

NORWEGIAN

COUNTRY: Norway

POST: Oslo

This language is part of the Scandinavian or Nordic group.

From the mid-sixteenth century until 1850, those who lived in the towns of Norway, which was a dependency of Denmark, had to read, write and even speak Danish, which was called "Riksmal" (State language), while the country people continued to use their dialects. By the end of the 19th century, "Landsmal" (country language) was developed on the basis of these dialects. Today both these languages are used in Norway and are equivalent in public use and in the schools. However, the names of both have changed: the "state language" is now called the "book language" (Bokmal, spoken in Oslo), and the "country language" has become "neo-Norwegian" (Nynorsk).

Bokmal or Riksmal has retained many elements common to Danish in its vocabulary and morphology. On the other hand, it is very similar to Swedish in its phonetics, because like Swedish it has two types of tones or accents. Norwegian also has a very distinctive melody: the tone is quite often raised at the end of an affirmative statement as if a question were being asked or irony being injected. Riksmal has a number of words borrowed from German and French.

Nynorsk continues to use three genders. Like Swedish, it has retained many coloured vowels in the inflections of nouns and verb endings. Nynorsk is very pure and contains only a very few foreign terms, most of them Danish or German.

With its historical and dialectic tendencies, Nynorsk emphasizes the specifically Norwegian characteristics of the language, while Riksmal as it is spoken in Oslo is easily understood by Swedes and easily learned by Danes.