and Jeg har ikke penger... = *jæ-harikke-penger*, etc.

Various other phonetic details: In words ending *-en*, the sound *e* is almost gone. E.g. mobil-n, bok-n, etc. This feature also explains (by extension) why words like *moren*, *faren* become mo-on, fa-an.

These, and other, topics will receive varying focus according to class size and student needs. There will be extensive attention to the development of both speaking and listening skills. Especially tone and rhythm patterns vary from the South, through Trøndelag, to the North of Norway. In these classes students will learn South-East intonation, including Oslo. Questions are encouraged!