

Language Collaterality in Scandinavia, especially Norway

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With "collateral languages" is meant language varieties which are so close to each other linguistically that their status as autonomous languages is or may be challenged.

The Norwegian language has two standardized written varieties, Bokmål and Nynorsk. Among interested Norwegians, an as yet unresolved discussion has been going on about which linguistic status should be allotted to these varieties: Are they two separate languages (*språk*) in their own right, or are they varieties (*målformer*) of one language: Norwegian?

Similar discussions, but less heated, have taken place relating to the three Scandinavian languages (Danish, Norwegian, Swedish), particularly in a historical context. From a somewhat different angle, this kind of problems have arisen and become the subject of strife also relating to traditional minority languages in Norway, viz. Kven in relation to Finnish, and the varieties of Sámi: languages or dialects?

Parallel cases from other language areas will be referred to, and political aspects of the discussion itself will also be taken into account. We can distinguish between degrees of collaterality, for instance in this manner (Eloy 2007: 24-25):

A: Indistinction: The varieties are not considered separate languages (the Arabic "dialects", British vs. American English).

B: Maximal proximity: The status of the varieties is disputed (Picardian vs. French, Scottish vs. English, Aragonese vs. Castilian, Serb vs. Croat).

C: Looser collaterality: The varieties are closely related historically, but are considered to be indisputable independent languages (Galician vs. Portuguese, Occitan vs. Catalan, Toscan vs. Sicilian, Finnish vs. Estonian, Russian vs. Ukrainian, Turkish vs. Azeri).

The paper will examine the criteria underlying the word *language* and its cognates in the Scandinavian languages, related to and contrasted to concepts for varieties of languages (dialects, sociolects etc.). The aim is to present a workable set of such criteria and apply it on some concrete cases, primarily in Scandinavia, but hopefully with some relevance even for other areas.

Reference

Eloy, Jean-Michel (2007): La proximité des langues, in: J.-M. Eloy, and T. Ó hÍfearnáin (eds.) (2007): *Langues proches - langues collatérales. Near Languages - Collateral Languages. Actes du Colloque International réuni à Limerick, du 16 au 18 juin 2005*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 13-26.