

# THE CHANGE FROM APICAL TO DORSAL R IN NORWEGIAN

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## ABSTRACT

There has been a rapid spread of dorsal pronunciation of r in South-West Norway during this century, affecting more than 1/10 of the population of the country. The dynamics of the spread are described and reasons for it discussed.

In Norwegian the most common pronunciation of r is an alveolar tap, [ɾ]. In the Oslo area it is often palatalized, [ɹ]. A century ago r was pronounced as an apical trill, [r], in most parts of Norway. This pronunciation is now common only in a small area between the towns of Florø and Alesund on the west coast. The apical trill in this area is a velarized one, [r̥], and the alveolar tap in the surrounding areas is also velarized, [ɾ̥]. In the three northernmost counties, Nordland, Troms and Finnmark an alveolar fricative or approximant is often used, [ɹ]. In South-West Norway where the dorsal pronunciation is common, a variety of pronunciations of r may be heard; from a palatal, velar or uvular fricative or approximant, [j, ɹ, ɣ, ʁ], to a uvular trill, [R].

Information from the Norwegian Dialect Survey at the University of Oslo forms the basis of Map 1. It shows the towns of South-West Norway where a dorsal r pronunciation is common and areas where informants born about the turn of the century use the dorsal pronunciation.

Map 2 is based on several different sources of information. In the first instance it was based on information, some of it extremely detailed, that the Directors of Education in 81 towns and municipalities in South-West Norway supplied in 1978. [1] Secondly, it is based on information from colleagues, students, and local informants who have offered information about their own area after radio programs about the spread of dorsal r.

When the two maps are compared it becomes clear there has been a spread of dorsal r to big areas in the South-West, but no towns have been affected. Even if the striation of map 2 also covers fjords and thinly populated mountain areas, so that the spread may look greater than it actually has been, the area taken over by dorsal r has a population in excess of 400000, which is more than 1/10 of the population of Norway. This spread is the biggest change in the pronunciation in Norwegian

during the last decades.

The dorsal r continues spreading quickly in some areas, notably round about the towns of Bergen and Florø, more slowly in other areas, for instance inland from the towns of Kristiansand and Arendal, and seems to have come to a halt near the town of Risør, an 'apical' town of the South-East coast.

The spread of dorsal r can not be accounted for purely by the motorically simpler movement that is needed to produce it. With the latitude in dorsal pronunciation it is not surprising that speech therapist reports from the schools in dorsal areas hardly ever show r-problems, while in the apical areas r-problems are very common indeed.

The spreading of dorsal r in Norwegian is facilitated by the fact that the dorsal and apical pronunciations are equally socially acceptable and are both used on Norwegian radio and TV, but also by the fact that most people do not experience the change in pronunciation as a change of dialect. On the whole Norwegians are dialect proud; pupils are by law encouraged to speak dialect and dialect is used by pop-artists as well as politicians.

But the main reason for the spread of dorsal r would seem to be the prestige connected with dorsal towns and bigger settlements in the area and the linguistic influence that these centres exert on the rural districts. School centralization which leads to children often travelling long distances by bus to go to bigger schools more often than not situated in a town or bigger settlement, facilitates the spreading.

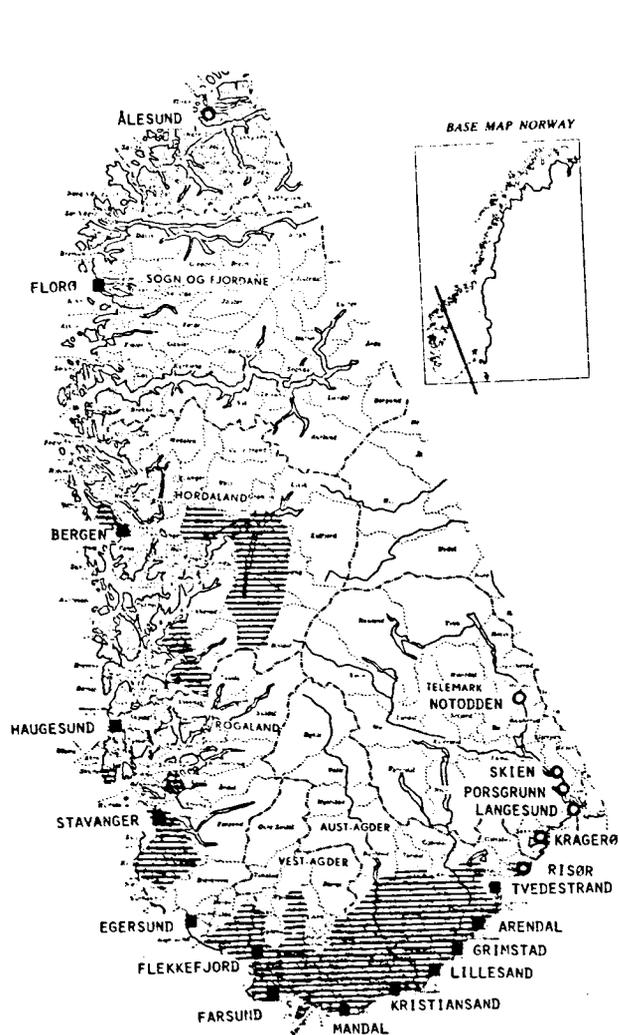
Even if the spread is fast in several areas at the moment there is reason to believe that it will not continue at its present rate. It seems likely that it will only continue as far as the linguistic influence of dorsal towns and settlements reaches. There are no signs of the dorsal r spreading to any of the apical towns. The dorsal r pronunciation in the capital of Oslo seems to be restricted to some upper class speakers only.

This change to dorsal pronunciation is easy to register; far easier than for instance minute changes in vowel pronunciation. Fieldwork and

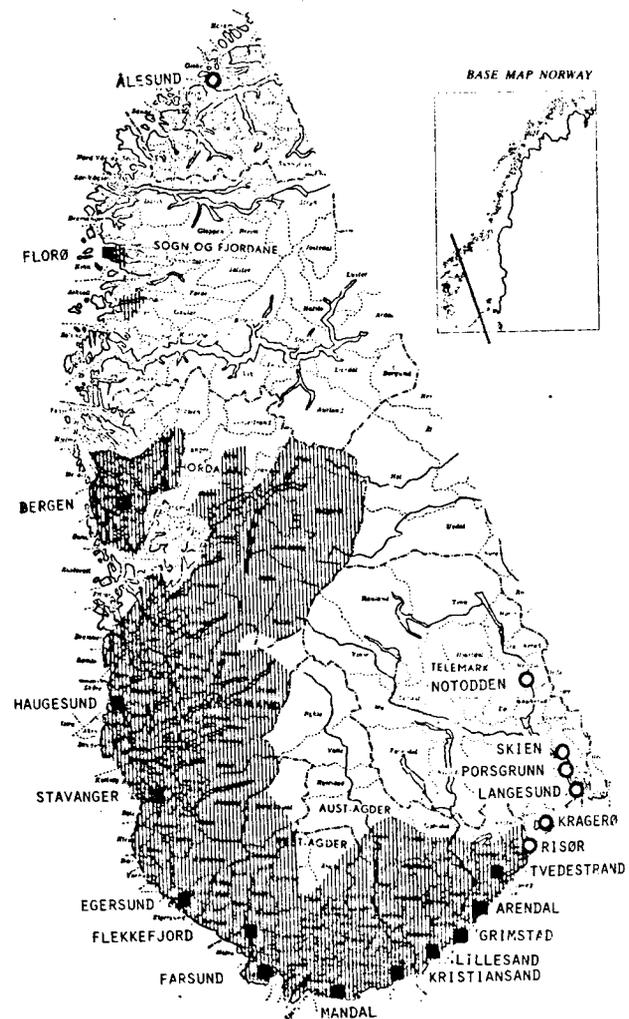
data collection concerning the spread of dorsal r will be continued.

Reference

- [1] A.K. Foldvik, The pronunciation of r in Norwegian with special reference to the spread of dorsal r. Pp. 105-110. In (ed.) T. Pettersson: Papers from the 5th Scandinavian Conference of Linguistics. Acta Univ. Lundensis 30. Lund, 1979.



Map 1. Horizontal striation covers areas where informants born about 1900 use a dorsal r.  
 ■ Towns with dorsal pronunciation of r. From Foldvik (1979)  
 ○ Towns with apical pronunciation of r.  
 - - - County boundary.  
 - - - - Municipal boundary.



Map 2. Vertical striation covers areas where informants born about 1960 use a dorsal r.  
 ■ Towns with dorsal pronunciation of r.  
 ○ Towns with apical pronunciation of r.  
 - - - County boundary.  
 - - - - Municipal boundary.