

Conservatively Radical: Cross-Modal Language Variation in Central Eastern Norwegian Dialect Speech

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Norwegian is characterised by variation in both spoken and written form, and between and within varieties (Røyneland, 2009). Bokmål, the focus of this study, is the most widespread of the two written standards and allows for variation in morphology and orthography (Fjeld, 2015; Papazian, 2002). In written form, these variants are labelled as conservative and radical. The variation in writing mirrors morphological and phonetic variation in the central Eastern Norwegian (CEN) dialects, but patterns of variation differ across modalities (Helset, 2024; Kola, 2015; Stjernholm, 2018). Inspired by Lundquist et al.'s (2020) study on Northern Norwegian, this study aimed to further our understanding of the relation between variation in written Bokmål and spoken dialect by analysing how variation is processed and translated into speech by CEN dialect speakers.

The results of this study suggest that written texts are processed and reproduced differently based on the task that the participants carried out – reading or retrieving. When reading Bokmål, the phonology most closely corresponding to the orthography was activated and reproduced almost exclusively. This suggests that even when variation exists in the dialectal repertoire, the written variant maps onto the corresponding form resulting in conservative variants when reading out loud. In the retrieval task, radical forms were more frequent, which is thought to be the result of sociolinguistic meaning being encoded in short-term memory rather than form. As a result, though conservative forms remained dominant, the production of radical variants was facilitated if they matched the individual's idiolect. This hypothesis was further supported by the patterns found based on the formality of the stimulus and individual variables.

References

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