Pavla Bartášková: "Changes of the written Norwegian and their refection in the press published in the United States in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century."

Ph.D. dissertation assessment

Reader: Professor Arnstein Hjelde, Østfold University College, Norway

The present doctoral thesis is a study of the spelling of Norwegian used in Norwegian-American newspapers, as well as English loanwords found here, from the 1880s to the 1970s. Such a study is worthwhile since this period in the history of the Norwegian written language featured a series of language reforms; Danish, the only written language used in Norway in the first half of the 19th century, was gradually "Norwegianized" into what became the Riksmål/Bokmål language. In addition, this was the period in which Norway gained independence (1905), and the development of distinct standards for the Norwegian written language played a significant role in country's nation-building. During Norway's national growth, thousands of Norwegians immigrated to America. In this new land, the situation for the written language was very different; maintaining the language was more important than reforming it. How Norwegian-Americans dealt with changes to the standards for Riksmål/Bokmål in Norway has not yet been systematically investigated in depth. Einar Haugen touches upon it occasionally in his work, as do historians like Odd Lovoll, but no scholar has attempted to tell the "full story" until now. Thus, the candidate deserves respect for being the first to take on this challenge.

The present thesis consists of 10 chapters, and it is divided into two main parts; an introduction (4 chapters) and an empirical part (6 chapters). The first two chapters introduce theories on language management and contact linguistics; chapter 3 is on Norwegian immigration while chapter 4 gives an overview of the immigrant – and especially the Norwegian press in the US. The empirical part of this study starts with chapter 5, where the primary research material is presented and discussed. Chapter 6 focuses on the spelling reforms in Norway, and how they were dealt with in the Norwegian-American community, while chapter 7 is devoted to the loanwords found in the examined newspapers. Chapter 8 and 9 are on implementation of spelling reforms in the three papers examined, the first of these two chapters give a general overview, while the latter gives a more detailed analysis of a selected set of texts. Chapter 10 concludes the study.
In the present assessment of this new version of Bartásková’s thesis, I focus on aspects where the first version had major shortcomings, and evaluate to what extent these are sufficiently improved. These were related to a) the empirical material, b) structure and focus of the thesis, c) use of theory, d) descriptive approach, and finally e) accuracy and language.

**The empirical material**
In the first version of the thesis it was not made clear what was the empirical material for the study. It claimed to “evaluate to which extent the language policy of the editors of the Norwegian newspapers in the US reflected the orthographic and morphological changes adopted in Norway”, and it included text produced by Norwegian-American editors and journalists, but also texts produced in “The old world”, and this was not discussed or clarified in any way. The present version of the thesis however, gives satisfying information on this. Here Bartásková motivates her choices and takes the origin of the different texts into account.

The same is the case with English words found in a Norwegian context and the question of their status. Several of these words have become a part of the Norwegian vocabulary and can be found used in newspapers published in Norway as well. Now Bartásková has solved this problem by looking at if – and how – these words are used in the Norwegian newspaper Aftenposten.

**Structure and focus of the thesis**
The first version of the thesis was short (around 85 pages), and it lacked focus in the sense that only a small portion of the work was devoted to answer the research question(s).

The study as presented in the last version of the thesis is greatly improved in this matter. First, the number of pages is almost doubled, leaving much more room to be devoted to the research question. Likewise, less relevant content is edited out, making the focus of this work even clearer. Thus, the original contribution in this study is more substantial, and the work as a whole does not rest that heavily on other scholars as the first version did. I find this to be the most important improvement in the present version of the thesis.

**Use of theory**
The two first chapters in this thesis are devoted to two different theoretical fields; one on language management, especially relevant for the implementation of spelling reforms, and another on contact linguistics, which is relevant to the part on loanwords. The candidate demonstrated that she has adequate knowledge of theory of this field, and the introduction of language management theory on a Norwegian material represents as far as I know a novelty. However, it is also clear that theory only plays a secondary role in this study, and a more thorough discussion of the
material in the light of theory would definitely add value to this work. This is especially the case for the study of loanwords, where there is a considerable amount of updated and relevant theory that could have been employed more thoroughly.

We also find some claims related to loanwords and borrowings that need to be commented on. “The majority of English loanwords in the language of Norwegian immigrants belongs to the group of cultural borrowings” (p. 28). I wonder what the basis for such a claim is. It is obvious that we find many loanwords in the group of cultural borrowings, but borrowing is definitely not limited to this domain. At page 31 we find a claim that vocabulary related to “family life” is “outside the English influence”. This is not in line with the Norwegian-American language as spoken today, as a high portion of words describing family relations is borrowed from English in the speech of Norwegian-Americans.

I do also have a critical remark regarding the use of secondary references. In my view this should be avoided in a doctoral thesis, however, in the present study the work of Aasta Stene is referred to through Haugen’s *The Norwegian Language in America* (p. 88).

- **Accuracy and language**
  Even if this version of the thesis is improved regarding accuracy and language, there is still some room for further improvement. Some examples are.
  - It is pointed at the word “prisstigning” as an example of a “Danish” form where $g$ has not been replaced by $k$ (p. 124). The Old Norse origin to this word’s root is *stiga* (with $g$), thus it is not among the targeted word where $k$ should replace $g$.
  - Repetition occurs, such as at page 143, where we find two sentences repeated in a near identical form.
  - There are examples of typos and awkward phrasing occasionally, but not more than what is to be expected.
  - Yaron Matras is referred to in the text (p. 26), but I do not find him in the list of references.
  - At page 71 we can read that “The reform was officially regarded as accepted when Aftenposten (...) applied the new orthography and the morphology adaptations to its spelling policy in 1923”. That the reforms were accepted by the media was of course important, but “officially regarded as accepted” is in my view a too strong claim her.
General conclusion
This study fills a research gap in the study of Norwegian-American language and culture, and while we have several studies on Landsmål/Nynorsk in America, there has been no comprehensive study on Dano-Norwegian/Riksmål/Bokmål until the present thesis. It is clear that the candidate has put a considerable amount of work into processing and analyzing the material, and the empirical work represents the strength in this study. On the other hand, it could be expected that theory had been applied on the material as well; the candidate presents some relevant theory, but does not use the opportunity fully to demonstrate ability in applying theory as a useful tool for analyzing an empirical material, and I find this to be the major weakness of this study. Nonetheless, after a thorough consideration, where I have taken the strong and weak aspects of the thesis into consideration, I recommend it for defense.

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Arnstein Hjelde

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