

Abstract

Eli Bjørhusdal: *Between linguistic neutrality and linguistic security:*

***Language regimes in Norway 1885–2005*, thesis (PhD), University of Oslo 2014**

[Original title: *Mellom nøytralitet og språksikring: Norsk offentlig språkpolitikk 1885–2005*]

The thesis examines Norwegian authorities' status planning strategies for the (written) languages Nynorsk and Bokmål. Issues concerning the politics of Nynorsk, the lesser used of the two, will be particularly addressed. The overarching aim is to diachronically explore the practices of and rationales behind Norwegian language regimes, and to identify possible consequences for today's official language policies and rights. The empirical material consists of approximately 140 government documents selected from the areas of education and public services between 1885 and 2005. The thesis investigates if and how frequent combinations of certain policies/regulations and justifications in different documents and periods of time constitute certain language regimes.

The main overall findings are:

- Users of the lesser used language Nynorsk received official language rights (positive rights) between 1892 and 1930. However, the state did not justify the *official-language rights regime* by multilingualism or the need for language maintaining and protection. This may seem a paradox.
- An explanation is that the official Nynorsk/Bokmål language regime was neutral until 1980–1990. Key characteristics of the Norwegian *linguistic neutrality* were equal treatment of the two languages/language groups, combined with procedural justifications, that is, arguments proceeding on fairness. The assumption was that Nynorsk and Bokmål should have equal possibilities and rights on the linguistic market, so that language users themselves could decide between them. As a result, few group-differentiated rights and policies for Nynorsk users were established. Norwegian language rights were universal and the rationale behind them procedural (liberal).
- In the 1980s/1990s, a new *linguistic security regime* replaced the neutral politics, at least in the area of public services. The rights and policies for Nynorsk are now often justified by the assumption that particular languages have intrinsic value for its users,

not only by formal status. However, in spite of the fact that Nynorsk is in decline, no new positive language rights have been established in the Norwegian education domain between 1980 and 2005, and only a few in the area of public services.

Likewise, new group-differentiated rights for Nynorsk users are not established.

- An important finding is that today's authorities' status planning strategies for Nynorsk and Bokmål only to a certain degree differ from or challenge the strategies established and justified during the linguistic neutrality regime. Even though policies and regulations for Nynorsk are *legitimated* by the need for language security, political and legal *practices* do not transcend the ideals of equal treatment and equal conditions. The neutrality ideals keep the authorities from acting against language assimilation and language shift, although these processes are generally regarded as main challenges for minority languages.

Status planning, language rights and policies for Nynorsk and Bokmål have received little attention from researchers and theorists, and Norwegian language regimes have not been systematically investigated nor conceptually nailed. The examination opens the field to academic critique and political criticism. The findings also illuminate the theoretical models of language regimes.

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