

“ONE, TWO, MANY = ONE TOO MANY?”

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF MOTHER TONGUE

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we analyze the use of the term ‘morsmål’ (‘mother tongue’) in official Norwegian documents and in media texts to identify if and how its conceptualization has changed in the era of increasing globalization. Our point of view is explorative. When examining our data, we highlight the importance of reflecting openly about the instability of powerful concepts. We highlight two partly conflicting conceptualizations that we name the ‘traditional use’ and the ‘novel use’, respectively. Building on critical discourse analysis and conceptual metaphor theory we explore how the conceptualizations reveal certain aspects of ideologies and the potential management of multilingualism in society. A broader understanding of how conceptualizations of mother tongue(s) are played out in the Norwegian context may contribute to the dialogue about multilingualism as it is understood and recognized across diverse contexts.

[1] INTRODUCTION

The title of this paper, *One, Two, Many = One too many? Conceptualizations of mother tongue*, reflects the overarching research questions we wish to pursue in the following sections: What are the available conceptualizations of ‘mother tongue’ (henceforth also MT), and what possible implications follow from the co-existence of different conceptualizations? Our point of view is explorative and we highlight the importance of reflecting openly about the instability of powerful concepts. Hence, we draw on methodologies inspired by critical discourse analysis (e.g. Fairclough 1995, 2013) and conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson 1985, 1998) in an analysis of how MT is reflected in present-day Norwegian official documents and media texts. We explore whether the conceptualizations of MT in the Norwegian context involve a change, or inversion, from referring to Norwegian, henceforth called ‘the traditional use’, to referring to non-Norwegian, henceforth called ‘the novel use’. The two different conceptualizations seem to co-exist, and we suggest that they can be

understood in part as a result of different encounters.

In the next section (2), we discuss how the term MT is used in different Norwegian contexts, before we add a historical perspective in section 3, where both monocultural (3.1) and multicultural (3.2) encounters are being investigated. Section 4 presents an analysis of how MT is used in official documents in Norway (4.1), and in media (4.2). Section 5 presents additional, southern perspectives, before reaching a short section of concluding remarks (section 6).

[2] BACKGROUND

In the Corpus of American Norwegian Speech (CANS) (see Johannessen 2015), a second-generation Norwegian immigrant to the Washington-area shares some of his experiences as a teacher of heritage Norwegian to his fellow migrants; experiences which are both ‘interesting and tragic at the same time’, as he puts it. He describes a situation where elderly people lost their memory and language and started speaking their mother tongue (i.e. Norwegian) only, and how the medical doctors pointed to the necessity of other family members learning Norwegian to be able to fulfill the needs of their elderly family members. Further, he states that the most useful thing he did during his career ‘was to help those with sick family members who had lost the language they had learned, and turned back to the mother tongue’ (CANS, seattle_WA_03gm, our translations from Norwegian). This is the sole instance of ‘morsmål’ (‘mother tongue’) being mentioned explicitly in the CANS corpus, but this small story from the American-Norwegian heritage language context is a strong reminder of the importance of the concept of MT. In some instances, it is literally a question of well-being, not to say life or death, since MT has the ability to recreate a communicative link between generations, as well as to tap into a collective memory related to a shared (heritage) background. This heritage language context sheds light on how ‘the mother tongue’ (the CANS informant uses the definite singular form in Norwegian) is something you may *have*, something you may *lose*, something you may *learn*, and an *asset* that heritage language researchers should contribute to *document*. Heritage language researchers across different contexts have also pointed to the strong relationship between MT and identity. People sometimes identify with a MT they don’t speak (e.g. Golden & Steien, in press).

The importance of turning (researchers’) attention to the concept of MT seems clear, but there are even more implications at play, which become clearer if we turn our attention from the Global North to the Global South. In some African contexts, MT is both something that is impossible to present in its singular definite form, and at the same time a concept used actively as a political

means in the socio-political stratification of societies (see section 5).

In the Norwegian context, the socio-political dimensions are especially prominent in relation to education; as reflected in the *Education Act (Opplæringslova)* § 2-8, students in primary and lower secondary school with a mother tongue other than Norwegian and Sámi have the right to adapted language education, and when necessary, this may also include MT-education. One reading of MT may, in other words, trigger specific legal rights. The legislation differentiates between different MTs, however, and the question of how MT is conceptualized or defined is of utmost importance on both an individual and a societal level.

The interplay between an individual and a societal level is present in the most widespread lexicographic entries concerning ‘morsmål’ in Norway. The official dictionaries for regulating the two Norwegian written norms, *Bokmålsordboka* and *Nynorskordboka*, together present three slightly different definitions of the term.¹ Both dictionaries state that a MT is ‘the first language one learns’. Hence, the order of acquisition is central for a definition, MT being the first of potentially several languages known by the individual. *Bokmålsordboka* adds ‘and the language one knows best’, i.e. points to the level of competence, albeit in parenthesis, whereas *Nynorskordboka* includes an additional definition of MT as being the national language of a country (‘riksspråk’). In certain settings, this *national language* definition is presupposed, for example, when the school subject Norwegian is termed ‘morsmålsfaget’ (‘the mother tongue subject’) by scholars, teachers, educational authorities, etc. We see the *national language equals MT* interpretation further exemplified in cases such as:

Nansen måtte lage en norsk versjon [av doktoravhandlingen] siden alle avhandlinger innlevert til bedømmelse i Norge måtte være på morsmålet. [‘Nansen had to make a Norwegian version [of his PhD] since all theses turned in for assessment in Norway had to be in the mother tongue.’]

(Carl Emil Vogt: *Fridtjof Nansen* in LBK 2011).

As we see from the lexical specifications above, identity is not reflected explicitly in the dictionary entries. But identity aspects are sometimes included in definitions of MT in official documents, such that the language you identify with is considered the MT, alongside more functional criteria, especially highlighting the extent to which the person uses the language (see section 4 below).

[1] The Norwegian lexical information in the two dictionaries: *Bokmålsordboka*: ‘mors|mål n1 (av I mål) det første språket en lærer (og som en behersker best)’ *Nynorskordboka*: ‘mors|mål n1 (etter mellomalderlatin lingua materna; av I mor) 1 det første språket eit menneske lærer 2 riksspråk, nasjonalspråk i eit land’.

Concepts are never stable, and this applies to MT as well. Conflicting conceptualizations are a potential source for misconception and there is a strong need for (re)negotiations of meaning – and in some cases, the separation and definition of power. The referent language of ‘the mother tongue’ in the CANS example above, is Norwegian. In the *Education Act*, however, the referent is the opposite, that is (almost) anything but Norwegian. Both the number of MTs and the number of potential conceptualizations of the term are debatable depending on the specific socio-historical context. An important reminder of this evident but sometimes neglected fact arises through encounters between people, languages and different ideas. We will highlight several such encounters in this paper. For a start, the *national language* definition from *Nynorskordboka* mentioned above is a product of encounters; in the Norwegian context it is an encounter between Norwegian and Danish and Swedish. This definition is in many ways a product of the establishment of a nation state. The use of the Norwegian corresponding terms to MT and ‘Norwegian’ in the Norwegian 1814 Constitution when denoting something that in many respects was the Danish language, shows how MT is also deeply intertwined with national identity (Mæhlum & Hårstad 2018, p. 290).

[3] MOTHER TONGUE IN NORWAY OVER TIME

[3.1] *Monocultural encounters*

In a report from a seminar in MT and MT education held in 1993, professor of Germanic language John Ole Askedal discusses the MT concept from a linguistic point of view, with the traditional stance in Norway up until the last few decades (Askedal 1994). For Norway and the Norwegian school, the MT for the students was Norwegian. This view connects with the definition of MT as being the official language of the nation, which has also traditionally been reflected in the official subject curricula for the school subject Norwegian (see e.g. Hårstad 2019). In the official subject curriculum from 1974, for example, the overarching goal was to teach the students to ‘love their mother tongue’ (‘bli glad i morsmålet sitt’) (Kirke- og undervisningsdepartementet 1974, p. 96, our translation). The birth of the subject Norwegian was strongly connected to the process of nation building, and the National curricula have, in different ways, reflected a monocultural norm during the decades (Bergan 2014, Engen 2006). The Norwegian curricula from the 1980s and 1990s sought to preserve and partly restore what had traditionally been considered ‘Norwegian’ and which was seen as threatened by globalization (Andersson-Bakken & Bakken 2017, p. 2).

Already in 1878, the Norwegian Parliament stated that the training was to be based ‘on the students’ own dialects’ (‘paa Børnenes eget Talemaal’), and

according to Askedal (1994), variation is part of the conceptualization of MT in Norway:

When most Norwegians, in spite of variations both in oral speech and in written language, mean that they take part in a common, Norwegian mother tongue, it is a correct recognition of basic common ground for a certain variety and register variation.

(Askedal 1994, p. 15, our translation)

Engen (2006) questions the notion of a ‘common ground’. He discusses the mono-cultural aspect of what has come to be known as the *Unitary School* (‘Enhets-skolen’), a hallmark of the Norwegian school system. As part of the nation-building project since 1850, every student was supposed to be equal. In school, it was assumed that every student had the same background, knew the same codes, and acknowledged these aspects of culture as being part of the Norwegian culture. If they did not, they were to be assimilated into the school’s cultural and linguistic basis. Certain cultures, especially the culture of the elite or the *bourgeois* (‘borgerskapet’), were more highly valued in school discourse, according to Engen (2006). Many students experienced that the language of the authorities and in the books was far from their own linguistic reality outside of the classroom.

Hårstad (2019, p. 27) also applies a critical view on how variation is (or is not) part of the conceptualization of MT in the textbooks in what Hårstad calls ‘mother tongue education’ (i.e. Norwegian as a school subject). He holds that in this setting, great emphasis has been placed on linguistic diachronic knowledge, the two official written varieties and knowledge of spoken variation. This approach has undoubtedly contributed to the establishment and spread of a cultural model in which geolectal diversity is an essential part of the concept Norwegian language, but sociolectal variation is correspondingly not highlighted. Furthermore, the monolectal individual is presupposed in the textbooks. According to Hårstad, ‘a central idea is that every person has one dialect, which has a name’ (ibid., p. 34, our translation). This critique resembles the one presented by Engen (2006). Students with a Norwegian dialect as their oral variety and either *Bokmål* or *Nynorsk* as the written variety, could claim to have Norwegian as their MT. But other tiers of the linguistic complexity in Norway, i.e. tiers defined by social variables, have received far less attention and appreciation in the ‘mother tongue education’, according to Engen, and potential multi-lingualism and multi-lectalism in the individual is downplayed.

Even though the National curricula reforms in the 2000s have widened the scope, from including a generally strictly mono-cultural norm to including

multi-cultural encounters, such perspectives are seldom reflected in Norwegian subject textbooks (Andersson-Bakken & Bakken 2017), although this may be slowly changing. L. A. Kulbrandstad (2001) found in his analysis of textbooks in the Norwegian subject for upper secondary school no mentioning of bilingualism or multilingualism. 15 years later, Opsahl & Røynealand (2016) found that multi-ethnolect is discussed and used as part of the Norwegian dialect variation in many of the textbooks that they analyzed from upper secondary school. L. I. Kulbrandstad (2019) finds in 5th–7th grade textbooks that the term MT is defined in several places, for example, as ‘the first language you learn as a child’ (ibid., p. 18), implying that one may learn more than one. She also finds that sociolinguistic research on modern urban youth language has gained some attention, with a variation of terms used (‘multiethnolect’, ‘kebab Norwegian’, and the ‘new Norwegian’). Furthermore, elements of Sámi are found in the textbooks, which illustrates that non-Germanic languages can also be included at this level. However, L. I. Kulbrandstad finds no examples covering the most common immigrant languages, and technical terms that are central to describing multilingualism are still virtually absent from the textbooks.

[3.2] *Multicultural encounters*

The pressure to be assimilated into the school’s cultural and linguistic basis has been precarious for Norwegian students who did not claim to have a variety of Norwegian as their mother tongue. As part of the nation-building project in Norway, the Sámi and Kven populations suffered severe oppression during at least a 100-year period, especially with regard to their Sámi and Kven MT(s). In 1851, the Norwegian Parliament established *Finnfondet* (*the Finn-fund*), which were grants for Norwegianization efforts towards the Sámi and Kven people. Furthermore, in 1898 came the so-called Wexelsen-poster stating that the use of Kven and Sámi as an auxiliary language in teaching should be severely restricted. This meant that, at least officially, Norwegian was the only language of education, including in Sámi areas. The instruction explicitly added that teachers should ensure that Sámi and Kven students did not use their MTs during recess. This ‘pedagogy’ lasted well into the post WWII-years (Mæhlum & Hårstad 2018).

Askedal’s aforementioned discussion (Askedal 1994) does not seem to include languages other than the national language Norwegian in the concept of MT. Neither Sámi, Kven, nor any other language is included here. However, this monocentric view had been changing, at least in other research areas, like Norwegian as a second language: Hvenekilde & Ryen (1984) point to the emerging linguistic diversity in Norway, with languages like Urdu, Turkish,

Vietnamese and Thai adding to Norwegian, Sámi and Finnish.

In the same publication where Askedal discusses MT (that is, in Guttu, ed., 1994), the editor Guttu refers to a discussion of Askedal's perspectives, where the discussant Einar Lundebý points to this change in meaning and use of the term 'mother tongue', with the monocentric interpretation as a backdrop: 'If one is to talk about mother tongue teachers today, it usually pertains to teachers of all languages but Norwegian, the teachers who teach the immigrant students' mother tongues.' (p. 21, our translation). He concludes that MT gets a new meaning for the younger generation, a meaning that is 'very strange and different' to those who are older (ibid.). The 'very strange and different' meaning is the one reflected in the educational legal prose of today. As we saw in the Education Act § 2-8, students in primary and lower secondary school with an MT other than Norwegian and Sámi, have the right to adapted language education, when necessary with MT education.

The multiplicity of referent languages for the MT concept has continued to increase since 1984. Today, 228 languages are registered among the students in Oslo schools (The Language Council 2016), and still the ambiguous meaning of 'mother tongue education' prevails. MT didactics is a field generating research volumes (e.g. Ongstad 2012), Nordic networks and conferences,² with the content of these initiatives related to the Norwegian and the Scandinavian languages in the Nordic school subjects, whereas the adapted MT education conceptualization mentioned in § 2-8 potentially pertains to all other languages but Norwegian. The two conceptualizations of the term 'mother tongue' exist side by side, in different contexts.

[4] MOTHER TONGUE TODAY

The complexity of the concept of MT in the Norwegian context illustrated in the previous sections has prepared the groundwork for an analysis of present-day conceptualizations of MT in official documents and media texts. Our selected official documents used in the search for the use of the term 'morsmål' are the currently used (as of fall 2020) curricula of all subjects in Norwegian schools (grades 1–13). The term is found in 9 of the LK20 curricula, and also in some of the LK06-versions which are being phased out. We further investigate the relevant law text (the *Education Act*), *Official Norwegian Reports (NOUs)* from 1995 onwards,³ and white papers (*Meld. St.*) related to education and immigration. The media texts examined are from the digital newspaper database *Atekst (Retriever)*. An overview of the texts is found in the back of the paper (other sources). The

[2] See e.g. <https://nordisknettverkformorsmalsdidaktiskforskning.wordpress.com/home/>.

[3] We have searched the NOUs at <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokument/nou-ar/id1767/?sesjon=&ownerid=586&term=>.

translations from Norwegian into English are ours throughout.

[4.1] *Mother tongue in official documents*

Sickinghe (2013) explores the categorization of, among others the term ‘mother tongue’ in Norwegian language education policy documents like law texts and white papers. She finds that in all the documents she studies, ‘first language’, ‘mother tongue’ and ‘native language’ are used in the singular form. She holds that the documents ‘reflects the assumption that speakers have one mother tongue, that mother tongue equals language ownership, and implicitly, that multilinguals are persons with another mother tongue than Norwegian.’ (Sickinghe 2013, p. 106). She holds, also along with Svendsen (2006), that although the official educational policy seems to value multilingualism and knowing other languages than Norwegian, ‘the traditional monolingual bias persists in policy documents.’ (Sickinghe 2013, p. 88).

In our search for the conceptualizations of the term ‘morsmål’ through the official documents, also including curriculum texts, we get similar results. Our text search reveals an uneven distribution of the term. In some documents, like the NOUs *Education in a multicultural Norway*,⁴ and *Multiplicity and Mastery*,⁵ MT is very frequent, with 259 and 135 hits, respectively. In the other NOUs, the use of the term is lower (1–20 hits), or non-existent, like in *The school of the future*, *Renewal of subjects and competencies*,⁶ and *Integration and trust: Long-term consequences of high immigration*.⁷ Often, the linguistic context for the term MT in these documents is in the singular form and with the wording ‘x-person with another MT than y-language’. This latter formulation is also found in some of the curricula from LK06 that are currently being phased out.⁸ In these contexts, the people in question (x) are children, students, immigrants, participants, and the languages (y) are primarily Norwegian but also sometimes Sámi (and Swedish or Danish). Hence, here the conceptualization of MT aligns with the ‘traditional use’ (see above) where Norwegian is the default MT and other MTs are set apart, compared or categorized, given certain rights, etc.

In the curriculum texts, the term ‘morsmål’ is (naturally) used the most in the

[4] ‘Opplæring i et flerkulturelt Norge’ (NOU 1995:12).

[5] ‘Mangfold og mestring’ (NOU 2010:7).

[6] ‘Fremtidens skole. Fornyelse av fag og kompetanser’ (NOU 2015:8).

[7] ‘Integrasjon og tillit: Langsiktige konsekvenser av høy innvandring’ (NOU 2017:2).

[8] Such as in *Mother tongue for language minorities* from the curriculum set LK06, with a reference to the *Education Act*-formulation ‘elever (...) med et annet morsmål enn norsk og samisk’ (p. 2) (‘students (...) with another mother tongue than Norwegian or Sami’). *The Education act* also pertains to the LK20 versions phased in from the fall of 2020 (LK20), but is not referred to explicitly in the curriculum text itself.

curriculum *Mother tongue for language minorities*,⁹ representing 63 hits whereas the other 9 curricula each has only 1–4 hits. In the curriculum texts, all the hits are in the singular form, except in the curriculum for *English for the hearing impaired*,¹⁰ where there are two examples with MT in the plural,¹¹ in both of the instances asking the students to find similarities between English and one's own MTs.

In *Basic Norwegian for Linguistic Minorities – A Guide to the Curriculum* from 2015,¹² a text is titled: 'The importance of the mother tongue'.¹³ However, in this text – half a page long – it is never mentioned that some learners may have more than one MT. An extra check in the curriculum itself, *Basic Norwegian for linguistic minorities* (LK20), reveals that the term MT is not used at all, but rather contains the following formulation: '[The students] must practice a comparative perspective on Norwegian and languages they already know',¹⁴ which implies leaving out the term MT, but opening up for the possibility that the students may know more than one language already.

The MT term also appears in a bare singular indefinite form, 'morsmål', with the effect that it refers to one, unspecified language, and, as seen from the context, excluding Norwegian. Such expressions – where further specification of the language is lacking – are used frequently, even in the title, in the curriculum *Mother tongue for language minorities*. Here, MT is also used in the definite form, 'morsmålet' ('the mother tongue'), in formulations like 'likheter og ulikheter mellom morsmålet og målspråket' ('similarities and differences between the mother tongue and the target language') and 'føre til bedre innsikt også i morsmålet' ('lead to better insight also in the mother tongue'), referring to MTs in general, but always in the singular.

In the other official documents, the bare, singular indefinite use is also found, to be read in the same way as in the curriculum seen above. Examples are 'to see Norwegian and mother tongue in relation to each other',¹⁵ and 'It concerns [...] necessary training in and by the use of mother tongue'.¹⁶ In the very beginning of the NOU *Education in a multicultural Norway*, in a section called *Clarification of*

[9] 'Læreplan i morsmål for språklige minoriteter' (looking at both the old LK06 and the new LK20 versions, but counting only the hits in the LK20-version).

[10] 'Læreplan i engelsk for hørselshemmede'.

[11] '4. trinn: finne likheter mellom ord og uttrykksmåter i engelsk og egne morsmål' and '7. trinn: identifisere noen språklige likheter og ulikheter mellom engelsk og egne morsmål'.

[12] 'Grunnleggende norsk for språklige minoriteter - veiledning til læreplan'.

[13] 'Morsmålets betydning' (p. 84).

[14] 'De skal oppøve et sammenlignende perspektiv på norsk og språk de kan fra før' (p. 3), specified further for Level 1: 'Eleven kan sammenligne ord og uttrykk på norsk med andre språk eleven kjenner.' (p. 5).

[15] 'å se norsk og morsmål i sammenheng' (in NOU 2010:7, p. 38).

[16] 'Det dreier seg om [...] nødvendig opplæring i og på morsmål' (in NOU 2010:7, p. 20).

Concepts,¹⁷ and later repeated in a section called *Mother tongue*,¹⁸ it is explicitly stated that a child may have two MTs.¹⁹ Exactly the same formulation is found in the NOU *Multiplicity and Mastery* in a section called *Mother tongue, multilingualism and other concepts*²⁰ as well as in White paper 6 (2012–2013): *A unified integration policy. Diversity and Similarity*.²¹ In *Education in a multicultural Norway* the two MTs that a child may have are restricted to the cases where the parents have two different MTs, or where an adopted child has Norwegian and another language as MTs. The document claims more generally that, ‘Therefore one should state that it is possible to have several MTs’.²² In *Multiplicity and Mastery*, MT is discussed on the basis of relevant research literature (e.g. Engen & Kulbrandstad 2008, Skutnabb-Kangas 1984), and the definition is elaborated by saying that ‘an individual may also obtain new mother tongues if the person moves into new language milieus and there obtains a language that (s)he will consider her or his mother tongues.’ In addition to the two examples from *The curriculum for English for the hearing impaired*, these are the *only* examples, out of the several hundreds hits of the term in the official documents, where the documents mention individuals with more than one MT.

[4.2] *The use of the term mother tongue in the media*

The digital newspaper database *Atekst (Retriever)* contains a large number of Norwegian newspapers and journals split into two categories called ‘paper’ and ‘web’.²³ For our media text study, we have limited the search to one year, from 21 February 2019 to 21 February 2020, neatly limited in both ends by 21 February, the official ‘Mother tongue day’. In this period, ‘morsmål’ occurs 1429 times, with 626 hits in 29 different paper journals and 803 hits in 30 different web-journals. The frequency of occurrence in all the different journals in this period varies

[17] ‘Begrepsavklaringer’ (p. 3).

[18] ‘4.2.2.1 Morsmål’ (p. 47).

[19] ‘Morsmålet til et minoritetsbarn er språket som snakkes i barnets hjem, enten av begge foreldrene eller av den ene av foreldrene i kommunikasjon med barnet’.

‘Et tospråklig minoritetsbarns morsmål er et språk som snakkes i barnets hjem, enten av begge foreldrene eller av den ene av foreldrene, i kommunikasjon med barnet. Barnet kan derfor ha to morsmål’.

[20] ‘2.4.2 Morsmål, flerspråklig og andre begreper’ (p. 25).

‘Det er viktig også å ha i mente at et individ kan ha flere morsmål om vedkommende for eksempel har foreldre som snakker ulike språk i sin omgang med barnet. Et individ kan også erverve seg nye morsmål om vedkommende for eksempel flytter inn i nye språkmiljø og der erverver seg et språk han/hun kommer til å betrakte som sitt morsmål’.

[21] Meld. St. 6 (2012–2013) En helhetlig integreringspolitikk Mangfold og fellesskap.

[22] ‘Derfor bør en fastslå at det er mulig å ha flere morsmål’ (p. 11).

[23] <https://web.retriever-info.com/services/archive.html>.

between five and 29,²⁴ and there seems to be a high frequency in the web-journals from northern Norway. A closer look reveals that it is mainly Sámi that is the MT in question. This corresponds well with our overall impression that different conceptualizations of MT are connected to encounters; in this case an encounter between the Norwegian majority and the national minorities.

When MT is used it mainly indexes *one* MT, but there are a few exceptions. The newspaper *Drammens Tidende* on one occasion refers to both Norwegian and Turkish as being the school children's MTs when the journal praises the Islamic cultural center for supporting one of the MTs of the Norwegian-Turkish community,²⁵ and *Dagbladet* mentions that 'the member of the Parliament from Akershus [had] to relearn his two MTs after a stroke'.²⁶

The linguistic contexts for MT in the media texts are mainly the same as commented on for the official documents. Some are used in the traditional way, like 'have another mother tongue', 'as mother tongue', 'their mother tongue', and the 'novel' way is often used in compounds pointing to all languages but Norwegian, like 'morsmålsundervisning' ('mother tongue teaching')²⁷ and 'morsmålsaksamen' ('exam in mother tongue').²⁸ This also includes instances where MT is used as if it were a named language, like 'it is mother tongues from almost the whole world',²⁹ and 'Pakistan is a country with 61 mother tongues'.³⁰ However, in the media, as opposed to the official documents, there are more expressive or 'romantic' uses of the term, as well as some texts indexing a more diversified and non-traditional use of MT through the use of adjectives. Examples are 'singing on both old and young, heavy mother tongue',³¹ 'to burn for her little mother tongue',³² 'our rich mother tongue',³³ 'a viable mother tongue',³⁴ as well as the more traditional adjective 'dear': 'I am so proud to advance my dear mother tongue'.³⁵ Interestingly, the language in these examples

- [24] The six paper journals with the most hits are *Agderposten* (29), *Klassekampen* (29) *Aftenposten* (28), *Dagsavisen* (22), *Vårt Land* (22) and *Dagen* (17) and the six web-sites with the most hits are *Aftenposten Log-in* (23), *Ruijan Kaiku* (23), *NRK* (19), *Utdanning* (19) and *NRK Sámi Radio* (17) and *Nordnorsk debatt* (17).
- [25] 'Etter at drammenskolene for noen år tilbake avskaffet morsmålsundervisninga og gjorde den til en privat sak, ivaretar dessuten Islamsk kultursenter en viktig kulturell funksjon for mange norskstyrkere ved å ta vare på det ene av deres to morsmål' (*Drammens Tidende* Nov 11, 2019).
- [26] '[...] stortingsrepresentanten fra Akershus [har] lært seg begge sine to morsmål - norsk og engelsk - fra begynnelsen av igjen' (*Dagbladet* Jan 18, 2020).
- [27] from *Drammens Tidende* Nov 25 and Nov 27, 2019.
- [28] from *Resett* Dec 11, 2019.
- [29] 'det er morsmål fra nærmest hele verden' (*Innherred Pluss* Nov 26, 2019).
- [30] 'Pakistan er et land med 61 morsmål' (*Bistandsaktuelt* 11 Feb 2020).
- [31] '...både gammelt og ungt, tungt morsmål' (*Klassekampen* Dec 14, 2019).
- [32] 'Brenner for sitt lille morsmål' (*Ballade* Nov 3, 2019).
- [33] 'vårt rike morsmål' (*Harstad Tidende* 16 Feb 2020).
- [34] 'et livskraftig morsmål' (*Ruijan Kaiku* 23 Jan 2020).
- [35] 'Jeg er så stolt over kunne fremme mitt kjære morsmål' (In several journals among others *Avisa Nordland*

is Sámi; there are no examples of Norwegian being described this way. Another emotional way of describing the MT is as ‘the language of the heart’, and this also relates to Sámi.³⁶

[4.3] *Metaphorical analysis of mother tongue*

In order to explore the ways mother tongue is conceptualized, we searched for the term MT and analyzed the metaphorical expressions where it appears. Here, metaphor is understood in accordance with Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 1999), further developed and used in Discourse Analysis (Cameron 2008, Deignan 2010) and in Critical Metaphor Analysis (Charteris-Black 2004, Koller 2008). In these frameworks, metaphor is defined as a way of conceiving one thing in terms of another; it is a conceptual mapping between two domains, *the source domain* (often concrete or embodied) and *the target domain* (often abstract).

An analysis of the verbs used in connection with MT in the media texts (e.g. ‘have an MT’; ‘give up an MT’), indicates a conceptualization of MT as an object. Examples like ‘worship our MT and be proud of it’³⁷ and ‘take care of [MT]’³⁸ further index a high value of this object. Moreover, some verbs point to a more violent situation like ‘be deprived of our own MT’ or ‘let oneself be deprived of one’s MT’.³⁹ Another verb used is ‘burn’ (‘burn for her little MT’),⁴⁰ indicating an activity for the MT involving an intense emotion. These expressions point to a conceptualization of LANGUAGE AS AN OBJECT,⁴¹ a conventional way of conceptualizing a language, and hence MT (see Golden & Steien, in press). Another finer grained conceptualization (cf. Berthele 2002) can be formulated MOTHER TONGUE AS A VALUABLE OBJECT as the examples indicate that the MT is worth worshipping and is in danger of being stolen. As such, the MT is something that may be manipulated in both positive and negative ways but controlled by people.

In the expression ‘to promote the MT’⁴² the conceptualization is rather MOTHER TONGUE AS PERSON, as the verb is used in connection with people, typically when promoting somebody for a higher position and indexed as a very capable person.

22.11.2019).

[36] ‘Alle tre har sørsamisk som morsmål, hjertespråket’ (Trønder-Avisa Sep 23, 2019).

[37] ‘dyrke morsmålet vårt og være stolt av det’ (Harstad Tidende 16 Feb 2020).

[38] ‘ta vare på det [i.e., morsmålet]’; (Drammens Tidende 25.11.2019).

[39] ‘bli frarøvet vårt eget morsmål’ (Fremover Dec 9, 2019); ‘la seg frarøve sitt morsmål’ (Nordnorsk debatt 2. Jan 2020).

[40] Ballade 6. Feb 2020.

[41] In Conceptual Metaphor Theory the notation is often capitalized and the target domain and the source domain is mentioned.

[42] ‘fremme morsmålet’ (Harstad Tidende 16 Feb 2020).

There were also several examples from the official documents, where MT is conceptualized as an object: verbs like ‘develop’, ‘maintain’, ‘utilize’, ‘choose’ and ‘map’ are recurring.⁴³ All of these point to more practical objects that need to be developed, maintained, utilized, chosen and mapped. But we also find the verb ‘recognize’,⁴⁴ indicating MOTHER TONGUE AS PERSON.

An analysis of the adjectives used in the media texts also reveals a conceptualization of MT as an object or a person as already shown by the examples of the more expressive or romantic uses mentioned above (‘little’, ‘young’, ‘dear’ MT). In addition, there are some cases of creative and expressive uses of MT. An example is ‘English is my step-mother tongue’⁴⁵ which indexes two mothers of the MTs: one biological (and maybe first language) the other one met later (but maybe as important).

As we see in this deconstruction of the metaphorical use of MT, it mainly points to the very conventional way of conceptualizing a language as an object, and more specifically of MOTHER TONGUE AS A VALUABLE OBJECT. As pointed out by Lakoff and Johnson, this understanding gives us the possibility to embrace or exclude the phenomenon in question, in this case the mother tongue:

Understanding our experiences in terms of objects and substances allows us to pick out parts of our experience and treat them as discrete entities or substances of a uniform kind. Once we can identify our experiences as entities or substances, we can refer to them, categorize them, group them, and quantify them – and, by this means, reason about them.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 25)

[5] SOUTHERN ENCOUNTERS

As pointed out in the introduction and highlighted in the analysis above, concepts are never stable. Encounters between people, languages and different conceptualizations remind us of this fact, and the complexity associated with the term MT expands even more if we include yet another instance of encounter: the one between Northern and Southern perspectives. With few exceptions, our analysis has so far highlighted the concept of MT in its singular definite form. When used in the plural, ‘*mother tongues*’ is most often understood to be referring to a compilation of different MTs, side by side, that is still in the singular and still as individualized entities. Hence, there seems to exist a strong expectation that

[43] ‘utvikle’ (p. 55), ‘vedlikeholde’ (p. 49), ‘nyttiggjøre seg’ (p. 38), ‘velge’ (p. 148) and ‘kartlegge’ (p. 127), all from NOU 2010:7.

[44] ‘anerkjenne’ (p. 104).

[45] ‘Engelsk er mitt stemorsmål’ (Klassekampen 3. Feb 2020).

the existence of one MT or, more precise ‘the mother tongue’, is the default situation. If we encounter certain Southern perspectives, this default situation differs in that ‘the mother tongue’, as an individualized entity with a clear denotation, does not exist. Seen from a Southern perspective, self-identification may not at all be connected to one of the definitions or conceptualizations of MT that we have presented so far. The following excerpt from an interview with a Congolese migrant to Norway is illustrative in this respect in reminding us of the situation many people around the globe are facing, that is the experience of being multi- and translingual:

- Guri: and which language was there in your family?
 Jean-Marc: eh at home (...) we had Swahili (..) and a bit more internally we had Mashi=
 Guri: [yes]
 Jean-Marc: = [it] is like parents used a lot of Mashi
 [...]
 but inside of the family we had Swahili, (.) and at school we had French.
 [...]
 that is was its kind of. (.) because Norwegian if you ask Norwegians kind of they will say ‘yes I know Norwegian the best’.
 Guri: yes
 Jean-Marc: eh for us in the Congo, we have been kind of eh multi-lingual. (.)

(Golden & Steien, under review)

Jean-Marc’s last statement, ‘for us in the Congo, we have been kind of multilingual’ resonates well with descriptions of several other African contexts (see e.g. Mendisu & Johannessen 2016 on Ethiopia). Furthermore, the multilingual situation is framed as something which unites: he speaks of ‘us in the Congo’ as opposed to Norwegians. We have already touched upon this claim in pointing to the strong connection between national identity and nation-building in the case of Norwegian in the introductory section of this paper. The importance of a concept such as MT may increase when nation states are established, and/or in times characterized by the striving for a unifying (national) identity. Woldemariam (2016) shows how issues of identity have made it difficult to achieve settled language planning in plurilingual areas, but the effort nevertheless is of high importance. Southern encounters, exemplified by descriptions such as Jean-Marc’s above, show how the unifying identity concept

sometimes rests on not only one or two, but many languages and, hence, MTs.

In what we identified as the ‘traditional’ understanding of MT in the Norwegian context, issues of identity and power-relations have been – and still are – important. However, the implications of multiple MTs for societies and individuals become even clearer when we consider Southern perspectives. An illustrative case from South Africa is the following excerpt from Kopano Matlwa’s novel *Coconut*, describing how ‘three unidentical white men in serious suits’ one day visit the school to write down ‘how many different types of boys and girls we had’ in our class:

When the three white unidentical men in serious suits had been through all the languages, the one that had not said a word yet muttered to Mrs Kumalo that I had not raised my hand when they were reading through the Bantu languages.

“What language do you speak at home, Ofilwe?” asked Mrs Kumalo, sounding a little bit mean again. “English, Mrs Kumalo,” I responded, confused because I had raised my hand when the fattest one had read out ‘English’, but Mrs Kumalo had told me to put my hand down. “No, Ofilwe, what language do you speak to your mother and father?” insisted Mrs Kumalo. “English, Mrs Kumalo” I tried again.

Mrs Kumalo sent me to go stand with my nose against the tall green court wall. [...] I heard the one who had not said a word until he did, say, “just tick her under ‘Zulu’, it’s all the same.”

(Matlwa 2007, p. 55–57)

In cases where there is a clash or mismatch between the wanted and the available identities associated to the different MTs, the consequences may be severe for the individual. Different conceptualizations may even be exploited in powerful abuse towards groups and individuals.

The case of migration is another important aspect of Northern/Southern encounters, and migration seems to reinforce the individualization aspect of the MT concept, that is, the concept of ‘the mother tongue’. The MT represents a strong link between people, places and belonging. This point was illustrated in the very first example in this article from the American-Norwegian heritage context. As for adult speakers of languages other than Norwegian in Norway, a search for the word ‘morsmål’ in the ASK corpus illustrates the same point.⁴⁶ The following quote from a 20 year old woman of Serbian descent may serve as an

[46] ASK – Second language Corpus of Norwegian.

example: ‘I wish to go back there one day in my home country, to talk my mother tongue and my children to talk mother tongue or grandparent-tongue’.⁴⁷ Such links are important, not only for their strong associations with identity, but because of their further implications as well. Bigelow (2020) presents several examples of how the ability to speak their parents’, and therefore the co-ethnic community’s, language gives migrant youth access to many sources of social capital, including higher educational attainment.

[6] CLOSING REMARKS

Our overview of the use of the term ‘mother tongue’ in the Norwegian context has shown how there has been an adding of conceptualizations from a ‘traditional’ use, where ‘mother tongue’ denotes Norwegian, to include a ‘novel’ use where ‘mother tongue’ denotes everything *but* Norwegian. The ‘novel’ use is dominant in present day official documents and media texts, and we interpret the changes in reference for ‘mother tongue’ as a result of encounters. In the Norwegian context, the birth of modern migration patterns during the 1970s represented an important change. As reflected in the media texts analysed, the same seems to be the case for modern Sámi identity and nation building, which at one level also involves an encounter between the Norwegian majority and the national minorities. Hence, in media texts from northern Norway, MT often denotes Sámi language.

The dominant discourses reflected in our data set is first and foremost of a person having one (and only one) mother tongue, even if the possibility of having several mother tongues is explicitly stated in the sections where mother tongue is the main topic. The deconstruction of the metaphorical expressions involving mother tongue reveals a very traditional conceptualization of the term, that is LANGUAGE AS AN OBJECT also specified as MOTHER TONGUE AS A VALUABLE OBJECT. However, we also find examples of the conceptualization of MOTHER TONGUE AS A PERSON, which indexes other qualities like power and strength. We have presented additional, southern perspectives where we are reminded of the situation many people are in: they might have several mother tongues and the question ‘What is your mother tongue’ is meaningless; the answer will typically be the language with the highest prestige. The importance of studying concepts like mother tongue is reinforced through encounters. In a globalized world we find several cases where the traditional and novel use of MT not only co-exist, but are closely intertwined; students may have several MTs, Norwegian may very well be one of these, as also is the case for many speakers of national minority

[47] ‘Jeg ønsker å gå tilbake der en dag i mitt hjemmeland, å snakke min morsmål og barna mine å snakke morsmål eller besteforedrensmål.’

languages. In such cases, there is a tension between the legislation, the official documents and media texts pertaining to MTs, calling for a continued dialogue about multilingualism as it is understood and investigated across diverse contexts. Our exploration of the data in this article highlights the importance of reflecting openly about the instability of powerful concepts. One interesting question for future research, which in fact also grows out of an encounter – the one between Norwegian and English – is how the term ‘native language’ is used or rather may be used in the future.

DEDICATION

In memory of our dear friend and colleague Janne. We will always remember her courage, stamina and smile.

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