Norwegian in the American Midwest: A Common Dialect?

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Abstract

The American Midwest is an area that stretches over huge distances. Yet it seems that the Norwegian language in this whole area has some similarities, particularly at the lexical level. Comparisons of three types of vocabulary across the whole area, as well as across time, building on accounts in the previous literature from Haugen (1953) onwards, are carried out. The results of these comparisons convince the authors that it is justified to refer to this language as one lexically defined dialect, which we call lexicolect.

Keywords

heritage Norwegian – loanwords – types of words – one common language variety – different dialects – lexicolect

1 Introduction

1.1 Our Goal

That a new speech variety or dialect can develop in a close-knit community is not surprising. It is also possible to see how members of a society tied together by mass media, especially radio, television and social media, can develop a common language variety. However, for people living far apart in a vast
and sparsely populated area like the American Midwest to develop a common linguistic variety at a time when travel was hard, expensive and very time-consuming, and the relevant mass media only existed in print, is much more unexpected. Yet, this is what happened with the Norwegian language as it developed from approximately 1850 to 1950, and which is the topic of this paper.

We claim that the American Norwegian language in the Midwest in many ways should be regarded as a new variety of Norwegian. This variety could be either a new dialect or a new koiné language. Crystal (1985) defines dialect as “a regionally or socially distinctive variety of a language identified by a particular set of words and grammatical structures.” According to Kerswill (2002), there are two types of koiné, regional and immigrant koiné. In both of these, one or more dialects together form a new dialect. In the present case, it is English that has caused consistent vocabulary changes in Norwegian, i.e. one language has influenced another. Since these changes are not structural, but pertain to the lexicon, we do not want to classify it as koiné (see also Hjelde 2015 for a discussion on a particular American Norwegian variety). The word dialect commonly includes not just vocabulary, but also phonology, morphology and syntax. Some linguists, for example Sandøy (1985: 15), use dialect about a linguistic variety that is well defined along the vocabulary scale. We would like to suggest a new and alternative term, lexiclect, to mean a geographically defined language variety that has a bulk of vocabulary in common that is not shared with other language speakers. We will give a couple of examples that show how the American Midwest Norwegian is grammatically unchanged, but will mainly concentrate on the vocabulary, which shows interesting similarities that must have developed after immigration took place.

The basis for this paper is first and foremost fieldwork that was done in March 2010 by the authors, though we also use some additional material towards the end of the paper.1 Our contention that American Norwegian in the Midwest is one variety, is in many ways surprising. There are 800 kilometres between the two extreme points (Westby, WI, and Hatton, ND) from which the data for this paper are taken. Also, this is an area to which people immigrated from all over Norway; Haugen (1953: 343) describes, for example, how in western Wisconsin “we find practically all the major dialects of Norway”.

We will present our findings in light of the work of Haugen (1953) and Hjelde (1992). We disagree with Haugen (1953), who claimed that a common dialect

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1 The fieldwork was part of the project Norwegian American Dialect Syntax (NorAmDiaSyn), financed by the Norwegian Research Council, as a special subproject under the big dialect project Norwegian Dialect Syntax. Johannessen has done more fieldwork later, but that plays only a minor role in the present paper.
was developed in the direction of the written norm of “Dano-Norwegian” (see Section 1.2, and Johannessen and Laake, 2015). Certainly, the new vocabulary amongst the American Norwegians does not go in such a direction.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 gives a background introduction to the fieldwork on which the paper is based. Section 3 presents two specific syntactic phenomena that show that the language is structurally unchanged. Section 4 shows three types of vocabulary change that serve as an argument that the American Midwest Norwegian is a new dialect. In Section 5 additional data is presented to support our view, while Section 6 concludes the paper.

1.2 Norway and Haugen’s Claims on the Dialect Situation amongst the American Norwegians

Norway is a long country with a small population spread across much of the country, which has big mountain areas and forests. In 1900 the population was just above two million people. There were thus good conditions for dialect formation. Even today there are many different dialects (divided into four major dialect areas), but they are probably more mutually intelligible today than they were at the time of the Norwegian emigration to America. Haugen (1953: 337–360) describes how the different dialects from Norway were spread across the Midwest. He emphasises the fact that many of the 800,000 immigrants that left Norway in 1825–1920 had not encountered other dialects until they came to America. The level of mutual understanding was low, especially between eastern and western Norwegians, in which case it was always the eastern ones that could not understand the others (op.cit. p. 346). Haugen further describes how the language changes from one generation to the next, due to the settlement of several different dialect speakers in one region, and how “where the children have grown up together, they all talk alike” (op.cit. p.350). Haugen concludes: “It was inevitable that these social forces should have tended towards the development of a generalized or central dialect in those settlements where many different dialects were spoken” (op.cit. p. 351).

Haugen (1953: 351–2) describes many speakers who have traits from eastern Norwegian, but concludes that “speakers have departed from their native speech in the general direction of the BL [book language]” (Haugen, 1953: 352). While Johannessen and Laake (2015) argue against the idea that the book language was the target for a common dialect, we agree that the main common dialect features are those of eastern Norwegian. This can be witnessed in intonation and in grammatical constructions as well as in many other dialect features, discussed by Johannessen and Laake (2015). Haugen (1953: 360) says that “there is a conspicuous trend toward a new and American norm of N[orwegian] speech, which would not be identical with that of any dialect”.
This, we believe, is what we see when it comes to the common syntactic and lexical facts we present in this paper.

2 Fieldwork in America

The fieldwork on which this article is primarily based, took place on 8.–20. March 2010. To obtain informants we placed advertisements in three Norwegian American periodicals: The Viking Magazine, The Norwegian American Weekly and The Norseman. Through these, we wanted to get in contact with descendants of Norwegian immigrants to America. The immigration should have taken place before 1920, and the descendants should speak Norwegian as a result of having learned it at home in the family. We contacted the informants who answered our ads, and our fieldwork itinerary spanned twelve days covering 3518 kilometres and 31 informant visits. The tour included large parts of the Midwest: nine locations in five states (Chicago, IL, Westby, WI, Sunburg, MN, Starbuck, MN, Albert Lea, MN, Stillwater, MN, Webster, SD, Hatton, ND and Grand Forks, ND).

All our informants were descendants of Norwegian immigrants, and they varied between second and fifth generation immigrants. They were aged 67–90 years. We did about an hour of video recording with each informant, typically a twenty minute interview with one of us in addition to a forty minute conversation with another informant. We would like to mention that all the informants we met were happy and grateful to see us. (This was also mutual!) Most had never visited Norway and had never spoken Norwegian with someone so much younger than themselves. Our conversations for the most part went completely fluently in Norwegian once we fieldworkers learned to substitute our Oslo dialect with question words and inflections from the dialects of the valleys in eastern Norway.

For the present paper we have chosen to investigate five informants from Wisconsin, Minnesota and North Dakota, covering a distance of 800 km, see Table 1. They have been chosen because they speak fluent Norwegian, and because they live far apart. Together they cover a large area of the Midwest. Their ancestors come from the same area in Norway (eastern valley districts). For the present study this is irrelevant, since what we are investigating is vocabulary that has clearly developed after the ancestors settled in America. In addition to these key informants, we have also used other informants from other fieldwork to substantiate our claims.

Each informant will be represented by the first letter of his or her name at the end of each example line. Since the examples are taken from spontaneous
speech in conversations of varying length and on different topics, not all phenomena occur in the recordings. It does not follow, of course, that if a phenomenon is not documented for each informant, it does not exist in their language.

3 The Syntax of the Norwegian Language in America

Little has been written about the syntax of American Norwegian, although this situation seems about to change, given the special issue of the Norwegian Journal of Linguistics (Norsk Lingvistisk tidsskrift) in 2012 and Johannessen and Salmons (2015). Haugen actually says: “Norwegian word order is similar to English, and offers no serious problems in the adaption of loanwords” (Haugen, 1953: 457). Much of Norwegian syntax, however, is very different from English. This fact can be used to check whether a particular group of American Norwegians speak the same variety, or whether some of them have constructions that have changed, perhaps in the direction of English.

Here we will only present a couple of syntactic phenomena, in order to show that they are stable amongst our informants. This is in spite of the fact that they are not part of standard Norwegian (i.e. in the standard written forms) or occur in English, and therefore plausibly could have changed. It shows that their Norwegian language is intact and is not attrited or has turned into any kind of semi Norwegian-English language.
3.1  **Preproprial Article**

Most Norwegian dialects have a preposed article in the form of a pronoun used with names and some name-like kinship terms (Faarlund *et al.*, 1997: 247; Håberg, 2010; Johannessen and Garbacz, 2013). All our five interviewees have a Norwegian dialect background from the valleys in the southeast, where one traditionally finds these preproprial articles. Its use is widespread amongst all our respondents. Eunice, Archie, Florence and Howard use it consistently with all names, while Olaf is not as consistent, but still uses it with a majority of names.

(1)  

a.  
\begin{align*}  
\text{n} & \quad \text{Hans} & \quad \text{og} & \quad \text{n} & \quad \text{Anton} \\
\text{he} & \quad \text{Hans} & \quad \text{and} & \quad \text{he} & \quad \text{Anton} \\
\end{align*}  

\text{‘Hans and Anton’}  

b.  
\begin{align*}  
\text{ho} & \quad \text{Lina} & \quad \text{Bakkom} \\
\text{she} & \quad \text{Lina} & \quad \text{Bakkom} \\
\end{align*}  

\text{‘Lina Bakkom’}  

c.  
\begin{align*}  
\text{n} & \quad \text{Jerome} & \quad \text{og} & \quad \text{Amy} \\
\text{he} & \quad \text{Jerome} & \quad \text{and} & \quad \text{Amy} \\
\end{align*}  

\text{‘Jerome and Amy’}  

d.  
\begin{align*}  
\text{ho} & \quad \text{Jane} \\
\text{she} & \quad \text{Jane} \\
\end{align*}  

\text{‘Jane’}  

e.  
\begin{align*}  
\text{ho} & \quad \text{Susan} & \quad \text{Galstad} \\
\text{she} & \quad \text{Susan} & \quad \text{Galstad} \\
\end{align*}  

\text{‘Susan Galstad’}  

We do not go into the conditions of use for the preproprial article here. They differ somewhat from dialect to dialect. For example, in some dialects it is obligatory for all names (this seems to be the case for North Norwegian dialects), while for others it is used only with first, given names (some dialects of southern Norway, see for example Faarlund (2000) on the Toten dialect). The most important thing for us to point out here is the fact that this article exists for all our informants and that English has not influenced the language in a direction of non-use of this article.
3.2 Possession

Possession is expressed in several ways in Norwegian dialects, many which are not possible in English. Here we present some of these as they are used amongst our informants.

(2) a. mor hennes Karen
    mother her Karen
    ‘Karen's mother’

b. mann-en hennes
    husband-DEF her
    ‘her husband’

c. bror åt mor di
    brother to mother your
    ‘your mother's brother’

d. etter-ane dommers
    cousins-DEF their
    ‘their cousins’

e. plass-en hass
    place-DEF his
    ‘his place’

f. syster hass
    sister his
    ‘his sister’

g. onkel-en min
    uncle-DEF my
    ‘my uncle’

In Norwegian, one of the common ways of expressing possession is to form a phrase consisting of the possessed noun with the definiteness suffix + a possessive pronoun, as in (2b,d,e,g). As discussed in Lødrup (2014), certain kinship terms (especially mor ‘mother’, far ‘father’ and bror ‘brother’) can also occur without a definiteness suffix when possessed. We see examples of this in
(2a,c,f). The latter is not part of the written language standard. Our informants are well acquainted with both types and use them. The possessive constructions are thus not influenced by English.

We have shown two kinds of syntactic phenomena here, preproprial articles and possession constructions, to illustrate that there are central parts of the syntax of our informants that are not influenced by English. They have all retained these constructions, across the vast area of the Midwest. We refer to Johannessen and Laake (2012, 2015) for more syntactic constructions amongst these informants.

4 The Vocabulary in the Norwegian Language in America

We have presented two syntactic construction types to illustrate that we find the language of our informants to be very similar across the whole area. However, we will use vocabulary changes to argue that the speech of our informants can be said to constitute a new American Norwegian variety. Using only vocabulary as a test for dialecthood is perhaps less common than including more linguistic features, such as phonology, morphology, and syntax. However, as we saw in Section 1.1, both Crystal (1985) and Sandøy (1985) are open for such a possibility. If a variety is defined geographically and linguistically, for example by vocabulary, it can be called a dialect. We could even call it a lexicolect.

A striking feature of the language of the Norwegian Midwest Americans, are, of course, the loanwords. It is especially interesting to see whether they are established words or whether they are just so-called random loan (nonce borrowings, Romaine 1995). If words are established amongst multiple informants over a larger area, and over time, they must be said to be part of a common language, which indicates that there is a common dialect. Below we show three tables. We have sorted the words into three groups:

A: words for things or concepts that did not exist in Norway
B: words that have replaced existing Norwegian words
C: words that have a new meaning

Table 2 shows loanwords of type A. The first column shows the borrowed word into American Norwegian; the second column shows the modern Norwegian word while the third column shows the original English word. In the fourth column, we show who of our five participants have used the word in our sample, while column five shows where, if anywhere, in the literature it was first mentioned: Haugen (1953) or alternatively in Hjelde (1992).
We see that most of the words are used by at least one of our informants, and in addition are also mentioned in the previous literature on the American Norwegian language. The word *pickup* was used by two informants from different states: both Howard (WI) and Olaf (ND) use this word. The word is also documented in Hjelde (1992). As mentioned above, the conversations that our recordings are based on are relatively short, so it is almost surprising if different pairs of informants have talked about the same topics, and hence used the same words. In spite of that, several actually did do this. *Retaira* (‘retired’.past) is a word we heard many times, even though it is only documented once in the recordings.

Since most of the words are documented in Haugen (1953) and Hjelde (1992), we understand that they must have a certain distribution in time and space, since their surveys are done earlier than ours and with informants from different (though to some extent overlapping) areas. They must therefore be said to be part of a common vocabulary of American Norwegian. However, there is nothing surprising in the words of type A, and it is conceivable that other heritage languages have many of the same ones.

| American Norwegian | Modern European Norwegian | English | Informant | Word first documented in |
|--------------------|--------------------------|--------|-----------|--------------------------|
| breiken            | bremsen                  | the brake | H         | Ha1953                  |
| caran              | bilene                   | the cars  | E         | Ha1953                  |
| college            | høyskole/college         | college  | O         | Hj1992                  |
| cookies            | kjeks                    | cookies  | E         | Hj1992                  |
| excercise          | trening                  | excercise | H         | –                       |
| garagen            | garasjen                 | the garage | H         | Ha1953                  |
| grillen            | grillen på bilen         | the grill | H         | –                       |
| lieutenant         | betjent                  | lieutenant | H       | –                       |
| loadern            | traktortilhengeren      | the loader  | H       | –                       |
| pickupen           | pickupen                 | the pickup | H, O    | Hj1992                  |
| retira             | pensjonert               | retired  | H         | Hj1992                  |
| rig                | utstyr                   | rig      | A         | Hj1992                  |
| sportsgaman        | sportskampene            | the sports games | H   | –                       |
| trækter            | traktor                  | tractor  | H         | Ha1953                  |
| trøkk              | trøkk                    | truck    | H         | Ha1953                  |
| tv                 | tv                       | tv       | H         | Hj1992                  |
Table 3 shows type B, in which English loanwords have taken over existing European Norwegian ones. This group carries much more weight than type A, since the words in this group are less predictable. It is interesting that the American words were borrowed into Norwegian, not just words for new concepts, but also words that replaced the Norwegian word for the same concept. Haugen also noted this phenomenon (1953: Ch.14).

In Table 3, too, we see that some of the words have been uttered by several informants, in some cases by all five. One example is nå ‘no’, which has replaced nei. It is used by all five informants, in other words in all the three states WI, MN
and Nd, and is also documented in Haugen (1953). A another typical example is rådn ‘road’.DEF, documented in all our informants and also in Haugen’s work.

The verb travle /ˈtravlə/ ‘walk’ is interesting. It was documented by Haugen (1953) and also found in the recordings of three of our informants, but we heard it by many more. The meaning of this word is somewhat unexpected, since it means ‘walk on foot’ and not ‘travel’ or even ‘go’ like its English counterpart. The European Norwegian verb gå ‘walk’, on the other hand, is not used with its original meaning in American Norwegian, but seems to have acquired the meaning of its American English counterpart go ‘move from one place to another in a method not specified’.

It is not clear exactly how the meaning of the American Norwegian travle ‘walk’ has developed. It is obviously not a direct loan from American English. Haugen (1953) speculates that while he does not think it is an original Norwegian word, it probably has moved into American Norwegian from British dialect-speaking immigrants. But closer surveys reveal that travle can actually be found in Norwegian dialects, although according to written sources, the meaning is then somewhat more specialised: the slip archive of the Norwegian dialect dictionary (Setelarkivet, Norsk Ordbok 2014) gives the meanings skynde seg ‘be in a hurry’, trave ‘walk fast’ or slite ‘struggle’. However, after presenting this mystery in a radio program, the present authors have been contacted by people from several parts of Norway (from Finmark in the far north to Rogaland in the south) who tell us that they actually use the verb travle to mean ‘walk about on foot’. This meaning, too, is not the same as that general meaning the American Norwegians have, so it may be that Haugen’s explanation is still that which is most likely. Whatever the history of the word in American Norwegian, it is interesting that most of our informants use this word with this meaning, which is so idiosyncratic with respect to the standard English and European Norwegian, so it is yet another example that shows that American Norwegian is one variety.

Finally we consider type C. These are words that strictly speaking exist in European Norwegian, but have acquired a new meaning in American Norwegian.

We should comment the word portrett (‘photograph’). This word is used twice in the recordings, but like retaira and travle was a word we heard all the time. Both in Norwegian and in English the meaning is a painting or photograph of a person, with special focus on the face. However, this word simply

2 The word nei still exists in American Norwegian, but now as a discourse marker, not as negation. Typically it will be used as a reaction to a dramatic story told by a discourse partner. It will be uttered with a vivid intonation and signals much interest in the story told: “Neeel!”.
means ‘photograph’ amongst our informants. The first occurrence we had of this word was when one of our informants (not one of the five here) wanted to show us a portrett of a cot in Norway. This idiosyncratic meaning is unlikely to have developed separately by chance in two different states: North Dakota and Minnesota. Instead, it shows that our informants speak the same variety of American Norwegian.

We have gone carefully through the speech of five informants in this study. They cover a vast area, from Westby in Wisconsin to Hatton in North Dakota. However, there are not many words that are used by all the persons. This is not necessarily because they are missing from their vocabulary, but because the conversations are relatively short and cover few topics. The vocabulary changes have typically been in the lexical and not functional domain (see Johannessen and Laake, 2015, for a discussion on which linguistic categories that typically have changed), and lexical words are much less frequent than function words. However, the fact that nearly all the words have been noted by Haugen (1953) and/or Hjelde (1992) support our claim that these words are stable and in use. These authors worked with different informants at different times and in different places (but all in the Midwest). In order to further substantiate our contention, in Section 5 we add some more data.

While it could have been conceivable that the words of type A have arisen spontaneously in each place by each speaker, and thus do not point towards a common dialect, this is not so with types B and C. As regards type B, it is difficult to imagine how these words would have been borrowed at the expense of exactly those Norwegian words everywhere. The Norwegians already had words for such concepts as ‘creek’, ‘work’, ‘field’, ‘road’, ‘play’, ‘walk’ and ‘no’ in
their own language. Although it is possible to understand how each of them individually could have been borrowed into one person's language, it is not likely that this would have happened for each person for each word. A much more likely scenario is that they became part of their common language, being passed on from one speaker to the other, and thus became part of their common language. It should also be added that while **no** ‘no’ is part of the common vocabulary (in the meaning of a negating interjection), the word **yes** is not. The word **no** has also not extended its domain to all the uses where the Norwegian **nei** ‘no’ was used. The verb **travle** ‘walk’ is particularly interesting, of course, since its meaning is totally idiosyncratic whether regarded from a standard English or Norwegian perspective. Type C is also convincing for the same reason: the members in this group are unpredictable. The word **portrett** got a new meaning that was not part of either the English or the Norwegian original vocabulary. We conclude that the shared lexicon, in which central words of the vocabulary have developed in idiosyncratic and unpredictable ways, shows that there is a common American Norwegian dialect in the American Midwest.

5 Other Informants

In addition to the five informants we have studied in this paper, the speech of other informants supports our thesis that there is a common dialect in the American Midwest. First, we present two speakers, also from the Midwest, who are interesting because the dialect background of their Norwegian ancestors is different from those of our five main informants, while they still have many of the same features. It seems that other informants also have some features based on eastern Norwegian, and might be bi-dialectal to some extent, even if their ancestors are not from that area. This is not the topic of this paper, but it adds to the understanding that there is a common language area in the Midwest. Second, we provide some data from the Corpus of American Norwegian Speech (developed at the Text Laboratory, UiO), which show the extension of the vocabulary amongst more speakers.

Starting with Bertram from Rushford, Minnesota, he has all four grandparents from Sogn, western Norway. He has quite a few features that are typical of that dialect, for example infinitives ending in –a (compared to a split system of –e and –a in the eastern parts of the country). His first person plural pronoun is the western form of **me**, rather than eastern form **vi**. However, he also has the occasional **vi** and even a flap l, a typical eastern feature. Importantly, he uses the same loanwords as our other informants: **portrett**, **travle**, **pleide** (for ‘played’), **farm, høgskola, mil, nå** (‘no’).
John from Webster, South Dakota, is another one who has adapted to the eastern common dialect even if his ancestors are from other parts of Norway. Three of his four grandparents are from northern Norway, and the fourth (his mother’s mother) is from Sogn in western Norway. He has typical northern dialect features, like the so-called high tone intonation pattern and apocope. These features were particularly clear when he spoke with his friend Carman with ancestors from the same place, but played down a bit when he spoke with the present authors (who are from eastern Norway). Importantly, John uses our special words: mil, høgskule, farm, travle.3

Even if both these informants have dialect features from other places than eastern Norway, both grammatically and phonologically, they have the same vocabulary as our other informants. Since our focus is to show that there is a common dialect in the Midwest, based on lexical facts, they support our claim.

Finally, we present some bulk data. The Corpus of American Norwegian Speech (by April, 2014) contains the recordings of 34 speakers from the Midwest. These are also relatively short, and as before, it cannot be expected that each speaker will use all (or even any) of the words in our survey. Without going into detail for each speaker, the results for some of the words are the following: farm/farme/farma ‘farm.n/v.inf/v.pret’ (22), live/livde ‘live.v.inf/v.pret’ (21), neste ‘next’ (14), nå ‘no’ (261), rådn ‘road.n.def’ (18), travle/travla/travler/travlende ‘walk.v/inf/pret/pres/pres.part’ (20), vegen/vegen ‘way.n.def’ (15).

With these additional informants, both those whose ancestors are from other parts of Norway and those in the corpus, also using the special vocabulary we have focussed on here, we find that our assertion that there is a common dialect, or lexicolect, in the American Midwest has been reinforced. If the American Midwest Norwegians all share this lexicolect, are there language users that do not use it? One big group is of course the Norwegians in Norway, who speak many different dialects, but not the American Midwest dialect. Another group might be American Norwegians outside of the Midwest. We do not have much data on this, but it seems that some Canadian Norwegians

3 We should mention Magne Oftedal (1947–48)’s notes on Haugen’s informants (available at the web page of the Text Laboratory, UiO) Norsk i Amerika. Here we find examples of American Norwegians that adapt to the common dialect in the Midwest. One of these is Joronn from Stoghton, Wisconsin. Her mother is from Telemark (eastern Norway) and her father from Sogn (western Norway). She speaks her mother’s dialect. Oftedal notes about Joronn’s father: “Her father speaks the Telemark dialect; the Sogn dialect only with other people from Sogn.” It suggests that it was the dialect from the eastern parts that was the main one. The syntactic features documented in Johannessen and Laake (2011, 2015) also suggest an eastern Norwegian predominance.
in Saskatchewan (which is just north of the border of the American Midwest) have the same lexicolect. This should be investigated more thoroughly.

6 Conclusion

In this paper we have presented work that mainly builds on fieldwork by the authors in the Midwest in March 2010. We found many similarities in the American Norwegian language across this vast area, and therefore chose to study closer the vocabulary of five selected informants from three states, and compare with the one documented by Haugen (1953) and Hjelde (1992).

The vocabulary obviously consisted of a lot of new words, which we divided into three types. What was immediately striking was that so many words were the same across the whole area. This is a strong indication that we can talk about one common variety across the whole area. Two facts are especially strong indicators. First, there are many words that have replaced existing Norwegian words. This is common in multilingual settings, but when it is exactly the same words that have been thus substituted in a big area amongst several people, this should not be attributed to chance, but to the fact that these have been in common use and been part of a shared variety. Second, some words have got an idiosyncratic, unpredictable meaning that is neither present in European Norwegian or in American English, apart from perhaps in certain dialects that are far from the mainstream or standard ones. They are extremely unlikely to have developed separately across this big area. Here, too, it must be concluded that the informants across the Midwest have shared vocabulary, i.e. speak a shared dialect.

While the five informants that we have studied in detail have been from a big area, and are thus suitable for arguing for the wide distribution of the words discussed, they are only five, and their recordings last a limited amount of time. There are many of the words, therefore, that have only been used by one or two of them. In order to substantiate our claim, we have looked at the lists provided by Haugen (1953) and Hjelde (1992), who have found most of the same words important enough to include in their published lists. We have further studied two more informants whose Norwegian ancestors were from other parts of Norway than our five main subjects, and we have looked up some of the words in the Corpus of American Norwegian Speech. These additional investigations support our contention that there is a common vocabulary, which for a large

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4 In 2013 Janne Bondi Johannessen and Arnstein Hjelde did fieldwork in the area of northern Saskatchewan. The data has not been analysed properly yet.
part is idiosyncratic and unpredictable. From this it is possible to say that there is a common language variety that is shared by all the American Norwegians across the American Midwest. We think this variety can be said to be a dialect, and more specifically a *lexicolect*.

**Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank the three anonymous reviewers for very constructive comments. We are also grateful to Joe Salmons, Helge Sandøy and Øystein Alexander Vangsnes, as well as participants at *Nionde nordiska dialektologkonferensen* in Uppsala, 18.–20. August 2010, and at the workshop *Languages abroad*, Gothenburg, 24.–25. October 2012 (organised by Maia Andreasson, Christiane Andresen and Benjamin Lyngfelt), for useful comments. We would also like to thank all our wonderful informants. Without them this work would not have been possible.

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