

# Written Language Shift among Norwegian Youth

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## Abstract

In Norway there are two written Norwegian languages, Bokmål and Nynorsk. Of these two written languages Bokmål is being used by the majority of the people, and Bokmål has the highest prestige in the society. This article is about the shift of written language from Nynorsk to Bokmål among young people in a traditional Nynorsk district in the country. Drawing on empirical data we conclude that many adolescents are experiencing written language shift. We discuss various reasons for this phenomenon in the linguistic landscape of Norway. In our discussions we emphasize the importance of the school with regard to language maintenance and language revitalization. We call for a new language policy in the educational system that can prevent language shift. Having several dialects and two officially written forms of Norwegian in the country, creates a special linguistic landscape in Norway. Despite the fact that the Norwegian language situation is in several ways unique, it's done very little research on how the existing policy works in practice. Our research reveals that the existing language policy and practice in the school system is not powerful enough to prevent language shift and language decay among the youngsters. The school system functions like a *fabric for language shift*.

**Keywords:** Language Planning, Language Shift, Language Revitalization, Bilingualism, Biliterate


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## Introduction

*Language maintenance, language shift and reversing language shift* are three key concepts in the research tradition after Joshua Fishman. By "language shift" Fishman means the shift of everyday language from a minority language to a majority language or from a low-status language to a high-status language. Research into language shift is becoming ever more important, as a large number of languages in the world are now considered endangered (Fishman 2001).

Most research into language shift focuses on shifts in the *spoken* language. This article examines the shift in the *written* language amongst a group of young people in Norway. In

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autumn 2009 we carried out a survey study to find the scope of the shift of *primary written language* (PWR) among young people in the district of Valdres in Norway during their school years.

For the purposes of this article we will be referring to the change in primary written language as a *language shift*. Moreover we'll apply the *primary written language shift* in the Norwegian context to a minority/majority model, although this is not considered a standard approach as regards the situation of the two officially accepted written Norwegian languages. Before presenting our research and findings, we would like to give a brief account about the sociolinguistic, historical, legal and educational aspects of the language policy in Norway.

### *Languages in Norway*

Norway has two official languages: Norwegian and Sami. The Sami language is the language of the indigenous people of Sami in Northern Scandinavia and North Western Russia. Norwegian is the majority language of Norway with *two written forms* which both are officially recognized as the standardized written languages of Norway. The one is *Bokmål* and the other is *Nynorsk*.

Norway has also recognised several language groups as national minorities, such as the Kvens in Northern Norway. Like most western countries, Norway has experienced immigration from other countries in the last 40 years. This has led to the establishment of new language groups in Norway, but none of the languages that immigrants speak are recognized as official language in the country.

This article addresses only issues concerning the two written Norwegian languages *Bokmål* and *Nynorsk*. We will therefore not go into further detail about the official status of and legislation on languages other than these two officially recognized and standardized written varieties of Norwegian in Norway.

### *Language legislation in Norway*

Since 1885 Norway has had *Bokmål* and *Nynorsk* as two official written Norwegian languages, standardised according to different principles. *Bokmål* has its roots in the written Danish language. This is due to the fact that from the Middle Ages until 1814 Norway was the inferior part in a political union with Denmark. During this historical period Danish was introduced as the only written language in Norway, and the upper classes considered Danish as their language. Since then this variety of the written language of the country has been known as Dano-Norwegian written language, which later got the Norwegian name of *Bokmål* (Grepstad, 2010).

The union between Denmark and Norway was dissolved in 1814. In the second half of the 19th century another standardised written language called *Nynorsk* was launched as a national, domestic Norwegian alternative to the Dano-Norwegian written language. The new written language was based on studies of the language spoken by ordinary people in the Norwegian countryside. In the 19th century most Norwegians lived in rural areas. In 1885 the Norwegian parliament, *Stortinget*, decreed that *Nynorsk* should have equal status to the Dano-Norwegian written language *Bokmål* (Hoel 2011).

After the parliamentary decision, Norwegian language planning has been an important sociolinguistic and political issue with significant impacts on educational system, broadcasting/media and official correspondence in the public services.

Since 1885 both the standardised *Bokmål* and *Nynorsk* norms have been revised numerous times. The major standardisation of *Bokmål* has not been based on the Danish language but

rather on the Norwegian language spoken by the upper classes in and around the capital city of Oslo. On the other hand the standardisation of Nynorsk has been based on elements of Norwegian language spoken across the country. (This Norwegian language planning is described in detail in Haugen 1966.)

Today there are far more Norwegians using Bokmål as their written language than there are Nynorsk users, but Nynorsk has a dominant position in certain geographical areas. Bokmål therefore serves as a majority written language in Norway today, even though all Norwegians read and understand both Bokmål and Nynorsk.

#### *A brief description of the educational system in Norway*

The administrative structure of the educational system in Norway has three levels: *state level, county level and municipal level.*

The state has the administrative responsibility for higher education institutions such as universities and university colleges. At county level there are county school administrative agencies that are responsible for upper secondary schools (*videregående skole*), which serve youths normally between 16 and 19 years of age in the respective counties. This means that Norway has 19 educational agencies at the county-level since there are 19 counties in the country. Education at the upper secondary school level is not compulsory, but a right for those who are between 16 and 22 years of age. This means that citizens in this age-group have the right to take a 3-years, 4-years or 5-years long secondary high school education depending on the educational programmes they choose. About 95% of the youths between the age of 16 and 19 are enrolled in secondary high schools in 2011 (SSB Utdanningsstatistikker 2011).

Basic school education (Grunnskolen) is compulsory in Norway, and it's 10 years. It is for all children between the age of 6 and 16. Basic school education has two stages a) Primary stage (1<sup>st</sup> thru 7<sup>th</sup> grade) and secondary lower high school stage (8<sup>th</sup> thru 10<sup>th</sup> grade). It's the municipalities' responsibility to provide compulsory basic school education. There were 430 municipalities in the country in 2011.

#### *The language legislation and its impact on the educational system*

In the years after the parliamentary decision of 1885, a number of laws were enacted to ensure the principle of equality between the two written Norwegian languages. In 1892 a new law was introduced and gave the local administrations (municipalities) the right to decide for themselves by referendums *which written language* should be used in basic education schools. (Almenningen & Lien 1979) This law is still in force. If the local referendums decide that Nynorsk is to be used, early teaching of reading and writing shall take place in Nynorsk. This implies that pupils must produce all written work in Nynorsk, and textbooks in all subjects must be in Nynorsk. The reverse is also true for Bokmål

In addition to this *democratic approach* to meet the needs of the local communities, the system also is seeking for *reciprocity*. Starting from the lower secondary stage (8<sup>th</sup> thru 10<sup>th</sup> grade) all Nynorsk students must also learn to write Bokmål in addition to their primary written language Nynorsk. The same is also valid for Bokmål students. At the lower secondary stage (8<sup>th</sup> thru 10<sup>th</sup> grade) they have to learn to write Nynorsk in addition to their primary written language Bokmål.

As mentioned earlier, the question of language in basic schools is being decided by local referendums. Municipalities are divided into school districts, and referendums are held in each district. The question being put to a vote is: "*Should the children at the school be taught in Nynorsk or Bokmål?*". This type of democratic approach to language policy at local

level means that the majority of the votes decides a) the *primary written language* of the child b) in which written language their textbooks must be and c) which of the two official written languages will be introduced as the *second* written language at the lower secondary stage.

Under this system there can be both Bokmål schools and Nynorsk schools within the same municipality. This does not necessarily mean that the children at the various schools use different spoken languages – only that their written languages are different. This is the effect of the different outcomes of the referendums in the different school districts. (Todal, 1980)

When the students are over 16 years of age, they can choose which upper secondary school (high school) they wish to enrol. The respective county's educational administration is obliged to give every student at upper secondary school the right to use that written language they choose. The students also have the right to choose the textbooks they wish because as a rule all the textbooks at this level have two versions, a Nynorsk and a Bokmål.

Once pupils have completed upper secondary education, they are free to choose which written language (Nynorsk or Bokmål) they wish to use in their further education or education at university level. There has been little research into how this situation works in practice in Norway, but as a rule every student at the university level has the right to use that written language they wish to use in examinations and/or written works.

#### *Nynorsk – a minority language?*

Despite the intentions of the above mentioned legal steps, democratic approach and reciprocity principle, the written language Bokmål works in the same way that majority languages and prestigious languages work in other countries in the world. The language policy movement behind Nynorsk in the 19th century initially aimed to make Nynorsk the *main* written language in Norway (Grepstad, 2010). The language activists hoped that this would happen in democratic competition with Bokmål through a series of local referendums. But Nynorsk did not become the main written language of the majority or of the country. It currently serves as a *written language of the minority* in many ways. However, there is no tradition in Norway of referring to Nynorsk as a minority language, because those who speaks the dialects of Norwegian which are *Nynorsk-close* and also write Nynorsk, do not constitute a minority in any other way than in their use of written language. Nor are they an ethnic minority, nor a religious or political one. Nor is there a requisite link between a person's spoken language and their choice of Nynorsk or Bokmål as their preferred, personal written language. In other words, Nynorsk is neither a majority language nor a minority language, but a written language which is used by *numerical minority*. Kjartan Fløgstad, an acclaimed author writing in Nynorsk, has expressed this paradox as follows: "*Nynorsk is a majority language used by a minority.*" With an objective approach to the position of the written language of Nynorsk in the society, one can see that Nynorsk as a written language, is in many ways in the same position as many minority languages in elsewhere in the world. Nynorsk has a low status, the stronghold of the Nynorsk-close spoken varieties of the Norwegian language and the written language of Nynorsk is in the countryside, and all Nynorsk users are *biliterate*. They can write both in Nynorsk and Bokmål. Moreover there is a certain degree of language shift in a Fishman (2001) sense of the word, and there is a language policy movement working to promote the language within various domains of the sociolinguistic landscape in the country. The competition between Bokmål and Nynorsk in the society can also be seen as a sociological tension of power between *centrum* and *periphery*. At the same time it's an issue of value and interest conflict between the users of the two language communities (Hoëm, 2010). Traditionally speaking the use of Nynorsk has also implied resistance against the cultural hegemony of the upper classes in the capital city

of Oslo and suburbs. With its historical roots in the geographic entitle of the country of Norway and as the only language originating from the spoken language of the pre-colonized Norway, Nynorsk shares common features with traditional indigenous, regional or national minority languages in other parts of the world (Björklund, 1997; May, 2001; Francis & Reyhner, 2002; McCarty, 2003; Özerk, 2006; Garcia, 2009). But this comparison is not normally drawn in Norway.

## Methods

### *The target group and the research questions*

This paper focuses on the language experiences of youths with Nynorsk as their primary written language. In our survey, we have been interested in highlighting the following questions:

- a. *Is there a shift of primary written language among Nynorsk-writing youths and, if so, what is the scope of this language shift?*
- b. *Are there any differences in the linguistic experiences of young people with regard to their use of spoken language and maintenance of Nynorsk or Bokmål as their primary written language?*

We tried to find answers to these questions by conducting a survey at Valdres Upper Secondary School (VUSS), which is the largest secondary high schools in Valdres region, a geographic area where Nynorsk is the main primary written language in many basic schools. Background for our investigation was the intensified debate in the language policy in the country during the recent years and the official statistical figures that showed continuous declining of the number of pupils that uses Nynorsk as their written language at the school (see figure 2).

Traditionally the main stronghold of Nynorsk is the following four counties in the Western Norway: 1) *County of Rogaland*, 2) *County of Hordaland*, 3) *County of Sogn og Fjordane* and 4) *County of Møre og Romsdal*. Valdres region is a part of County of Oppland, but all the municipalities in Valdres region are quite close to the neighboring county of *Sogn og Fjordane*, which is a part of western Norway. Nynorsk historically and traditionally has deep roots in this part of the country.

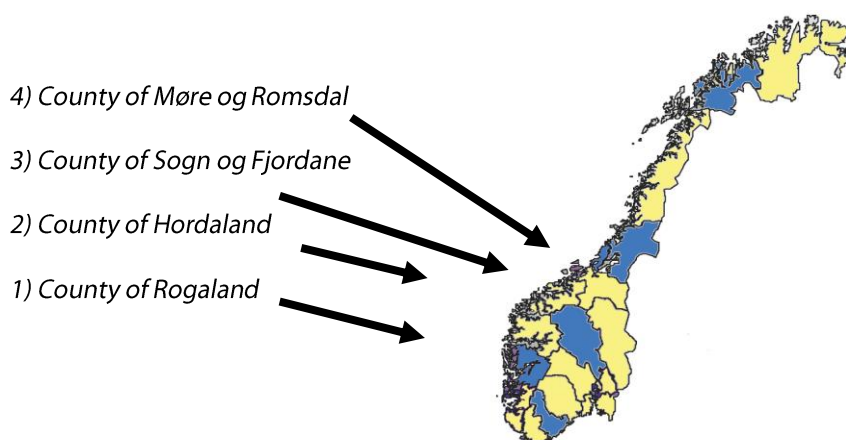


Figure 1. The four counties in Western Norway in which Nynorsk has historically and culturally deep roots

On the basis of the available data from Statistic Central Bureau of Norway, we worked out the following graph to illustrate the historical decline of Nynorsk as written primary language among children.

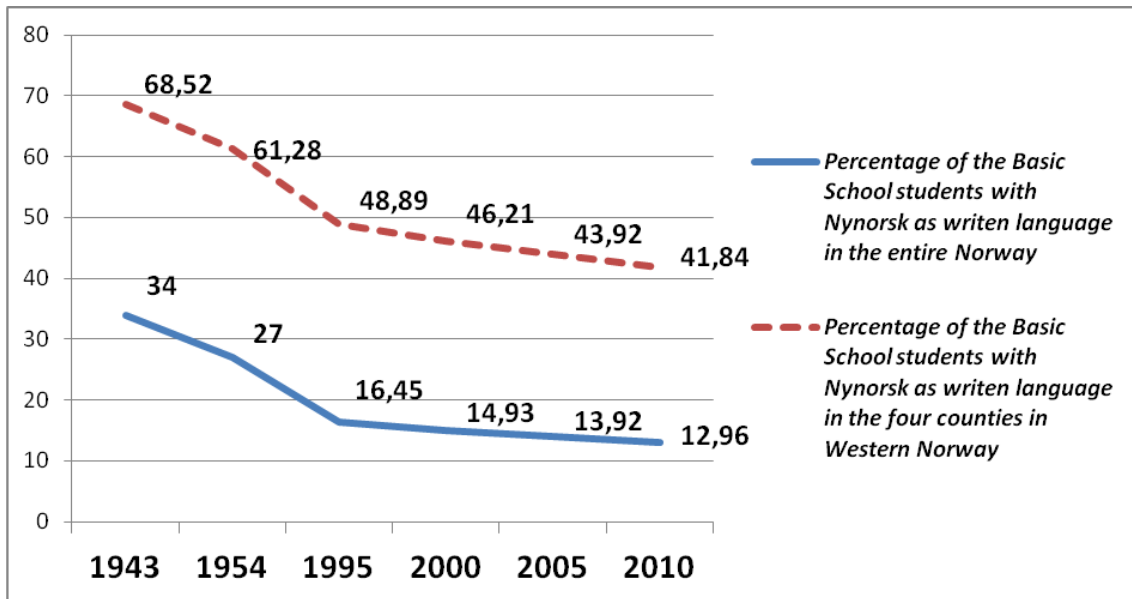


Figure 2. The percentage of the Basic School students with Nynorsk as written language

The graph in Figure 2 shows the decline of the percentage of the Basic School students with Nynorsk as written language in the entire Norway and in the earlier mentioned four counties of Western Norway

#### The sample

The sample in this study comprises 384 students at Valdres Upper Secondary School (VUSS) which is the only upper secondary school in the Valdres district (Valdres Upper Secondary School, in Norwegian: Valdres vidaregåande skule) in the western part of the County of Oppland. The data was gathered in Autumn 2009. The reason for choosing the Valdres Upper Secondary School was threefold:

- The Valdres Upper Secondary School is located in a region where people predominantly spoke the Nynorsk-close Norwegian, and the main written language in the area has for a long time been Nynorsk.
- The Norwegian name of the Valdres Upper Secondary School is a Nynorsk name, and thus one should expect that this institution would serve to strengthen the use of Nynorsk.
- The Valdres Upper Secondary School is the only high school in the region, and thus we could easily reach to most of the youngsters in our targeting group, the young people, in the region.

Valdres Upper Secondary School serves around 550 students. When we gathered our data using a questionnaire, there were 414 students at the school. Of these, 384 had Norwegian as their first (spoken) language / mother tongue. Twenty-five had a first language other than Norwegian. Five students did not answer this question.

In this paper we included only those students who had Norwegian as their first language. This means that the sample that this paper draws on, consists of 384 students.

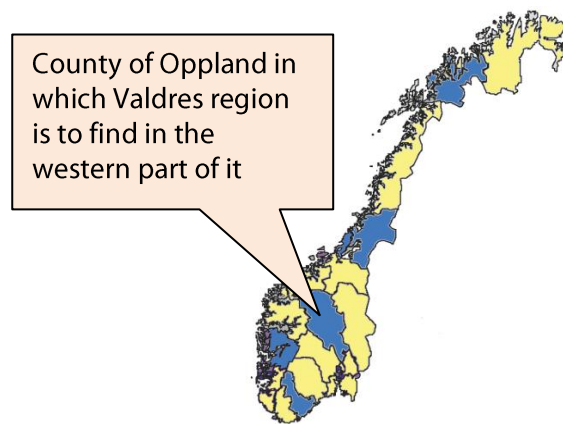


Figure 3. Norway: 19 counties and the County of Oppland

These 384 students come from six neighbouring municipalities: Etnedal, Nord-Aurdal, Sør-Aurdal, Vang, Vestre Slidre and Øystre Slidre in the Valdres region of the County of Oppland. The map in the figure below shows the location of the six municipalities making up the Valdres region in the western part of the County of Oppland.

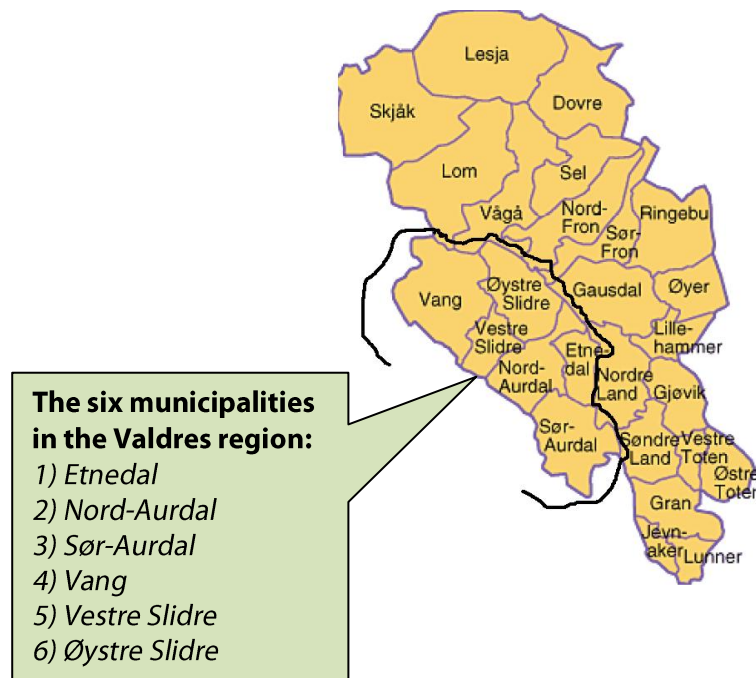


Figure 4. The Valdres region and the six municipalities located in the region

All basic schools in the four municipalities *Etnedal*, *Vang*, *Vestre Slidre* and *Øystre Slidre* use Nynorsk as the written language of teaching and textbooks. In the municipality of *Nord-Aurdal* there are three schools using Nynorsk and three using Bokmål. In the municipality of *Sør-Aurdal* there are two Nynorsk schools and two Bokmål schools.

*Valdres Upper Secondary School* is located within the boundaries of the municipality of *Nord-Aurdal*. As we can see in the map in Figure 3 above, the *County of Oppland* is a landlocked county surrounded by several other counties. The municipality of *Nord-Aurdal* as

one can see in Figure 4 is geographically at the centre of the Valdres region from which the majority of the students at Valdres Upper Secondary School come. The following figure shows the residential background of the sample.

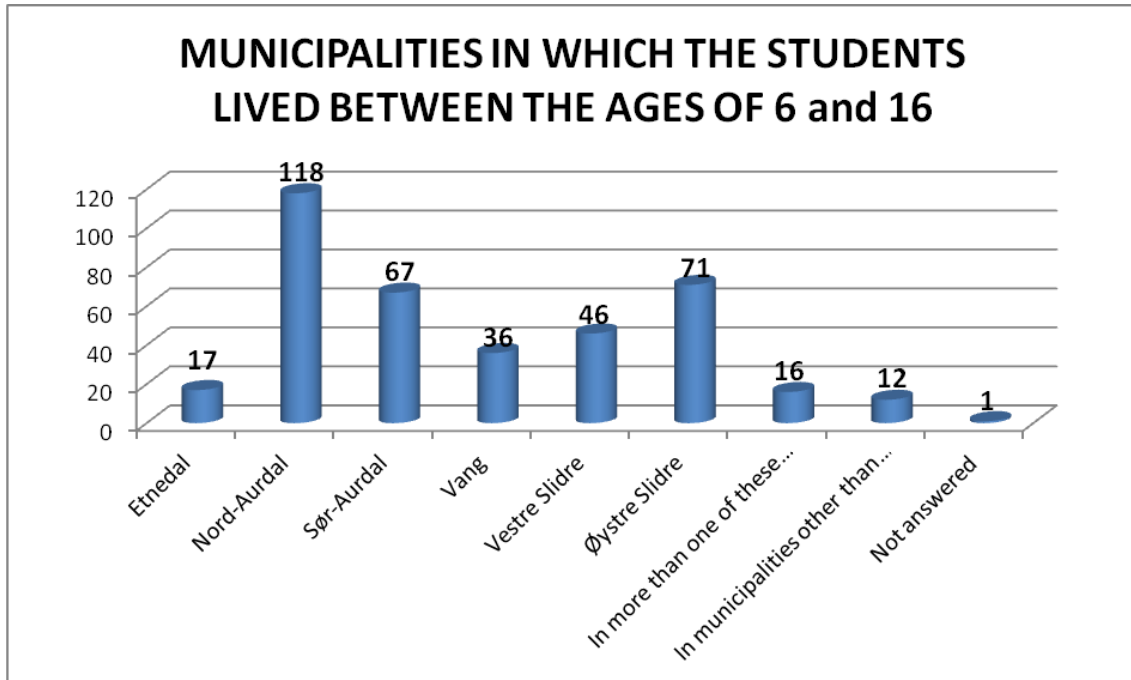


Figure 5. Municipalities in which the students lived before they started Valdres Upper Secondary School.

Of the 384 students, 371 lived in the *Valdres region* before enrolling at the Valdres Upper Secondary School.

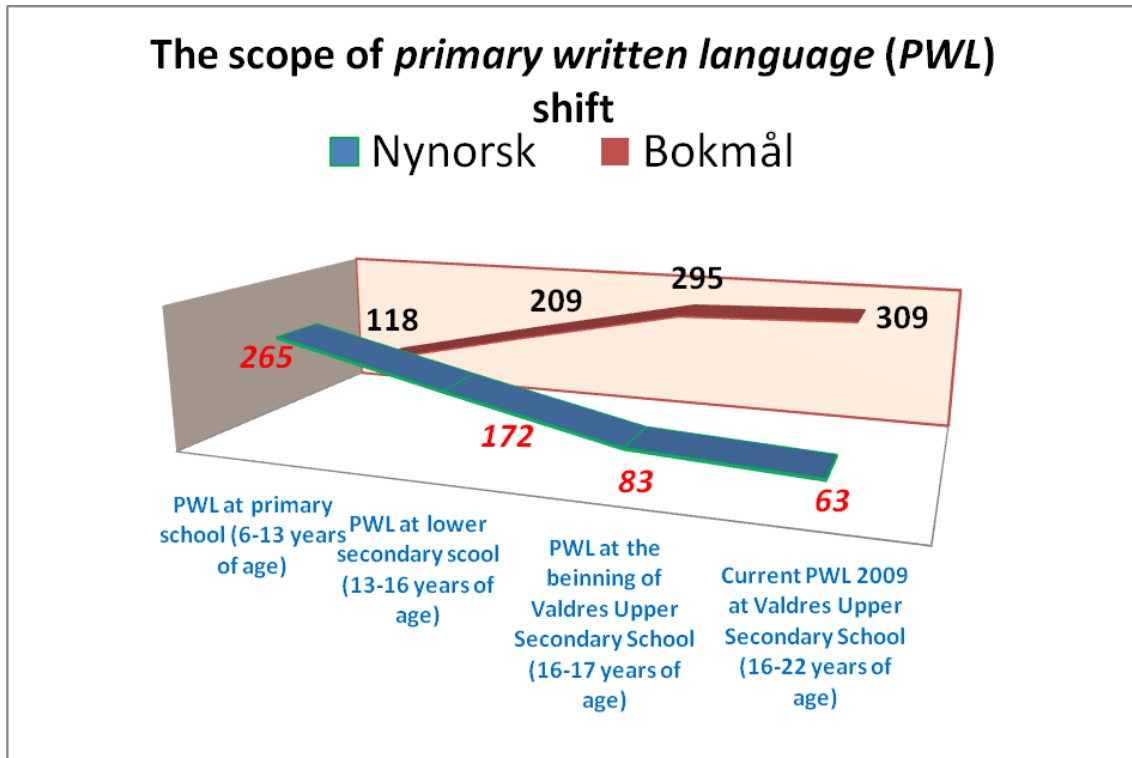
#### *The scope of the primary written language (PWL) shift amongst young people*

We asked the students about their use of *primary written language* (PWL) when they were at basic school (6–13 years of age) and in 2009 while they all were students at Valdres Upper Secondary School (VUSS).

As one can see in the Figure 6, during the course of schooling, there is a considerable '*written language decline*' among those who had Nynorsk as their primary written language (PWL) when they started primary school. Only 63 of 265 students (24%) of those who had Nynorsk as their PWL at primary school age continued to use Nynorsk as their written language at upper secondary school age, ie. while they were students at VUSS.

This means that around 76% of the students with Nynorsk as PWL experienced *written language shift*: a shift *from* having Nynorsk as their primary written language at primary school age *to* adopting Bokmål as their written language at upper secondary school age. On the other hand we see an increase in the number of students using Bokmål as their written language. The number of students who had Bokmål as their PWL at primary school was 118. In 2009, when the students were going to Valdres Upper Secondary School (VUSS), this number rose to 309. The decline in the number of students with Nynorsk as their written language is reflected in the increasing number of students with Bokmål as their written language.





-The discrepancy between the total number of students in the sample (N=384) and the numbers in the figure is due to the lack of answers to some of the questions concerning primary written language / written language in the questionnaire

Figure 6. Shift of primary written language (PWR) during school life

As one can see in the Figure 6 above, our data reveals a clear tendency of written language shift among Nynorsk-youths. The more schooling, the more written language shift among the youths with Nynorsk as written language. Our data shows that 69% of the sample had a Nynorsk written language background at primary school age. At lower secondary stage the Nynorsk students continuing to use their written language (Nynorsk) comprised some 45% of the student population. When they started Valdres Upper Secondary School, the number of students using Nynorsk fell even more. At this stage they comprised only 22% of the student population. When we conducted our survey, the majority of the students had been at VUSS between one and two years. When we asked the students about their current (in 2009), written language, only 63 out of 369 (who answered this question), or only 17% of them said that they used Nynorsk as their written language. This decline in the use of their primary written language Nynorsk as their written language at upper secondary school age among the youths who spoke a Nynorsk-close dialect in Valdres region, means that Nynorsk youths went through a period of gradual shift of written language. From being a linguistic majority at the primary school years, they became a linguistic minority during the years at upper secondary stage. This happened in a region which historically and traditionally has been considered as the stronghold of Nynorsk – both culturally and linguistically.

#### *Reasons for the language shift*

We will in the following sections discuss three possible reasons for the shift in written language among Nynorsk-writing young people in Valdres:

1. Potential change in spoken language,
2. Potential desire to be as similar as possible to the Bokmål majority in Norway, and

## 3. The way in which schools treat Nynorsk and communicate Nynorsk.

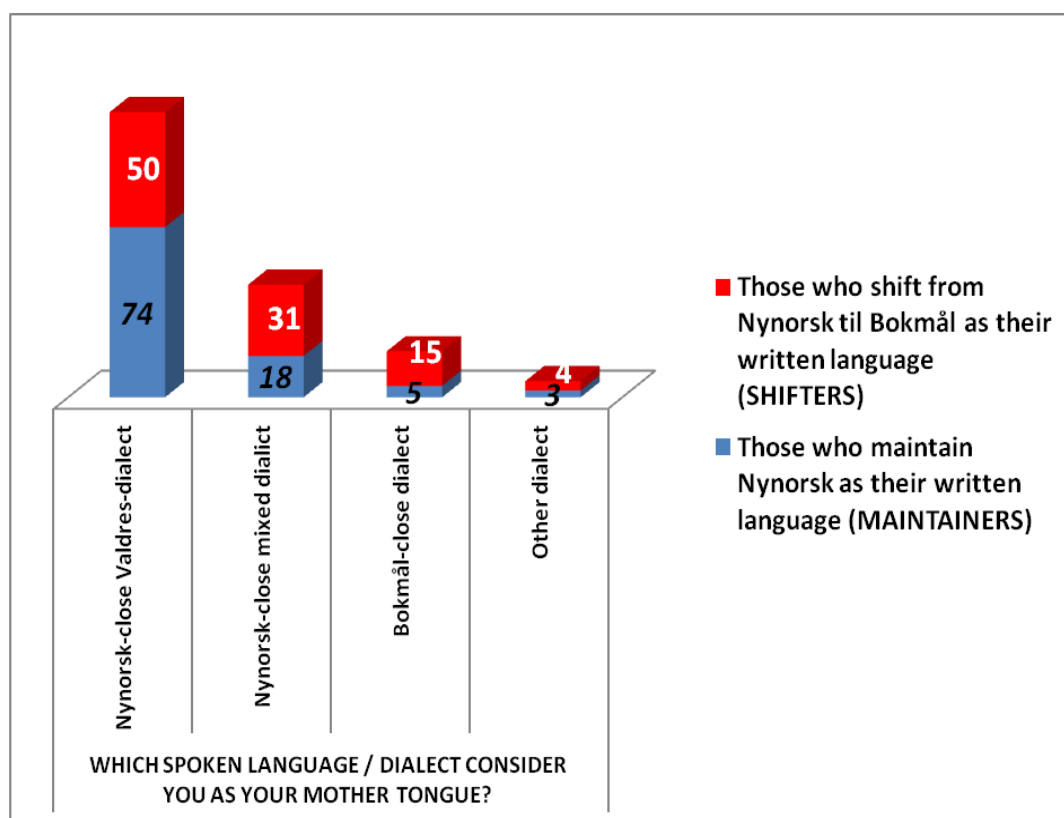


Figure 7. The students' description of their mother tongue and the percentage of written language 'shifters' and written language 'maintainers'

#### Spoken language background and written language

In Valdres the linguistic difference between the traditional local dialect and Nynorsk is rather small. At the same time there has been a shift in spoken language among the younger generation – a shift from a traditional Nynorsk-close Valdres dialect to a more Bokmål-close spoken dialect (Kvåle, 1999a; 1999b). We did not know the extent to which this affected the choice of written language. We asked the students participating in the survey, how they themselves would describe their dialect. Almost 50% of all students describe their spoken language as Nynorsk-close Valdres dialect. Almost 30% say they speak a Nynorsk-close mixed dialect, almost 20% say they speak a Bokmål-close dialect, while a few say they speak a different dialect. It is difficult to say exactly what constitutes a Nynorsk-close mixed dialect or a Nynorsk-close Valdres dialect as the material does not include any detailed linguistic variables. But we can assume that some 80% of their language have elements of the traditional Nynorsk-close Valdres dialect in their spoken language to a greater or lesser extent.

Is there a link between the verbal use of Nynorsk-close dialect and the choice of Nynorsk as a written language in upper secondary education age? The following diagram shows the percentage of the Nynorsk-close dialect users and those of them who have changed their written language from Nynorsk to Bokmål (the "shifters") and those who maintained Nynorsk as their written language (the "maintainers"). This diagram also includes those who were originally users of Bokmål-close dialect.

The columns in figure 7 show the spoken language background of the *shifters* of Nynorsk in red and *maintainers* of Nynorsk in blue.

As we mentioned earlier, Valdres region has traditionally been considered as the stronghold of Nynorsk-close dialects. As one can see in the figure 7, majority of the shifters say that Nynorsk-close Valdres dialect and Nynorsk-close mixed dialect (which comprises element from various Nynorsk-close dialects) are their spoken language (Mother tongue).

Figure 6 above shows that 63 upper secondary school students maintain Nynorsk as their written language at upper secondary school age. What kind of background do these *maintainers* have? As we can see in figure 7, almost 74% of those who maintain Nynorsk ( $n = 63$ ) say that they speak Nynorsk-close Valdres dialect and 18% of the *maintainers* have Nynorsk-close mixed dialect. This means that 92% of the *maintainers* speak *Nynorsk-related dialect/mother tongue*.

Figure 6 reveals also that 202 students with Nynorsk as their *primary written language* shifted their written language from Nynorsk to Bokmål during their schooling. In Figure 7 we can see that 81% of these *shifters* ( $n = 202$ ) have *Nynorsk-related dialect/mother tongue*.

In our view, these findings indicate that in Valdres region it would appear that speaking the traditional Nynorsk-close Valdres dialect or Nynorsk-close mixed dialect is a *natural prerequisite* and a *good point of departure* for writing Nynorsk. However, our survey also reveals that speaking the traditional Nynorsk-close Valdres dialect or Nynorsk-close mixed dialect is not a *guarantee* for maintaining of Nynorsk for writing.

#### *Attitudes towards the local language*

Bokmål has more prestige than Nynorsk due to the fact that Bokmål has the majority of the population and media on its side. On the other hand Nynorsk is often associated with traditional rural cultures and traditional rural dialects. As mentioned earlier, the heartland regions of Nynorsk are to find in the countryside, predominantly in Western Norway (see Figure 1). It is often the case that those who regardless their current residential place, use Nynorsk as their writing language to a certain degree proudly signalize that they are part of the traditional, rustic Norwegian culture. However we do not know whether this positive attitude among the Nynorsk-writing adults have any significant impact on stabilization of language decline or strengthening of Nynorsk as a written language among adults. The same uncertainty is also valid with regard to the attitudes toward Nynorsk and use of Nynorsk as written language among young generations.

As we discussed earlier in the article, the only thing that we know is that the percentage of basic school children (6 to 16 years of age) who choose Nynorsk as their written language has been declining during the last seventy years as we have shown in Figure 2.

In our survey we asked the students at Valdres Upper Secondary School whether they thought this cultural association between *speaking a Nynorsk-close dialect* and *using Nynorsk as written language* was an important argument in favour of maintaining Nynorsk as their written language. We asked them to consider the following statement: *"I think it is important that people in Valdres region use Nynorsk as written language because Nynorsk is a part of the culture here."* The following figure shows the results.

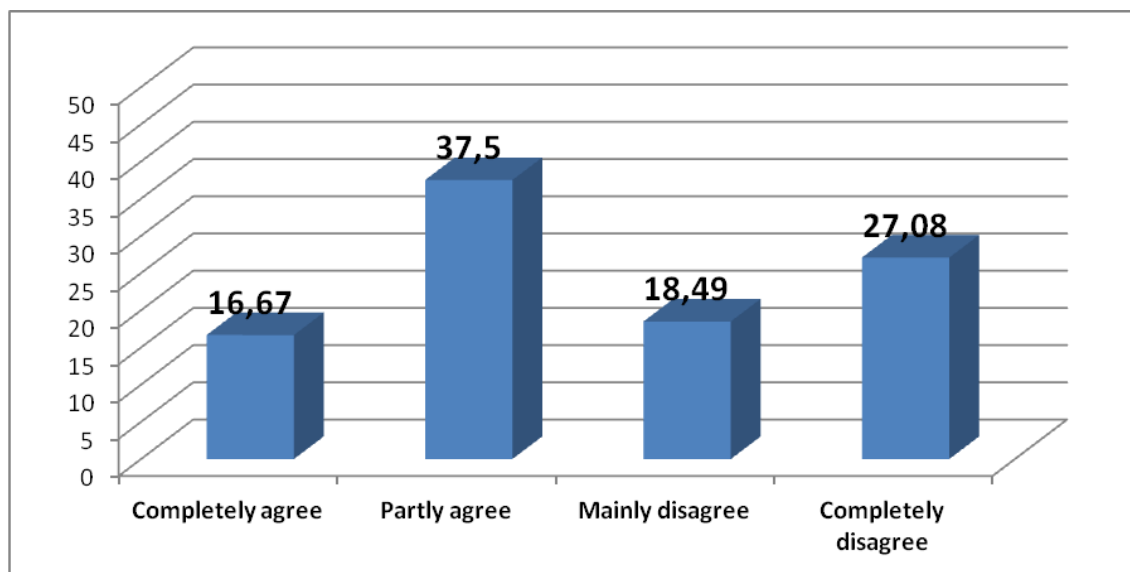


Figure 8. What the students think about this statement: "I think it is important that people in Valdres use Nynorsk as written language because Nynorsk is a part of the culture here"

Figure 8 shows that about 54 % of the students or 201 of the students in the survey ( $n = 372$ ) completely or partly agreed with the argument that it is important to write in Nynorsk because Nynorsk is a part of the culture in Valdres. This is far higher than the numbers of those who actually kept Nynorsk as their written language: 63 of 372 or 17 % of the sample.

Of those who completely or partly agree with the statement that it is important to use Nynorsk in Valdres, 72% used Nynorsk as their written language at primary school, but stopped doing so at upper secondary school. Of those who completely or partly agree, 25% had used Bokmål as their primary written language at primary school and continued to use Bokmål as written language at upper secondary school.

In the survey we also asked what the students thought about the use of Bokmål as written in Valdres region by considering this statement: "I think that in Valdres region we should write in Bokmål because this language is used by the majority of people in the country."

Figure 9 shows the answers to this question.

The response to this question corresponds quite well with the response to the previous question: About 53% completely or mainly disagreed and 45 % completely or partly agreed with the statement.

In our judgement the main message carried by these responses is that the majority of the respondents link Nynorsk to the local culture and believe that it is a good thing that people in Valdres use Nynorsk as their written language. The majority also believes that it is not necessary to use Bokmål in Valdres even the most people in the country use it. This suggests that arguments linked to local culture are important to the respondents. Even though the majority of students hold this attitude toward Nynorsk, a considerable portion of them changed their written language from *Nynorsk* to *Bokmål*.

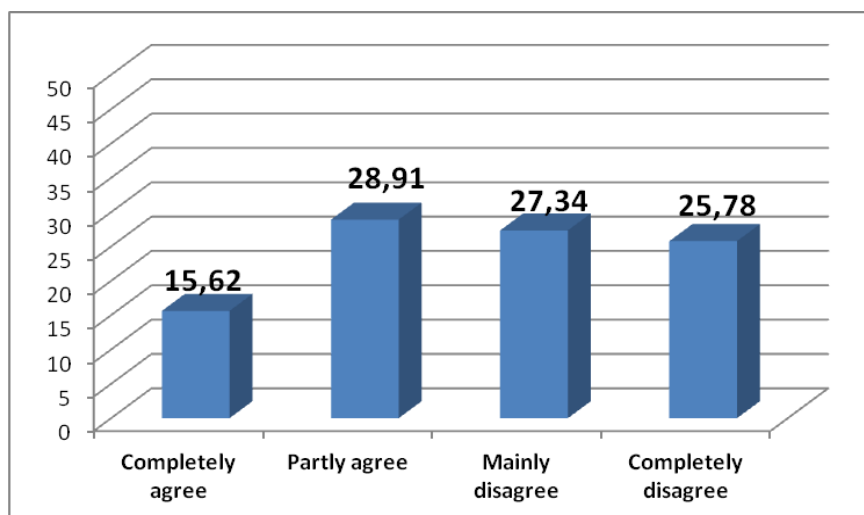


Figure 9. What the students think about this statement: "I think that in Valdres region we should write in Bokmål because this language is used by the majority of people in the country."

### *The role of the school*

When the students are asked to give reasons why they changed their written language, many of them say that "Bokmål is easier to write than Nynorsk". In reality they encounter more written Bokmål than written Nynorsk, even in Valdres, which is in many ways a Nynorsk stronghold. As we mentioned earlier Bokmål and Nynorsk are officially equal status. The state broadcastings and the other TV and radio channels as a rule obliged to use at least 25 Nynorsk-close dialects and texting or text-TV. At least 25% of the official documents and written correspondences must be in Nynorsk. The people has the right to get answer from the public services in the written language that they use in their contact with the public services. Almost all the official forms and documents include both written languages. However, on the other hand the ten biggest newspapers in the country use Bokmål. With regard to educational materials, it's the state's obligation to ensure textbooks in both written languages, but when it comes to the free market, Bokmål is the preferred language. Bokmål functions as the most prestigious majority language in which the vast majority of fiction, children literature, online documents and web based resources are published in. The Bokmål's superiority in the publishing and commercial market makes it the *de facto* dominant language of the country in the people's everyday experience and in their consciousness. In most cases the students who use textbooks in Bokmål also have available several reference books in Bokmål. This is a seldom case for the students with Nynorsk as their primary written language. All these factors pose a challenge for schools.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

We have studied the choice of written language among students at a Norwegian upper secondary school in the region of Valdres where Nynorsk enjoys a strong position as the medium of instruction in primary schools. The results of the survey show that a vast majority of students in Valdres who gained their first literacy in Nynorsk, shifted to Bokmål as their written language before they complete upper secondary education. Hardly any student make the opposite shift: From Bokmål to Nynorsk..

The traditional spoken dialects in Valdres region are close to the written Nynorsk language. There is also a link between spoken language and the choice of written language in Valdres in the sense that those who continue to use Nynorsk as their written language also speak with a traditional, Nynorsk-close Valdres dialect. Using the traditional Valdres dialect appears

to be a prerequisite in this district for continuing to use Nynorsk. However, speaking a Nynorsk-close Valdres dialect is not a *guarantee* that the person continues to use Nynorsk for writing. The survey shows that most respondents who speak a Nynorsk-close Valdres dialect go over to Bokmål when writing. Maintaining the Nynorsk-close spoken language is not a guarantee for maintaining Nynorsk as written language even Nynorsk has been their primary written language, the first written language they learned.

According to our findings, a majority of the students believe that it is important that people in Valdres write Nynorsk, because Nynorsk is part of the local culture. At the same time the majority of students reject the idea of writing Bokmål in culturally Nynorsk-dominant Valdres region even though the majority in Norway write Bokmål. These attitudes should suggest that the students would choose Nynorsk. But contrary to our expectations, a vast majority of the students have chosen to shift from Nynorsk to Bokmål. It seems to us that this was not happened voluntarily, but as several researchers point out (Baker 1996; Fishman 2001; Crystal 2002; McCarty 2003; Garcia 2009) language shift happens due to several external factors. This may suggest that the students wish to write Nynorsk, but that they find it too difficult. To an open ended question in our questionnaire, many of them express this orthographic-factor as their reason for shifting their written language. They write that it is easier for them to write Bokmål rather than Nynorsk. Many students also add to their comments that easy access to Bokmål books and Bokmål literature and the teacher recommendations to choose Bokmål-textbooks instead of Nynorsk-textbooks are among the reasons for their shift of written language. Therefore we can say that

- a) free-market forces,
- b) the lack of acknowledgement by the decision makers in the mainstream society of the fact that Nynorsk is facing significant harder challenging in Norwegian society than Bokmål, and
- c) lack of a linguistic academic consciousness among some teachers

are among the factors that make it difficult for schools to be good promoters of Nynorsk as the written language of a mother tongue and primary spoken language. When the school system is blamed in Nynorsk-media for this language declining in disfavour of Nynorsk, there is a standardized answer that one hears: "It's the students' own choice, a choice that the students at upper secondary school age have the right to do according to the law." On the basis of our research, we want to argue that it's not solely a problem of choice, but it's also a structural problem in the educational system. The system has several dysfunctional mechanisms that make it easy to the schools to leave language-choice by the students to coincidences. Nobody chooses to shift his/her language unless some powerful mechanisms surrounding the person push him/her to do so.

As we have pointed out earlier in the article, the situation of the written Nynorsk language in Norway has much in common with the situation of minority languages in other parts of the world. But in the Norwegian political arenas and in research circles, addressing this sociolinguistic challenge from the perspective of majority-minority relationships or power relationships have not been a part of the Bokmål-Nynorsk debates or research approaches. Due to the absence of this approach, the themes like language maintenance, language shift, language decline, revitalization of the language, language planning and linguistic planning in educational system etc. have not been devoted as much attention as one could expect. At the legal level however, Nynorsk and Bokmål are considered as two languages with equal status, but as we have discussed in elsewhere in the article, this is not the case in several language domains and societal sectors in the country. When we look at the way school system is functioning in practice, we see that the school system has not developed

differentiated models for teaching of and in Nynorsk or Bokmål. Nor the bilingual-biliterate approach and the educational programs that can serve for this purpose, have been put on the educational planning agenda despite a continuous debate on the declining of Nynorsk. Based on our research findings we want to claim that developing bilingual-biliterate programs or bilingual-biliterate language maintenance and cultural reconstruction programs (jfr Baker 2002, Øzerk 2008) must be considered if the aim of social justice, language maintenance and language revitalization to be achieved. A such mobilization also necessitates a differentiate teacher training. In the existing educational system in Norway, which is based on 'equality', the curricula, syllabuses and provisions are the same for Nynorsk and Bokmål pupils. Sameness is not the way to ensure equity or equality in real sense of the words. In the existing standardized state driven teacher training programs and policy, all teachers are also expected to be able to teach in both Nynorsk schools and Bokmål schools, even if it is a well-known fact that many teachers who have Bokmål-close spoken language and Bokmål as their primary written language, usually develop poor Nynorsk-written language skills. On the other hand the teachers who are proficient in Nynorsk-written language also use to be proficient in writing Bokmål. The step to shift from Nynorsk to Bokmål is shorter for the former category of teachers or teacher candidates than the step from Bokmål to Nynorsk. Combinations of all the mentioned factors have had and still have negative impact on Nynorsk. As one of the official written languages in the country, Nynorsk undergoes a gradual status lost. Nynorsk experiences language decline among those who have had Nynorsk as their primary written language. Our research reveals that a vast majority of youngsters with Nynorsk-close dialect as their mother tongue are experiencing written-language shift during their schooling. It seems to us that the existing school system functions like a *fabric for language shift*. This negative tendency in the linguistic landscape of Norway necessitates a new language-policy orientation by the legislators and the educational practitioners.

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