

Country Report on multilingual issues

Norway

July 7. 2005.

**By Lars Egeland, ABM-utvikling
(Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority)**

1. Introduction of the multilingual diversity of Norway

Of Norway's population of a little more than four million, (4 606 363 1.1.2005) 95 per cent speak Norwegian as their native language. Everyone who speaks Norwegian, whether it is a local dialect or one of the two standard official languages, can be understood by other Norwegians. In the areas where Norwegian is spoken, there are no real language barriers. However, the minority Sámi language is not related to Norwegian, and it is incomprehensible to Norwegian speakers who have not learned it.

Norway has two official written languages, Norwegian and Sámi. Norwegian is really two different languages: Bokmål (Dano-Norwegian), Nynorsk (New Norwegian).

The two Norwegian languages have equal status, i.e. they are both used in public administration, in schools, churches, and on radio and television. Books, magazines and newspapers are published in both languages. The inhabitants of local communities decide themselves which language is to be used as the language of instruction in the school attended by their children. Officially, the teaching language is called the hovedmål (primary language) and the other language the sidemål (secondary language). Students read material written in the secondary language and at the upper secondary level they should demonstrate an ability to write in that language. This is a consequence, among other things, of a requirement of public employees to answer letters in the language preferred by the sender.

During the 1995-96 school year, 398,150 pupils in primary and lower secondary schools listed Bokmål as their main language, while 79,104 listed Nynorsk. The primary language of all cities is Bokmål; the same applies to the relatively thickly populated areas surrounding the Oslo fjord and the lowlands of Eastern Norway. Nynorsk dominates in the communities lining the fjords on the west coast of Norway and in the mountain districts of inland Norway. The rules regarding the selection or possible change of a school's teaching language are established by law.

While the percentage distribution of the two languages in the schools has been fairly stable over the last 15 to 20 years, this does not mean that perfect peace and harmony prevail between the two tongues. From the percentages claimed by the respective languages, it is clear that Bokmål

dominates, as it always has done. Bokmål is the language of choice of the major newspapers, the weekly magazines, and paperback novels. Because the cities and most industrial areas use Bokmål to train new employees, the language prevails in business and advertising. Bokmål was developed from the form of Danish that was freely spoken by government officials and by leading social circles in the cities; it therefore had the prestige of being the preferred speech of people with higher education and aspirations. It has the same function as normal speech in other countries, as well as serving as a status symbol.

Nynorsk has the upper hand in districts where the population is stable and most speak their traditional local dialect. Normalized Nynorsk is hence usually not the spoken language in the local communities where it is the teaching language and is mainly used in places where the inhabitants hail from different parts of the country.

The Language Usage Act

Norway has a law that regulates the use of language in public services. The Language Usage Act may be summed up as follows:

- Private individuals and other private legal persons shall receive responses in the language (Bokmål or Nynorsk) they use when addressing a State agency.
- Municipalities and counties may decide to require Bokmål or Nynorsk in the correspondence they receive from State agencies, or they may decide to remain linguistically neutral.
- The so-called civil service language of a lower administrative level in the State shall determine the form used at a higher level to handle correspondence between them, for example, and the civil service language in turn is based on the municipality's choice of language.
- State agencies shall generally alternate between the two languages in the documents they produce for the public, i.e. everything from parliamentary documents, books and magazines to stamps and bank notes, so that neither language is ever used less than 25 per cent of the time. **This also includes websites.**

Publications in Norway

It was published 4.375 books in Norway I 2003. 4 652 was published in Bokmål (Dano-Norwegian), 460 in Nynorsk (New-norwegian), 1 in the Sámi language and 530 in other languages.

Minority languages in Norway

Norway is implementing the provisions of the European Charter for regional or minority languages. The languages recognized as regional or

minority languages in Norway, thus granted protection by the Charter; are the Sámi language, the Kven/Finnish language, and the Romanes and Romany languages.

There is no agreed total number of inhabitants with an ethnic minority background in Norway, since there is no statistics on ethnic affiliation. According to estimates there are, at present, approximately 10 000 – 15.000 Kvens, 1 500 - 2 000 Jews, a few hundred Skogfinns ("Skogfinn" is the Finnish speaking population living in the vast forestland near the border to Sweden), 2 000 - 3 000 Romanies (Travellers) and 300-400 Romas (Gypsies). It should be pointed out that the figures are rather inaccurate, reflecting the number of people who claim they belong to the minority group, and not necessarily those having a fluent command of the language.

Sámi language

The Sámi language is the language of the indigenous Sámi population. The Sámi language has been recognized as a regional language. The Sámi language in Norway includes four major languages, North Sámi, South Sámi, Lule Sámi and East Sámi, with varying degree of similarities between them. The majority of the Sámi population speaks the North Sámi language.

The Sámi people are a North European ethnic minority group and the indigenous population of the vast open areas of northern Norway, Sweden Finland, and the Kola Peninsula in Russia. It is estimated that approximately 25 000 people in Norway speak the Sámi language cf. a language usage survey that was completed by the Sámi Language Board in October 2000. According to the findings, 17 per cent of the respondents claimed they were Sámi speakers, which in this context was defined as being able to understand Sámi well enough to take part in a conversation conducted in Sámi.

Kven/finnish language

The Kven/Finnish language has been recognized as a minority language in Norway.

The migration and settlement of the Kvens in Norway is part of a history of extensive colonization by Finnish peasants, almost a mass exodus from the old agricultural communities of Finland and northern Sweden. The emigration continued for several hundred years, from the 16th century up until the first half of the 19th century. Later in the 19th century modern labour migration followed in a larger scale.

The Kven/Finnish language is spoken in Troms and Finnmark, the two northernmost counties of Norway.

Romanes

In Norway Romanes has been recognized as a non-territorial minority language.

Romanes is the language of the Roma ("Gypsy") minority in Norway. Approximately 400 people of Romanes descent have lived in Norway during the last decades, mainly in the Oslo area. Generally, it is assumed that they all have Romanes as their mother tongue. During the last decade, some Romas have come to Norway as refugees from Bosnia and Kosovo.

Romany

Romany has been recognized as a non-territorial minority language in Norway, and is granted protection under Part II of the Charter.

Romany is the language of the Romany people (or the so-called "Travellers"). This minority group has lived in Norway for several centuries.

Immigrant languages

About 7.3% of Norway's population have immigrant background, most from Africa and the Middle East. 6, 3 % of the pupils in school belong to language minorities. 5, 9 % of the children in kindergartens have a different mother tongue than Norwegian, Swedish, Danish or English. Approximately 1/3 of them are getting bi-language assistance.

Among the dominating immigrant languages are Albanian, Arabic, Hindi, Kurdish, Persian, Portugese, Somali, Spanish, Swahili, Tamile, Turkish, Hungarian, Urdu, Vietnamese.

Some multilingual cultural websites – good examples

Most major cultural institutions has websites with information in English. The Norwegian culturenet which launched a new version in 2004 based on Topic Map, will probably launch an English version next year.

The multilingual library - the library with books in 28 languages and staff from 25 countries.

The Multilingual Library is a part of Deichman Library, the public library in Oslo, but serves the whole country. The Library has three main functions:

The Multilingual Library was established as a separate entity in 1983. At that time the Deichman library had already built up a considerable collection in the main languages of the immigrant population. Today the library's activities are financed partly by the municipality of Oslo (25%) and partly by the state (75%).

The Multilingual Library has its own website with links to resources for immigrants and people from ethnic minorities.

Website BAZAR

Bazar is a website for language minorities in Norway. It is available in 14 languages and is a unique possibility to reach language minorities in their own language on their own premises. Bazar is developed and run by the Multilingual Library with funding from ABM-utvikling.

<http://www.bazar.deichman.no/>

Vadsø museum – multilingual website

Vadsø museum has a multilingual website about the the museum, about local history and about the kvens. The text is in Norwegian, English and finnish/kven.
<http://museumsnett.no/alias/HJEMMESIDE/vadsomuseet/>

Some Sami websites:

Culturenet Troms

Kulturnet.no is the "website for culture in Norway", run by ABM-utvikling on behalf of the Ministry for Culture and Church Affairs. It contains a central website and several regional culturenet-websites. One of them – kulturnett Troms – is multilingual sami and Norwegian.

<http://troms.kulturnett.no/samegillii/>

Sami radio

The Norwegian non-commercial broadcasting company, runs a Sami radio station which produces and broadcasts radio and television. They also have a multilingual website in North-sami, Lule-sami, South-sami and Norwegian.

<http://www.samiradio.org/>

The Sami parliament

The Sami parliament runs a website with information about sami politics and government, but also information to the citizens from health to culture. It is in Norwegian and sami.

<http://www.samediggi.no>