The Historical Sociolinguistics of Norwegian-American Bilingualism[1]

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Abstract
We know surprisingly little about when and how people in Norwegian-American communities became bilingual in English and then often generations later became monolingual English speakers. Exploring this can inform our understanding of how these individuals and communities negotiated bilingual-bicultural life in the American Upper Midwest, with its social and linguistic implications. Drawing on methods and data types developed for German-speaking immigrant communities and since tested in other communities, I reconstruct some evidence for Norwegian monolingualism and Norwegian-English bilingualism, especially in Wisconsin. From there, a brief examination of patterns of institutional use (schools, newspapers, and the economy) allows us insight into broader community structures during the time of shift to English. While Norwegians tended to report knowing English considerably earlier than some other immigrant groups, they have remained bilingual just as long and show roughly parallel histories of institutional support for the language, illustrated here especially with comparisons to German-speaking communities.

This essay presents new data and reviews existing evidence to introduce two related lines of linguistic research to historians and others beyond linguistics. The first line is the study of 'language shift,' how and why people give up a community language in favor of a society's dominant language. I adopt a recent model of shift

as 'verticalization', and this brief case study provides a new test of the model.[2] The second is the relatively new field of historical sociolinguistics, which draws data from social history in particular to better understand past linguistic situations, applying methods and theories from contemporary sociolinguistics to past settings, from prehistory to the twentieth century. My aim is to show what this work can contribute to our understanding of language in Norwegian-American communities and widespread issues in American society and beyond. The discussion focuses on three questions:

- When did Norwegian immigrants and their descendants learn English?
- How, when and why did Norwegian-speaking descendants switch to speaking only English?
- What roles did institutions play in the process?

Throughout, I compare these results to those found in some contemporaneous immigrant communities of the time in the same region, the American Upper Midwest, especially some that were German-speaking well into the twentieth century.

We know that Norwegian and other languages from the Nordic countries have been spoken in the American Upper Midwest since immigrants began to arrive in the 1830s, continuing for most of a century, and fieldwork is still going on today with bilingual heritage speakers, especially with Norwegian. Einar Haugen devotes most of the first volume of his pioneering 1953 study—which remains a landmark not only for Norwegian-American language but for immigrant and heritage language linguistics broadly—to social and historical issues; these include a chapter on the learning of English, institutional use of Norwegian and the ultimate shift to English.[3] Beyond a few important more recent studies, though, we today know relatively little more about when and how these communities became bilingual and how they negotiated bilingual-bicultural life in the region, with its social and linguistic implications, than we did when Haugen wrote.[4]

Relying on methods and data types first developed for German-speaking immigrant communities by Wilkerson and Salmons, I present evidence on monolingualism and bilingualism in the past, beginning with information found in the 1910 US Census.[5] That survey asked whether people were able to speak English and indicated other mother tongues where the answer was 'no.' I use that to establish a baseline of information about language knowledge and use. I then turn to the framework used here, the verticalization model of language shift, and apply it to the context of Norwegian-American immigration and language. From there, a look at institutional use of Norwegian allows us insight into overarching community patterns during the time of shift to English, connecting to much recent research on Norwegian and other languages.[6] The analysis presented here suggests that Norwegians tended to report speaking English considerably earlier than German-speaking immigrants, but in other ways, they appear to behave much like other immigrant groups in the region. For instance, institutional support for Norwegian followed a path very similar to what we see in German communities. And despite their somewhat earlier learning of English, Norwegians have remained bilingual just as long. In the rest of this chapter, I briefly sketch some examples of institutional language use, especially schools and the press. I conclude with comments on the kinds of current studies being done to develop and further test the model and to compare immigrant communities across the American Midwest and beyond, as well as a note on the value of this kind of study for contemporary society in the context of migration.

Before moving on, note that the notion of 'community' is both central to this discussion and used in scholarship in many ways. Linguists often talk about 'speech communities,' groups of people who share languages or varieties of languages, and Warren, whose views will be discussed below, defines community as "that organization of social activities to afford people daily local access to those broad areas of activity that are necessary in day-to-day living".[7] Neither matches well with working governmental definitions. For example, the Census data treated just below is

organized by 'census tracts,' which seldom align with patterns of immigration. Major Norwegian settlement areas in Wisconsin often span sets of census tracts and some tracts include areas of Norwegian and non-Norwegian population. In this article, I rely most heavily on Warren's understanding of community, but we have to keep in mind the broader context of the larger Norwegian-American population especially in the Upper Midwest.

Turning to data, how do we know what languages people spoke and whether they knew English? Labov provides a model of how to use the 1910 Census to look at past language knowledge.[8] Census takers were told to ask whether each person over the age of ten could speak English and, if not, what language the person did speak. Even aside from the fact that this gives no indications of bilingualism among those who reported knowing English, the opportunities for imprecision are vast here—starting with the fundamental question of what constitutes ability to speak English, for example—but research starting with Wilkerson and Salmons has been able to align such information with other, especially qualitative, sources in ways that suggest that the Census gives a reasonable if necessarily imprecise picture of monolingualism in the absence of more reliable quantitative evidence.[9] Various studies have used this approach to gauge immigrant monolingualism in the Upper Midwest, shown in Table 1, starting from already published data and supplemented with information on some other Norwegian-American communities—those in the table that do not list another source, six Wisconsin Norwegian areas and one each from Icelandic, Walloon and Finnish areas outside of Wisconsin.

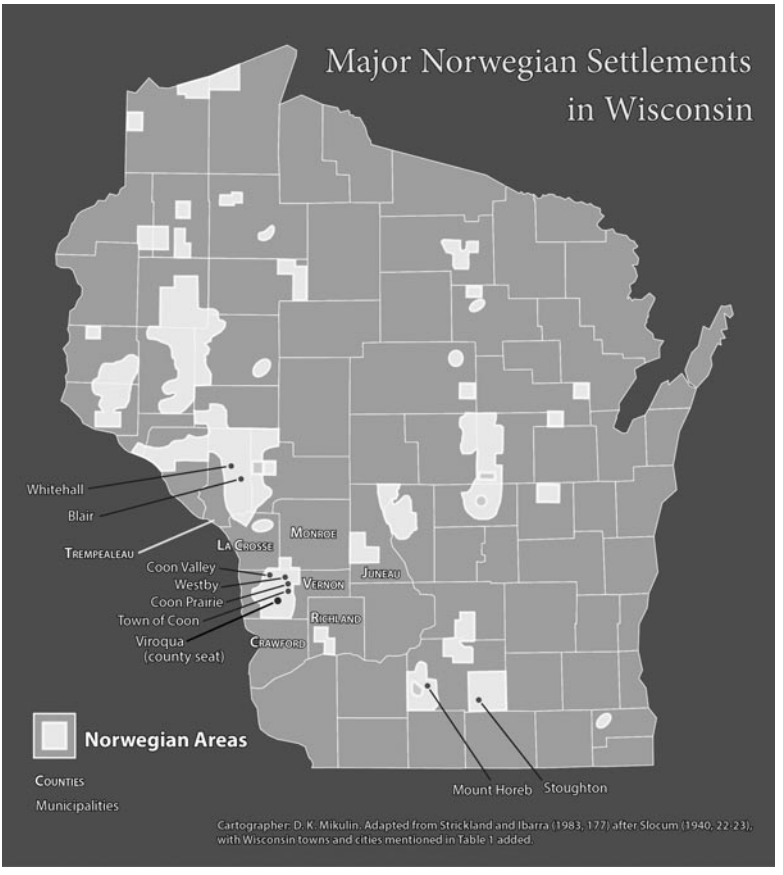
	Monolinguals		US-born mono		Other mono[10]	Source[11]
Norwegian						
Ulen, MN	17	5%	0			Natvig
Stoughton, WI	203	9.7%	5	2.5%	12	[Wards 1, 2]
Coon Valley, WI	17	5.8%	0		2	
Coon, WI	156	13.2%	0		2	
Whitehall, WI	9	1.8%	0			
Mt Horeb, WI	15	1.4%	0			
Blair, WI	10	2.1%	0			

German						
Hustisford, WI	310	24%	108	35%		W&S
Schleswig, WI	238	22%	85	36%		W&S
Hamburg, WI	152	21%	28	18%	2	W&S
Germantown, WI	253	18%	110	43%	7	W&S
Sheboygan, WI	259	17%	28	11%	170	W&S [Ward 6]
Sauk City, WI	97	14%	11	11%		W&S
Brothertown, WI	71	7%	24	34%	8	W&S
Belgium, WI	89	7%	20	23%	43	W&S
New Holstein, WI	272	28%	134	49%	41	Frey
Kiel, WI	164	17%	30	18%	1	Frey
Dutch						
Fox Valley, WI	41	7.5%	0		1	V&S
West Frisian						
Randolph, WI	102	9%	—			B&E
Icelandic						
Akra, ND	41	12.5%	0			
Walloon						
Brussels, WI	120	12.1%	41	34.0%	41	
Finnish						
Oulu, WI	169	27%	5	2.9%		Johnson
Palo, MN	112	16.4%	0		121	

Table 1: Ability to speak English, 1910 Census [US born = % monolingual], place names following the Census.

Map 1 shows major settlement areas of Norwegians in Wisconsin and gives the location of the Wisconsin counties and towns mentioned in Table 1.

Norwegian shows relatively low numbers of monolinguals, people who had not learned English, and virtually no American-born Norwegian monolinguals. My initial samples from other Norwegian settlements in Wisconsin support this as a widespread phenomenon, with several communities listed as having large percentages of people with Norwegian heritage (http://zipatlas.com/us/wi/city-comparison/percentage-norwegian-population.htm) having only one or two reported monolinguals, e.g. Hixton and Hollandale. Indeed, scanning through census data in various Norwegian settlements it appears that many monolinguals were relatively recent immigrants and that American-born Norwegian monolinguals were rare.



Map 1: Major Norwegian settlement areas in Wisconsin, with counties and towns mentioned in the essay.

This picture aligns with the national trend found by Labov, where the "proportion of foreign born able to speak English" is higher for Danes, Swedes and Norwegians than any group except "English" and "Irish."[10] Drawing on the Canadian census from 1931, Haugen shows that similar trends hold there across speakers of mainland Scandinavian languages generally, as shown in Table 2, reformatted from Haugen and giving all five languages he presented.[11]

	All heritage lang.	Bilingual	All English
Norwegian	1.3%	72.6%	24.9%
Swedish	1.6%	72.8%	23.7%
Danish	1.2%	66.8%	9.0%
Icelandic	3.0%	82.5%	14.2%
Finnish	17.7%	78.0%	3.6%

Table 2: Language spoken, 10 years and older, Canada, from Haugen (1953).

Still, at least many Upper Midwestern immigrant communities continued to transmit their heritage languages to children until surprisingly similar dates, with larger cohorts who were born in the 1940s raised speaking these languages at home and then learning English at school and beyond.[12] In many communities, including Norwegian ones, many people who did not have Norwegian ancestry learned the local heritage language simply by growing up among speakers—something we see in many communities with various languages. To the astonishment of people investigating these languages in the Upper Midwest, Arnstein Hjelde has even interviewed speakers of American Norwegian born in the twenty-first century, though these speakers have somewhat unusual biographical circumstances.[13]

While we need similar surveys from many more communities for statistical analysis, some preliminary correlations are suggestive about who was more likely to remain monolingual in immigrant languages. First, Figure 1 plots numbers of non-English monolinguals against community size. Here, it seems, there may be more monolinguals in larger communities, particularly those with a large presence of a given immigrant group. Intuitively, this may not be surprising: If you speak only Norwegian in a community of thousands of other Norwegian speakers, the need to acquire English may have been less acute than if you lived in a small Norwegian community surrounded by speakers of English and/or other languages. Scholars occasionally make informal connections between community size and maintenance of Norwegian, with Haugen for instance commenting on the time around the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century as "a period

when the use of Norwegian was a matter of course in all significantly large settlements".[14]

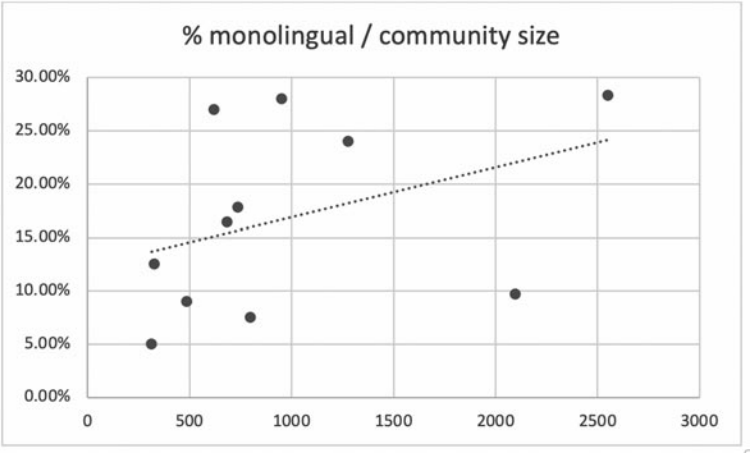


Figure 1: Immigrant language monolingualism and community size, calculated from data in Salmons 2022.

Figure 2 plots the number of reported monolinguals born in the US against community size. Here we see a clear correlation, though again, one based on very limited data: Larger communities, especially those with large concentrations of speakers of particular languages, look much more likely to have more monolingual speakers of the community language. This presumably connects to access that children had to English in the community, the chance to acquire it. Where Figure 1 may reflect some inertia of adults not choosing or needing to learn English, Figure 2 may tell us something about what languages children were exposed to during their early lives.[15] At least some non-Norwegians sometimes learned Norwegian in some communities, though data is sparse.[16]

Based on the data in Table 1, Norwegians follow the trend in Figure 1, with larger communities having more monolinguals, but not the trend in Figure 2, since there are just very few American-born monolinguals in general.

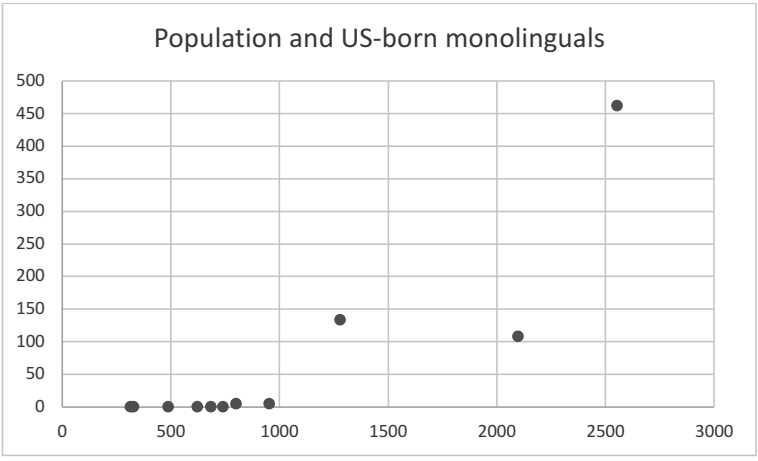


Figure 2: US-born monolingualism and community size, calculated from data in Salmons 2022.

How and why have these communities all shifted dramatically to English, with few heritage speakers born in any of these communities after the 1940s? I draw on a model of shift built around Warren's idea of a 'Great Change' in American society from the mid-nineteenth well into the twentieth century, starting from the notion that communities' major functions—production-distribution-consumption, socialization, social control, social participation and mutual support—are organized along two dimensions, horizontal and vertical.[17] The former involves connections of institutions within a community to one another, like how local schools shape and are shaped by the local economy, local religious practice and so on. The latter is about how those institutions are connected to and interact with bodies beyond the community, like how county, state and national bureaucracies and policies shape local education. As Brown and Salmons summarize the core of the model,[18]

> Verticalization is about the relative shift of control over these [functions] from the hands of local, community-oriented and

> interconnected actors to extra-community actors. It has profound impact on language use across a set of fundamentally different domains, from private economic institutions to the broad organization of economic activity in a community, religious, and other cultural institutions, and government.

At the heart of this is the notion that horizontal structures allow the continued use of a community language across an expansive range of domains. Local control of institutions and functions means the local language can be used instead of the dominant language of society's majority group. Crucially for longer-term maintenance, children growing up in such settings have robust exposure to the language in informal and formal settings, hearing different styles and usually dialects, often with exposure to relevant standard languages, e.g. from the pulpit, and often learning to read and write the language. These changes in community structure, in other words, connect directly to language learning and use. How these changes find their way into social networks, families and individuals—how these macro processes reach down to the micro level—has been the focus of research as well, beginning with Benjamin Frey's dissertation.[19]

Short-term pressures can certainly promote shift, though in the long-term fundamental social structures play a much larger and more lasting role. For our situation, the role of World War I is widely discussed as having helped drive shift. While the effects of anti-immigrant language policies in this period had effects in terms of institutional use, like in many but not all schools, this had far more limited impact on home language and some institutions, including even the press. People continued to learn and use German in the home, in churches and beyond into the mid-twentieth century.[20] Norwegian has been somewhat less studied in this regard but see John Higham's *Strangers in the land*.

While Warren provides a fully developed model of this process in terms of community structure, albeit without direction discussion of language, many of the basic dynamics of verticalization were certainly apparent to earlier scholars of immigrant communities.

In a study of Norwegian in Vernon County in western Wisconsin (which includes Coon Prairie and Westby), Munch describes, in essence, the creation of horizontal community structures:[21]

> Coon Prairie … through its spatial and socio-economic consolidation, has been able to build up an independent and socially self-sufficient community of its own. In the city of Westby, which is about 95% Norwegian, it has even created its own community center with most of the economic, social, and cultural services that are usually allotted to such a center in a community of that size. In this way, the Norwegians in this settlement have actually managed to withdraw the whole area from the economic and social control of the 'Yankee' dominated city of Viroqua.

He later goes on to argue that the Norwegians there[22] …

> have both built up a social system of their own, rather firmly knit through a strong loyalty within the group, and with a sharp bounding outwards towards the encompassing society. There is no doubt in my mind that this reaction is a response to the social situation in which the groups found themselves in the New World. Feeling that they were not fully accepted in the new society they had no choice other than trying to provide for the satisfaction of the social needs of their members within their own group, unless they wanted to submit to a rather subordinate status in the society.

Ibarra presents a detailed analysis of Westby, treating the social system as "an intricate blending of three cultural factors: immigrant Norwegian, rural American, and Americanized-Norwegian." He sees this as an "adaptive process in terms of social organization and entrepreneurial activity".[23] Ibarra understands the community as having avoided "cultural assimilation" in part because it "has developed and refined a well delineated ethnic boundary".[24] While he gives particular attention to economic activity, he covers a full range of formal and informal institutions in ways that resonate

with the main tenets of the verticalization model, something worthy of future study.

One particularly striking example of economic independence among western Wisconsin Norwegians comes from tobacco farming. As detailed by Strickon and Ibarra, Norwegians became tobacco farmers in western Wisconsin in the 1850s and eventually became dominant in growing, selling, and eventually marketing tobacco.[25]

Playing on the 'melting pot' language so common in his day, Munch concludes that social pressure in this area led not to melting but hardening. Writing in the middle of the last century, Munch does not explore the breakdown of these horizontal structures, though the process had already begun before he wrote.

Similar views can be found in the historical literature about many other immigrant communities in the region. For instance, in the standard history of the state of Wisconsin, Thompson describes Wisconsin Polish communities in ways that are consistent with verticalization and with Munch's views:[26]

> Their determination to govern their own affairs, to own a home or a piece of land in clear title and to pass it on intact to the next generation, to preserve their language, to support their church, and to create and maintain the banks and businesses, the cultural and fraternal societies, and the other institutions necessary to a self-sufficient people were essential components of Polish life in Wisconsin.

Thompson goes on to specifically connect these patterns with language maintenance:[27]

> More important than school, church, and the ethnic press was the opportunity to speak the language at home, at work, and in the company of friends and neighbors. The more compact the family, neighborhood, or community in 1940, the more likely the old languages still were being spoken.

Those general statements are supported by evidence from particular domains. Haugen's *The Norwegian Language in America* remains a remarkable source on institutional use, achieving an integration of information not only from areas like education and the press but also neighborhoods and political life. His wide-ranging discussion of the use of Norwegian in church services and religion are rich, showing widespread use of the language into the 1930s, with Norwegian still having some presence into the late 1940s.[28] For comparison, German religious services remained somewhat longer, but likewise represented often the last real institutional presence of the language in many communities.

In terms of education, Haugen sketches the early establishment of the teaching of Norwegian especially in church schools, which he sees as crucial community resources for language maintenance.[29] Ostergren gives a similar account of Swedish parochial schools in Minnesota:[30]

> The Cambridge [Minnesota] Lutheran Church, like others in the area, tried to combat the erosion of Swedish language and culture through the establishment of parochial 'Swede schools,' an auxiliary educational system set alongside the public schools. Children were expected to attend both. … The community places tremendous importance on these schools.

Norwegian language education of course required teaching materials in the language. Over time, many immigrant communities developed their own materials, among them Norwegians. As Hvenekilde writes:[31]

> Norwegian Americans published textbooks for their own schools, and in the period between 1853 and 1925 no fewer than forty-six books for teaching and studying Norwegian as a mother tongue were published for use in America, most of them intended for the church schools. Among these were eighteen primers, eight readers, and two that were a combination of reader and primer.

> In addition, six declamation books, five books with letter formulas, and five grammars were published. After the publication of the last reader in 1925 there was no longer a market for books in Norwegian for native speakers, and the Norwegian language textbooks published since then are books for students without Norwegian as their first or dominant language.

Haugen also charts the decline of Norwegian education in the early twentieth century, where even religious instruction in Norwegian shows a very steep decline from World War I to almost disappearing by the late 1920s, in line with Hvenekilde's date for the end of textbook publishing.

While Haugen understandably focuses heavily on parochial schools, the full picture of American education is relevant. The basic story told often runs along these lines:[32]

> The school system remained largely private and unorganized until the 1840s. Public schools were always under local control, with no federal role, and little state role. The 1840 census indicated that of the 3.68 million children between the ages of five and fifteen, about 55% attended primary schools and academies.

Schooling was only later compulsory in most places, and only yet later enforced in practice. Communities could and often did organize schooling to advance their own goals using their own languages. Like other immigrant language communities, Norwegian Americans took full advantage of this opportunity. And the timing of the shift to English-language instruction was very similar to when it took place in German-American communities.[33]

Turning to another institution supporting not only the spoken language but written language as well, the Norwegian-language press in America was formidable in the Upper Midwest, though most papers were short-lived as was typical of publications in those times, including those in English. Looking at the material included in Oehlert and Hanson, there were at least 31 Norwegian-language

papers in Wisconsin, as shown in Table 3, with a focus on the example of Madison.[34]

Madison alone:

Amerika 1 Oct. 1884-28 July 1922.
Emigranten 23 Jan 1852-24 Aug 1868.
Liberale Demokrat May 1874-Aug 1875 > *Nordvesten* 17 Sept 1875-15 Dec 1876.
Den Norske Amerikaner et National Demokratisk Blad 21 Dec 1854-27 May 1857 > *Nordstjernen et National Demokratisk Blad* 10 June 1857-Oct 1860.
Den Norske Immigrant 12 Jan-11 May 1871.
De Norskes Ven 19 July 1850-Ca Feb. 1851.
Skandinavisk Tribune 19 Aug 1887-July 1888.
Vikingen 11 Aug 1888-1 June 1889.
Wisconsin Nordmanden Jan 1886[?]-Mar 1896.

Other towns / cities with Norwegian papers:

Mt Horeb, Stoughton, Superior, Eau Claire, La Crosse, Marinette, Milwaukee, Rhinelander, Racine, Whitehall

Wisconsin papers in other Nordic languages

6 in Danish
15 in Swedish

Table 3: Some Wisconsin Norwegian language newspapers, compiled from Oehlert and Hanson (2021)

Madison is an interesting example, as a place not itself heavily Norwegian but surrounded by many Norwegian communities. Although the Madison papers ceased publication relatively early, other outlets survived much longer. Moquin gives a recent treatment of *Reform*, published in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, which appeared until 1941.[35] Haugen shows that the *Decorah-Posten* from Iowa was widely read in Wisconsin in the late 1940s.[36]

What we see here is typical of the trajectories many small immigrant-language newspapers experienced, where the founding

of new papers first drops off in the late nineteenth century and smaller papers fail not much later, much like in the larger German-language press.[37] This, though, is not something distinctive to the immigrant press, but a fact about small American newspapers, as demonstrated by Willey.[38] In the seven years prior to the publication of his book, he charts almost 3,000 papers that failed, mostly small ones, comprising about a quarter of all periodicals. This trend was not simply the result of a loss of readership but also larger economic factors, such as the development of new technologies in printing that were affordable for larger papers but not for smaller publishers.[39] The German press underwent a series of mergers and often relied on increasingly widespread mail distribution to survive, consistent with Haugen's observations about the *Decorah-Posten* in Wisconsin.

Finally, economic life is central to verticalization. To take a pervasive case in this period of American history, the shift from family farming to an increasingly industrial economy is a dramatic shift of control from extremely local to national and ultimately global hands. Even within agriculture, a change from subsistence farming to producing crops for commercial markets, with increasing mechanization, means increasing dependence on forces far outside the community, including banks. Natvig makes exactly this case for the Norwegians of Ulen, Minnesota, while Johnson and Bousquette provide related studies of other immigrant communities in the same region.[40]

While Ulen was small and overwhelmingly agricultural, it is worth our while to consider the economic positions of Norwegian monolinguals in other kinds of communities. In the much larger city of Stoughton, Wisconsin, the 1910 Census shows monolinguals widely engaged in trades and crafts, including individuals listed as carpenter, butcher, painter, blacksmith, machinist, mason, baker, and shoemaker. One boarding house proprietor is listed as speaking only Norwegian, a person who presumably had extensive interaction with the public, though perhaps often with recent arrivals. Two factories in town, tobacco and wagon making, both counted many monolinguals among their employees, sometimes in

skilled positions. These included, for example, an 'inspector' and a 'foreman' in the wagon works, supervisory positions. As argued in Wilkerson and Salmons (2008, 2012) this suggests that monolinguals were not necessarily as economically disadvantaged as we might expect. This also suggests that there were people who could train them as, say, inspectors, in Norwegian, and that the infrastructure existed for monolinguals.[41]

Into at least the late nineteenth century and often into the early and occasionally mid-twentieth, then, Norwegian in much of Wisconsin and neighboring states had strong institutional support, closely parallel to what we have found with other languages, especially German. In these examples, though, control shifts from "local, community-oriented and interconnected actors" to the hands of "extra-community actors", often initially the control of local Anglo or Yankee populations, but eventually to state and/or national control. Taken together, these and other institutional changes steadily eroded the basis of Norwegian language maintenance. In his study of Norwegian in Ulen, Minnesota, Natvig presents this as a creeping loss of domains for the language, where spaces for using the minority language became fewer and where there was more pressure for use of English in more settings.[42] In earlier days, parents may have worked on the farm and used Norwegian, and children had limited schooling, that often in Norwegian as the medium of instruction. Later, as parents sought employment in the broader economy where English was more often the norm and as schools switched to English, it is easy to see that carrying over to use of Norwegian at home over time. With that, the transmission of a minority language to the next generation stops.

This then is the bookend of the discussion at the beginning of this essay about how horizontal community structures supported maintenance of the community language: Where an extensive network of local control made it possible, even natural, for people to speak Norwegian and pass it on to new generations, the break-down of those patterns compounded the difficulties of keeping the language in everyday use. As described by Brown as well as Bousquette and Brown, the exceptions to this situation—that is,

examples of language maintenance in verticalizing and verticalized societies—are communities where there is explicit commitment to the community language as central to identity and even a requirement of group membership, such as Pennsylvania Dutch among Old Order Amish and Mennonites or Yiddish among Hasidim.[43] Those communities have constructed and maintained cultural boundaries—horizontal patterns—that allow transmission of their languages. That is, the evidence presented here is thoroughly consistent with and provides support for the verticalization model.

What can we conclude from this brief discussion of some basic data and analysis of Norwegian in the American Upper Midwest?

- Evidence suggests that Norwegians often acquired English faster than some other groups, like German and Poles.
- Institutions played important supporting roles for language, including transmission of standard languages, language ideologies, and so on, and play a role in shift.
- Loss of institutional support parallels what we see in some other language communities, such as German in terms of timing in particular institutions.
- Norwegians and other immigrant groups in the Upper Midwest ultimately shifted to English monolingualism at roughly the same time. That is, becoming bilingual and shifting to becoming English monolingual were different processes at different times.
- Verticalization provides a promising account for understanding language shift and its timing.

These conclusions are all tentative, pending more detailed further study, but the picture that emerges follows closely along the lines found in other immigrant communities in the region. The similarities in timing of institutional change and language shift across different immigrant language communities lends some further support to the verticalization model, suggesting that shift is dependent on fundamental dynamics of regional and national society, not anything specific to particular communities or speakers

of particular languages. It is, we argue in work on verticalization, about those changes in community structure and not how many generations removed from immigration people in a community are.

Most exciting is the amount of research taking place today, precisely because it is filling in more detail and texture. Just from our own group of researchers, this includes research specifically on Norwegian by early career scholars like Laura Moquin (Wisconsin) and David Natvig (Stavanger), but also on languages like Finnish (Mirva Johnson, Wisconsin), Dutch (Rachyl Hietpas and Charlotte Vanhecke, both Wisconsin), and continuing investigations of German (Samantha Litty, Flensburg). A robust scholarly community has formed and grown around the Workshops on Immigrant Languages in the Americas, https://www.workshoponimmigrantlanguages.org with published annual proceedings available for free download.

Finally, this work has potential value for contemporary society, where issues of language and immigration loom large and are often hotly contested. First, this whole line of research began with results that should help dispel the resilient myth that 'good old immigrants' learned English and integrated quickly into American society. Second, public awareness of research on past immigrant bilingualism and language shift can be part of opening the door to more tolerance among the descendants who feel ties to their immigrant ancestors—I have sometimes heard community members comment, after public talks about this project, on how recent immigrants and refugees are facing challenges today that in some ways mirror what their own families dealt with. Third, the world today is losing languages at an alarming rate, such as the endangerment of Indigenous languages in both North America and the Nordic countries. Understanding how and why people shifted suggests ways of combatting shift, such as rebuilding horizontal patterns within communities.

Notes

[1] As will be apparent throughout, this essay reflects deep and ongoing collaboration with a whole set of other people. We are standing on the shoulders of giants here, able to learn and benefit from decades of study by Arnstein Hjelde,

Janne Bondi Johannessen, and many others, some but hardly all cited here. I have benefited very directly from the help of many students and younger colleagues cited and discussed throughout the paper. In addition to valuable feedback from the editor and two anonymous reviewers, I am grateful to the following for comments on this manuscript and discussions on this topic: Joshua Bousquette, Josh Brown, Mirva Johnson, Monica Macaulay, Laura Moquin, and David Natvig. I alone am responsible for any and all shortcomings.

[2] Joshua R. Brown, ed., *The Verticalization Model of Language Shift: The Great Change in American communities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); Joshua R. Brown, and Joshua Bousquette, "Language maintenance and language shift among heritage languages in North America," in *Language Contact*, Volume 2, ed. Jeroen Darquennes, Wim Vandenbussche and Joseph Salmons. (Berlin: de Gruyter Handbooks, 2025): 503–15.

[3] Einar Haugen, *The Norwegian Language in America: A study in bilingual behavior*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press (1953).

[4] See Arnstein Hjelde, "A bilingual community and research problems: The Coon Prairie settlement and problems of distinguishing language contact phenomena in the speech of Norwegian-Americans," ed. P. Sture Ureland, *Global Eurolinguistics – European languages in North America – Migration, maintenance and death*, (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001): 209–29; David Natvig, "'The Great Change' and the shift from Norwegian to English in Ulen, MN," in *The Verticalization Model of Language Shift*, ed. Joshua R. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022): 85–113.

[5] See Miranda Wilkerson and Joseph Salmons, 'Good old immigrants of yesteryear' who didn't learn English: Germans in Wisconsin," *American Speech* 83 (2008): 259–83; Miranda Wilkerson and Joseph Salmons, "Linguistic marginalities: Becoming American without learning English," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 4.2. http://www.escholarship.org/ uc/item/ 5vn092kk (2012) and much research since.

[6] See work like Joshua Bousquette, "The Great Change in Midwestern agriculture: Verticalization in Wisconsin German and Wisconsin West Frisian heritage communities," in *The verticalization Model of Language Shift: The Great Change in American communities*, ed. Joshua R. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022): 52–84; Mirva Johnson, "Language shift and changes in community structure: A case study of Oulu, Wisconsin," *Scandinavian-Canadian Studies Journal*, special issue: *Migration, Exile, and Diaspora in the Nordic Region,* ed. Marit Ann Barkve. 25, no. 1 (2018): 30–49; Mirva Johnson, "Politics and cooperatives: Verticalization in rural Finnish American communities of the Upper Midwest," in *The Verticalization Model of Language Shift*, ed. Joshua R. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022): 25–51; Laura Moquin, "Language and morality in Norwegian-American newspapers: *Reform* in Eau Claire, WI," in *9th Workshop on Immigrant Languages in the Americas*, ed. Kelly Biers and Joshua R. Brown (Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project, 2019): 64–71,

http://www.lingref.com/cpp/wila/9/index.html?fbclid=IwAR27W8KxYI-2LiJkoeTRQnm3GG51I5m95hbcaGhuecfIGcq1huUYZ4yt-ZY; Natvig, "The Great Change."

[7] Roland L. Warren, *The community in America*, 3rd edition. (Chicago: Rand-McNally,

1978), 9, further discussed in Brown and Salmons, "A verticalization theory of language shift," in *The Verticalization Model of Language Shift*, ed. Joshua R. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022): 8-10.

[8] Teresa G. Labov, "English acquisition by immigrants to the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century," *American Speech* 73 (1998): 368–98.

[9] Wilkerson and Salmons, "Good old immigrants."

[10] Labov, "English acquisition by immigrants," 385.

[11] Haugen, *The Norwegian Language,* 290.

[12] Salmons, "The last stages."

[13] Hjelde has discussed this several times at the Workshops on Immigrant Languages in the Americas.

[14] Haugen, *The Norwegian Language*, 246. Conversely, more urban areas may be prone to faster language shift, especially where speakers of other languages are present, see Felecia Lucht, Benjamin Frey, and Joseph Salmons, "A tale of three cities: Urban and rural asymmetries in language shift," *Journal of Germanic Linguistics* 23 (2011): 371–98.

[15] We sometimes get unexpected information about this. Census takers occasionally report language for children under ten—contrary to their explicit instructions—and Bousquette and Natvig show that they occasionally did it for whole communities, showing large numbers of children speaking heritage languages before they entered school: Joshua Bousquette, and David Natvig, "Heritage language home and community: Gendered division of labor and language shift," *9th Workshop on Immigrant Languages in the Americas*, ed. Kelly Biers and Joshua R. Brown (Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project, 2019), 55–62. http://www.lingref.com/cpp/wila/11/paper3607.pdf (2019).

[16] Haugen, *The Norwegian Language*; Peter A Munch, "Social adjustment among Wisconsin Norwegians," *American Sociological Review* 14, no. 6 (1949): 780-87.

[17] Warren, *The Community in America.*

[18] Brown and Salmons, "A verticalization theory," 11.

[19] Key examples include Benjamin Frey, *Toward a General Theory of Language Shift: A case study in Wisconsin German and North Carolina Cherokee.* PhD dissertation. University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2013; Natvig, "The Great Change."

[20] Salmons, "The shift from German to English"; Salmons, Keineswegs Feinde der Englischen Sprache: Deutsch, Englisch und Schulpolitik in Wisconsin," *Muttersprache* 127 (2017), 310–23; and much other work.

[21] Munch, "Social adjustment," 782–83.

[22] Munch, "Social adjustment," 786.

[23] Robert Antonio Ibarra, *Ethnicity genuine and spurious: a study of a Norwegian community in rural Wisconsin*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1976, 24–25.

[24] Ibarra, *Ethnicity genuine and spurious,* 416.

[25] Arnold Strickon and Robert A. Ibarra, "The changing dynamics of ethnicity:

Norwegians and tobacco in Wisconsin," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 6, no.2 (1983), 174–97.

[26] William F. Thompson, *The History of Wisconsin.* Vol. VI: *Continuity and Change, 1940-1965* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin,1988); see Natvig, "The Great Change," for similar comments on Norwegians.

[27] Thompson, *The History of Wisconsin,* 32.

[28] Haugen, *The Norwegian Language*, especially 262–77.

[29] Haugen, *The Norwegian Language,* 137–40, elsewhere.

[30] Robert C. Ostergren, *A community transplanted: The Trans-Atlantic Experience of a Swedish Immigrant Settlement in the Upper Middle West, 1835–1915 (*Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 229; and see Bousquette, "The Great Change," 75, for a similar example from German.

[31] Anne Hvenekilde, "Readers for Norwegian-American schools." *Norwegian-American Studies* 34, no. 1, (1995): 135–69, quotation on p. 136.

[32] This quote comes from https://infogalactic.com/info/History_of_education_in_the_United_States, accessed January 13, 2023, but web searches reveal various other sources with the same or very similar language.

[33] Salmons, "Keineswegs Feinde."

[34] Donald Oehlerts, revised by James L. Hansen, *Guide to Wisconsin Newspapers, 1833-2004* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 2021). And see Odd Sverre Lovoll, *Norwegian Newspapers in America: Connecting Norway and the New Land* (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2010) for the classic, full overview of the Norwegian press in the United States.

[35] Moquin, "Language and morality."

[36] Haugen, *The Norwegian Language*, 278.

[37] Salmons, "The shift from German to English."

[38] Malcolm M. Willey, *The Country Newspaper: A study of socialization and newspaper content* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1926).

[39] Salmons, "The shift from German to English"; Lucht et al., "A tale of three cities".

[40] Natvig, "The Great Change"; Johnson, "Language shift"; Johnson, "Politics and cooperatives"; Bousquette, "The Great Change."

[41] Joshua Bousquette pointed this out to me in personal communication.

[42] Natvig, "The Great Change."

[43] Brown, *The Verticalization Model*; Brown and Bousquette, "Language maintenance and language shift."