

Preface

Helge Dyvik will be 70 on December 23, 2017. We are proud to present this volume of linguistic studies by colleagues from near and far who have welcomed the opportunity to honor Helge and his career. The title is a take on the song 'I Am the Very Model of a Modern Major-General' from the Gilbert & Sullivan comic opera *The Pirates of Penzance*. Although the song, which Helge knows and enjoys, is a parody packed with hyperbole, our admiration of Helge's academic achievements can hardly be overstated, for reasons which will soon become apparent.

Helge grew up in Bodø in northern Norway. Already when he was quite young, he showed a special interest in languages. He sometimes wrote his homework assignments in verse, and he was in fact a bit of a problem for his language teachers, because he knew more than they did. He had a special fascination for Professor Henry Higgins in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, and he read Otto Jespersen's *The Philosophy of Grammar* while at school – early signs that he was headed towards a life in linguistics. Once he was done with school, he could hardly wait to begin his university studies, so he spent a lot of his free time during his military service studying Latin, much to the amazement of his fellow soldiers.

Once finished with school and the military, Helge left provincial Bodø and traveled south. He felt he had come to the big city when he arrived at the University of Bergen to commence his studies, and his first subject was phonetics. His undergraduate degree also included English and Scandinavian language and literature. He received a bachelor's degree in 1972 and continued studying Scandinavian languages for his graduate degree in 1976. His studies also included a spell at the University of Durham in England, where he studied Old English language and literature and enjoyed wearing a gown to the formal dinners at the dining hall. Back in Bergen he studied Vietnamese and Cantonese.

From 1974 to 1981 Helge was employed at the University of Bergen as a research assistant and later lecturer in Old Norse, and during this period he participated in a project on the grammar of the language. It was his responsibility to treat the syntax of Old Norse, and his intention was to write his doctoral dissertation on this topic. The first sentence of his dissertation is 'Er lingvistikken en empirisk vitenskap?' (Is linguistics an empirical science?), and the reader can perhaps guess where it goes from there. Helge wanted a modern linguistic framework for describing the syntax of the

old language, but found that the transformational generative grammar of the time did not measure up. Rather than being about Old Norse syntax, the dissertation ended up proposing a new model for grammatical description, one which had much in common with Lexical Functional Grammar, which was being developed at the same time. If Helge's dissertation had been written in English rather than Norwegian, we feel certain that it would have been influential on the international stage.

In 1983 Helge became professor of general linguistics. During his career he has had an unusually broad range of interests. He has done research on Old Norse and Old English phonology (umlaut and breaking), Old Norse syntax (passive and the development of articles), and runology (interpretation of runic inscriptions). He has also studied Vietnamese syntax (classifiers and topic constructions). Throughout his career he has been engaged in foundational issues in linguistics.

In the 1980s Helge became interested in computational linguistics. In the late 1980s and early 1990s he developed PONS, an experimental system for machine translation. The system took advantage of structural similarities between the source and target languages to take shortcuts during the translation process, thereby achieving a compromise between linguistic sophistication and efficiency.

From 2001 to 2004 he led the project From Parallel Corpus to Wordnet in which the *Semantic Mirrors* method for deriving semantic information from translations was developed. Based on the assumptions that semantically closely related words should have strongly overlapping sets of translations, and that words with wide meanings should have a higher number of translations than words with narrow meanings, the method formulated definitions for semantic concepts such as 'synonymy', 'hyponymy', 'ambiguity' and 'semantic field' in translational terms.

In 1999 Helge initiated Norwegian participation in the international Parallel Grammar project, and he led the development of NorGram, the Norwegian ParGram grammar based on Lexical Functional Grammar. After the initial NorGram project, the grammar has been used in many other projects. From 2003 to 2007 Helge led the Bergen group participating in the LOGON machine translation project, in which translation was done not only from one language to another (from Norwegian to English), but also from one syntactic framework to another (from LFG to HPSG). For this project Helge added a Minimal Recursion Semantics projection to NorGram to enable semantic transfer-based translation. NorGram has also been applied in the projects TREPIL (the Norwegian Treebank Pilot Project) and XPAR (Language Diversity and Parallel Grammars); the latter formulated formal principles for aligning monolingual treebanks at phrase and word levels based on translational correspondences at predicate-argument level.

Helge played a leading role in the INESS project (Infrastructure for the Exploration of Syntax and Semantics), which ran from 2010 to 2017. This project created NorGram-Bank, a large treebank for Norwegian Bokmål and Nynorsk, by parsing a corpus auto-

matically with NorGram. Helge was responsible for the further development of NorGram throughout the project, and his insightful analyses of practically every syntactic construction in the language has resulted in a treebank with very detailed syntactic annotation. The combination of Helge's thorough understanding of all aspects of Norwegian grammar and his extraordinary talent for implementation has resulted in a computational grammar of great sophistication.

Helge has had many collaborations with colleagues outside of Bergen. In the academic year 1996/1997 he was affiliated with the research group *Contrastive Analysis and Translation Studies Linked to Text Corpora* at the Centre for Advanced Study in Oslo. He spent several sabbaticals at the Palo Alto Research Center in California and developed good relations with its natural language research group. He has recently done research on Norwegian language subnorms and has become involved in the BRO dictionary project. He is currently affiliated with the research group *SynSem: From Form to Meaning – Integrating Linguistics and Computing* at the Centre for Advanced Studies in Oslo.

Helge has had a number of responsibilities outside of his duties at the University of Bergen. One of his most important appointments was as the chair of the Language Council of Norway's Committee for Language Standardization and Language Observation, a position in which he served from 2007 to 2014. The Language Council is the state advisory body for the Norwegian language in both its written forms, Bokmål and Nynorsk. The committee worked on a variety of issues concerning language standardization, revision of the orthography of Norwegian, the management and future of monolingual lexicography for Norwegian, nondiscriminatory language in the media, etc. Helge's approach in dealing with all these issues was that all decisions should be based on explicit reasoning, and that every practical decision should be anchored in linguistic theory in a principled way.

Unlike some of his younger colleagues, Helge is active in social media, especially Facebook. *Språkspalta* (The Language Column) is a Facebook group which counts some 34,000 members, many of whom have very strong opinions about the Norwegian language – opinions that are not necessarily based on facts or research. Helge is a veritable beacon of enlightenment in this environment that most linguists shun like the plague. He is untiring in his attempts to educate this group about language and linguistics, and there is hardly any question or statement he is not able to offer insightful comments on. His contributions about etymology and language history are especially valued. Helge's posts in *Språkspalta* are concise and highly informative, often with a touch of humor, though he does sometimes get exasperated, especially when he has to repeat – again and again – that languages change naturally, or that Bokmål is not Danish, or that spoken language and written language are two different things. Faithful members of *Språkspalta* describe him as a hero and a guru, eminent and elegant, practical and pedagogical, a knight in shining armor battling ignorance and prejudice.

Helge is well known for his sense of humor. When in working with NorGram we sometimes came upon a feature of the Norwegian language that was practically impossible to find a good solution for, Helge would often joke that he would probably be better off just changing the language, something he could easily do because of his influence with the Language Council. Helge has fun with language whenever he has a chance. Puns, plays on words, rhymes, every way of playing around with languages comes naturally to him all the time. His poems, mostly produced for and performed at special academic occasions, have become famous, and not just at our department. When the University of Bergen had its fiftieth anniversary as a university in 1996, Helge was commissioned to write and perform a prologue for the celebration. For this occasion he wrote nearly 2000 words in 370 lines of verse. Helge dismisses these writings as *rimerier* (rhymings), but we who know him well, know better; if he hadn't chosen to be a linguist, he could equally well have been a poet.

It is with a certain melancholy that we celebrate Helge's career with this festschrift. On the one hand, we are happy to congratulate him on (soon) reaching the ripe old age of 70. On the other hand, it is hard to imagine our work environment without him, and we will certainly miss his important contributions to the department's teaching, supervision and administrative work. But luckily for us, he will not be disappearing. He will be transformed from professor to professor emeritus, but since he's never really believed in transformations, we don't expect this to have much of an effect on his work ethic. We look forward to having him as a colleague and friend for many years to come.

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