

## Writing skills among Norwegian Americans – what may their letters reveal?

Arnstein Hjelde & Camilla Bjørke\*

**Abstract.** The Norwegian emigration to America created an urgent need for literacy among emigrants; for the first time, writing letters became an important skill for preserving ties with the family in the “old country”. However, few of the early emigrants were trained for this task even if they had been through a compulsory schooling. The school in the first half of the 19th century was closely linked to church, with the aim of preparing pupils for confirmation. Thus, the curriculum focused on reading and memorizing religious texts, but not on writing. However, towards the end of the 1800s, educational reforms in Norway had introduced a broader curriculum, including writing, which improved the literacy of subsequent emigrants. This study examines and compares certain linguistic features in letters from two periods: the early letters (prior to the Civil War) and those written in the early 1900s. The early letters are written by emigrants who had learned to read in school, but not to write, and thereby had to compensate this lack by drawing on other experiences, like what they had learned by reading religious texts. The more recent letters were written by emigrants who had learned to write in the secularized school in Norway or by second generation immigrants, who indeed had learned to write English, but were not sufficiently trained in utilizing this skill in the heritage language. The preliminary analysis reveals shifts in writing practices, including a decline in topicalization and changes in possessive structures over time. Early letters predominantly featured prenominal possessives and minimal compositional definiteness, while later letters showed an increase in both these features, which can be interpreted as if the spoken variety gained more importance as a norm for writing over the investigated time span.

**Keywords.** literacy; letter writing; topicalization; V2; prenominal and postnominal possessives; compositional definiteness

**1. Background and research question.** The emigration from Norway to America started in 1825. During the following century, about 800,000 chose to leave. Many of the emigrants had a rural background and sought to continue the traditional way of living by settling down in farming communities among their countrymen. During the first decades of emigration, the decision to leave had huge consequences: emigrating probably meant never seeing family or the home place again. For the first time in their lives, letters became an important means of preserving family ties across the Atlantic, as well as distributing information about the new land (see Mathiesen 2022). The importance of literacy changed dramatically during this period among common people, from being relevant for religious life in the early 1800s to being a prerequisite for living and acting in a modern democracy a century later.

Before 1860, the rural school in Norway was rather limited; typically, it was an ambulating school for pupils from the age of 7–8 years up to around age 15 and lasted 2–3 months a year (Høigård & Ruge 1963: 83). It was closely linked to the church, where the main purpose was to prepare for confirmation. Thus, the curriculum focused on religion, including reading religious texts and memorizing hymns. Consequently, schooling taught the pupils to

---

\* Author(s): Arnstein Hjelde ([arnstein.hjelde@hiof.no](mailto:arnstein.hjelde@hiof.no)) & Camilla Bjørke ([camilla.bjorke@hiof.no](mailto:camilla.bjorke@hiof.no)), Østfold University College, Norway.

read, while writing skills were barely needed in rural Norway. These circumstances changed when emigration placed families on each side of the Atlantic; a general need and motivation arose among the public for acquiring these skills. These emigrants, who hardly had any formal training in writing, represented the first category of writers in our study.

In 1860, the Norwegian school was reformed, and topics like history and geography, mathematics and writing gained importance (Høigård & Ruge 1963: 83). Hence, emigrants who had been through this reformed school represent a second category, as they were much better accustomed to writing than the previous generation of emigrants. Vannebo (1984: 112) states that in Norway, reading skills were widespread in the early 1800s, while writing skills were not widespread until the 1880s.

Finally, a third category of letter writers would appear: they were second- or subsequent-generation emigrants who had become literate in America. These students went to the American public school and became literate in English. Many of them had been to the Norwegian-American parochial school, where they had learned to read and, to some extent, write Norwegian.

During the investigated period (1847–1914), Norway underwent a transformation into a modern society where literacy became an important part of life. This change is clearly seen in the Norwegian mail service; in 1848, 700,000 letters were distributed (domestically and internationally), and this figure surpassed 60 million in 1910 (Statistics Norway 1995: 508).

Thus, access to – and importance of – literacy changed dramatically during this period. As a result, letters written by emigrants before the mid-1800s, on the one hand, and in the early 1900s, on the other, should expose the writing skills of two different types of writers. The oldest letters were written by emigrants used to writing under certain conditions; they relied on a strategy in which they draw heavily on model texts – that is, religious texts related to schooling and church. The letters from the 20th century were probably written by another kind of writer, first-generation immigrants accustomed to writing Norwegian from Norway, or second-generation immigrants with literacy training in Norwegian parochial schools, as well as in English from the public school.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, this latter group would be familiar with personal letters as a genre; Øverland (2011: 57) claims that letters prior to 1870 had the purpose of providing information about the new country and were intended for a wider audience. Later, letters became more private and personal and could express intimacy, personal feelings, and thoughts. In this pilot study, we examine and compare the writing skills of these two groups of Norwegian-Americans.

There are obvious differences between oral and written language (Chafe & Tannen 1987); this difference is partly linguistic, related to such aspects as vocabulary and style, as well as social and ideological – that is, related to status. The prestigious written language was not considered a reflection of the spoken language but rather as another language with other rules; to write was to formulate linguistic structures very distinct from the spoken language. Thus, the influence of the writer's own vernacular is limited. Haugen (1953: 112–122) studied letters written to *Decorah-Posten* in 1936 and found that people wrote surprisingly well with only scarce influence from their spoken vernacular; such oral traits occurred in about half of the letters and were normally limited to one per letter.

---

<sup>1</sup> Although these two last types of writers from the early 1900s are very different (America born vs. first generation immigrant), we generally lack the biographical information needed to distinguish them in our analysis.

In contrast to speech, writing represents carefully planned language production. Thus, by examining how Norwegian heritage speakers (HSs) wrote, we also gained a more holistic insight into their total linguistic competence. A complicating factor for the present study is the language situation in Norway during this period. Due to four hundred years under Danish rule (1380–1814), Danish had become the only written language in Norway. When Norway broke out of the union with Denmark in 1814 and shortly after entered a union with Sweden, Danish continued to be the written standard. However, as the National-Romanticism ideology of the 1800s stressed the connection between nation and language, the need for a Norwegian written language on its own became evident. One option was to “Norwegianize” Danish in several reforms, and the first major one was in 1907.<sup>2</sup> This strategy led to today’s Bokmål. The extent to which these reforms were widely introduced in the Norwegian-American community is another matter (see Hjelde & Bjørke 2022).

In the selection of features to be examined, we decided to follow the results of earlier research on *spoken* heritage Norwegian (HN), as *written* HN has not yet been studied. Thus, we focus on a few features that have proved to change, namely *topicalization* and *V2*, *postnominal* versus *prenominal possessives*, and *compositional definiteness*. Several of these are also features that distinguish spoken Norwegian dialects from written Dano-Norwegian.

**2. Method and data.** The available American letters do not provide full insight into the variety of literacy among Norwegian emigrants. Above all, many were probably unable to write or, due to misfortune, did not feel like reporting back home. Additionally, only a fraction of letters have found their way into archives, and there might be reasons why these letters were found worthy.

For this study, we chose letters published by Øverland & Kjærheim in the seven-volume series *Fra Amerika til Norge* (1992–2011). The editors state that “the text is as accurate a copy of the original as possible,”<sup>3</sup> except that in some cases, they inserted a period followed by a capital letter to improve the readability (Øverland & Kjærheim 1992: 6). These volumes are electronically available at the Norwegian National Library (NNL).

This format is searchable, albeit with limitations, such as no distinction between lowercase and uppercase letters. Nor does it distinguish between hits in the letters, in the introduction, or in the commentaries from the editors. To illustrate this, we had to read through all hits to distinguish *hans* ‘his’ as a possessive from *Hans* as a surname, both in the letters and in the editors’ comments. To exemplify this, *hans/Hans* has 355 occurrences in Volume 1, but only 186 of them are possessives in the letters. This is often the case with all third person possessives, both singular and plural, but *hans/Hans* occurring both as a possessive and a surname in letters and commentaries is quite frequent, probably since the spelling has not changed in modern homeland Norwegian, while other possessives partly have: *hendes* ‘her’ in Dano-Norwegian versus *hennes* in modern homeland Norwegian have different distributions in the material; *hendes* is most frequent in the letters and in citations in the commentaries, while *hennes* appears exclusively in the commentaries.

---

<sup>2</sup> The other strategy employed was to establish a new written standard based on Norwegian dialects (Landsmaal/Landsmål/Nynorsk). In the present study, this is not taken into consideration as none of the letters examined were written under this standard.

<sup>3</sup> Our translation.

The NNL also has a limitation on displaying the number of hits; only the first 1,024 are listed.<sup>4</sup> Due to the thousands of hits, both in the letters and in the commentaries, we therefore did not examine the determiners *den/det/de* ‘that, those’, especially because they also perform as pronouns. We thus focused on *denne/de(t)te/disse* ‘this, these’.

We had to pay attention to the varying writing skills among the writers. Regarding the possessives, we had to be aware of the word form *vor* ‘our’, which is often the inexperienced writer’s realization of *hvor* ‘where’; ‘how’. The same concerns the alternative spelling *aa* for *o*: *vaar(es)*, *vaart*, and *vaare(s)* ‘our’. To complicate this, *vaar* also performs as the meaning of ‘spring’ in our material.

We chose two different methodological approaches. In our study of compositional definiteness and pre- versus postnominal possessives, we employed the search function in the NNL on determiners and possessives when harvesting data. Each hit was manually verified as relevant data and counted. Therefore, this part of the study includes 436 letters in the two volumes; alternatively, up to the limit of 1,024 displayed items was reached.

This method was not appropriate when studying topicalization and V2; thus, here we selected 10 letters from Vol. 1 (letters from 1838–1857, the early era) and 14 letters from Vol. 7 (letters from 1905–1914, the late era) and manually counted topicalizations and non-V2 structures. We wanted to employ letters written by “ordinary people,” in other words, to exclude educated people, as our aim was to examine how people with elementary education coped with varying degrees of writing skills. Unfortunately, we do not know the details of all the writers in this compilation, but we excluded writers with a family name that indicated a Danish civil servant pedigree. The content of the letters, as well as the recipients, should also indicate the writer’s background. Another problem is that the sender was not always the writer, as the less literate sought help from more experienced writers.

An additional challenge, especially with the older letters, is that they were commonly copied and distributed to potential emigrants who wanted information about America. Some of these letters were even edited and published in different newspapers. We tried to avoid such letters because the language was probably modified during the copying process(es).

### 3. Investigated features and preliminary findings.

3.1. TOPICALIZATION AND V2. Torp & Vikør (2014: 257) claim that the main difference between modern day Bokmål and Danish in the early 1800s is not morphology or orthography, but syntax. The so-called *chancellery style* of written Danish, a treasured style of writing, was heavily influenced by the German and Latin writing tradition; one of its characteristics was long, hypotactic sentences in which extensive and complex constituents were in the front or mid-part of the sentence (Torp & Vikør 2014: 258–259).

Much research on spoken HN in America during the last decade has focused on topicalization and V2 and the interrelation between these two phenomena (Eide & Hjelde 2015). In these studies, attention has been paid to cross-linguistic influence (CLI). Longitudinal studies of HN have shown that the tendency to topicalize a non-subject in declaratives has decreased over time, from around 40% of declaratives in the oldest recordings to less than half among today’s speakers, which is in line with English (Eide & Hjelde 2023).

---

<sup>4</sup> For this pilot study, with the adjustments we have made, we find this to be sufficient as we are confident that the majority of instances are displayed. For future study, however, a way needs to be found around this limitation.

Norwegian is a so-called V2 language; the finite verb is the second constituent in declaratives. This is linked to topicalization, as the fronting of a non-subject means that the subject will be allocated in the third position to the right of the finite verb. Furthermore, studies have shown that V2 violations have increased over the last few decades, probably due to CLI, as English does not have a similar V2 rule. It has been suggested that the increase in V2 violations is linked to reduced topicalization, as one consequence of reduced topicalization is a lower input of these particular types of V2 structures when acquiring HN (Eide & Hjelde 2023).

From the early era (1847–1857), we found that the letters contain an average of 43% topicalization, fairly in line with the 30–40% benchmark in homeland Norwegian. However, we see a large variation between the letters, with 69% and 17% as the high and low extremes, and a median of 51% (Table 1). These numbers are higher than in the late era (1905–1914), when the average is 21%, ranging from 28% to 0%, with a median of 21% (Table 2).

<b>Letter ID</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Percentage topicalization in declaratives</b>
20	1847	69%
29	1848	17%
30	1848	40%
32	1849	64%
44	1850	49%
49c	1850	53%
98	1854	53%
111	1855	29%
122	1856	33%
141	1857	47%
<b>Average</b>		<b>43%</b>

Table 1. Tendency to topicalize in the 19th century letters

<b>Letter ID</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Percentage topicalization in declaratives</b>
2	1905	18%
3	1905	22%
13	1905	11%
15	1905	23%
23	1905	28%
46	1906	13%
118	1908	20%
193	1911	26%
194	1911	21%
214	1911	27%
217	1912	19%
222	1912	0%
248	1913	14%
278	1914	26%
<b>Average</b>		<b>21%</b>

Table 2. Tendency to topicalize in the letters from the 20th century

We also find non-V2 structures, but surprisingly, they are attested in old and young groups alike. The instances in both groups are very few, and there are no indications that this has increased over time. (1a), (1b), and (1d) have a V3 structure, while (1c) is V2.

(1) a. Letter 30, 1848

Da jeg Have saa god Anledning at til sende nogle linjer  
 When I have so good opportunity to forward a few lines  
 angaaende min forfatning Jeg kan for det første lade Eder  
 regarding my condition I can for the first let you  
 vide at jeg med Kone og to Børn Lever Vel  
 know that I with wife and two children live well

‘Since I have such good reason to send you some lines regarding my constitution, I can first of all let you know that I and my wife and two children are living well.’

b. Letter 30, 1848

Dog Denne vei er alene en  
 However this way is alone one

‘However, this road is only one.’

c. Letter 30, 1848

Dog kan jeg ikke Nægte At gud arbeider i Blant os  
 However can I not deny that God works among us

‘However, I cannot deny that God works among us.’

d. Letter 2, 1905

Der Vi har havt rigtig meget moro  
 There we have had really much fun

‘There we have had a lot of fun.’

However, what we find somewhat puzzling is both the steep fall in topicalization between the two periods and the early non-V2 structures. At this stage, we cannot offer any convincing explanation for this, but we have the following hypotheses, which should be tested with more robust data:

- The fall in topicalization is in line with what is documented in recent studies on HN, a reduction that might be due to CLI (English has a lower tendency to topicalize than Norwegian) or a result of reduced stylistic variation due to attrition. However, this explanation poses a problem, since the letters were written more than one hundred years ago, while the change in HN probably took place among the 21st century’s HSs.
- The lower tendency to topicalize in the late era might be due to the writer’s inexperience with the written heritage language (HL) and more in line with what we typically find written in Norwegian as a second language (Berggren et al. 2012: 92–100). A common writing development among second language students of Norwegian is that at an early stage, they hardly topicalize (if at all).

- The old group had the complex structures of the chancellery style as a model in which the fronting of complex constituents is distinctive. The late generation was not familiar with this style; thus, they tended to follow the archetypical SVO structure.
- America-born Norwegian-Americans were alphabetized in English and felt more comfortable with English as a written language, which also facilitated the application of an English topicalization pattern when writing HL.

Regarding non-V2 structures:

- Non-V2 structures in the letters from the 1900s are accompanied by other features typical of CLI; thus, we find it plausible that V2 is targeted by CLI as well. However, CLI can hardly be an explanation for non-V2 in the older letters, as the writers here were adults when emigrating; thus, the V2 structure should be robust. However, the reason might be associated with the chancellery style. According to Hoel (2018: 453), V2 was not mandatory, as it is today; he especially identifies V2 structures in declaratives, but he indicates that there might be other syntactic structures associated with writing in the early 1800s that are not in use today. The two examples (1b) and (1c) are written by the same person, where (1c) has a V2 structure, and (1b) appears to have V3. The adverb *dog* is not a part of the Norwegian vernacular, thus the writer would not find much support in his own intuition. But similar *dog*-S-V structures can be found in contemporary writing, like the 1847 printing of The New Testament: *Dog dette haver du, at du hader de Nicolaiters Gjerninger, hvilke og jeg hader* ‘But you have this to your credit: You hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate’ (Revelation 2:6). The religious texts, including psalms, which were read and memorized, would also include many non-V2 structures (cf. Brorson’s (1694–1764) hymn *Mit Hierte altid vancker* ‘My heart always flutters’).

3.2. PRENOMINAL AND POSTNOMINAL POSSESSIVES. Possessive placement is an interesting feature in this context (Westergaard & Anderssen 2015). In the Norwegian homeland, possessives can be both prenominal and postnominal, as in (2a–b).

- (2) a. Mitt            hus  
       My.NEU    house.SG.IND  
       ‘My house’
- b. Huset            mitt  
       House.SG.DEF. my.NEU  
       ‘My house’

In NPs with a prenominal possessive, the noun is in indefinite form (2a), while in postnominal constructions, the noun must be in definite form (2b).

The placement of possessives is interesting for several reasons. In written Danish, prenominal possessives are the only option. During the first part of the 1800s, when Danish was the written language in Norway, prenominal possessives constituted the only input from texts.

In spoken Norwegian, in contrast, postnominal possessive placement is the unmarked option; prenominal possessive placement is chosen for contrasting purposes, and it has been suggested that the contemporary distribution between these two constructions has a ratio of 3:1, but there might be dialectal variation (see Eide & Hjelde 2023: 18–20). As the language ideology in Norway changed during the 19th century due to a stronger national awareness, some writers started to experiment with postnominal constructions, especially in oral-inspired genres,

such as different kinds of folklore. This trait found its way into public schools through Nordahl Rolfsen's popular readers from 1892; during the early decades of the 20th century, it became an integrated part of the Bokmål standard – as an alternative to the traditional Danish structure of prenominal possessives.

English has prenominal possessive placement as the only option, just like written Danish. Thus, possessive placement might serve as an interesting field in which two different contradicting patterns might influence – and confuse – an inexperienced writer. Prenominal possessive placement characterizes written language(s) per se, while postnominal possessives dominate the writer's vernacular and might interfere when writing.

Finally, we can take into consideration that in today's HN, the postnominal possessive pattern has expanded even more than in homeland Norwegian, in contrast to what could be expected if CLI played any role in this process.

To find any postnominal use of possessives in our material, we searched for all possessives in the 147 letters from the early era and the 289 letters from the late era. Hence, we examined the singular possessives *min, mi, mit(t), mine* 'mine'; *din, di, dit(t), dine* 'your'; *hans* 'his'; *hendes* 'her'; *sin, si, sit(t), sine, dens, dets* 'his', 'her', 'its' in genders and numbers.

Furthermore, we examined the plural possessives *vor(es), vort, vore(s)* 'our' in genders and plural, and *deres/Deres* 'your/Your [plural/polite form], their' and *eders/Eders* 'your/Your' [plural/polite form].

From the early era, we examined a total of 2,827 possessive tokens of those listed above, in which all but four showed a prenominal structure: *Gutten min* 'my son'; *Følge vaart* 'our entourage'; *Foffen hendes* 'her Foff' [someone's nickname]; *Svinene deres* 'their pigs'. We may therefore conclude that the postnominal use of possessives had not found its way to letter writers in the early era.

From the late era, we found 2,417 possessives, of which 39 have a postnominal position. These typically express a family relation: *gutten min* 'my boy'; *døtrene mine* 'my daughters'; *faareldrene deres* 'their parents', but also body parts: *nasan min* 'my nose'; *munden sin* 'his mouth'; *navlen hendes* 'her navel'. Finally, a great number of them express a relation toward daily life: *kirken vores* 'our church'; *huset vort* 'our house'; *værkstedet sit* 'his workshop'. The postnominal use of possessives thus reflects the private sphere, which is probably more easily influenced by spoken language.

There are not many possessives in the postnominal position compared to those in the prenominal position, but 10 times more occurrences in the late era might be considered a substantial increase. The increased frequency might be linked to a genre change; the early letters are intended to be read by many, while the late letters exhibit more private and intimate content for close relatives and friends. The postnominal pattern increasingly becomes a more relevant option in the Dano-Norwegian writing tradition from around 1900.

It might be noteworthy to mention that letters as a written genre consist of many typical genre-specific features, such as greetings and farewell phrases. These include the frequent use of possessives in first and second person, both in singular and plural, such as *min ven* 'my friend' and *deres sønner og brødre* 'your sons and brothers'. In our material, we exclusively find the prenominal use of possessives in these opening and closing phrases; they are of such a genre-specific and formulaic nature that they are still used this way in modern homeland Norwegian in written personal communication, such as *hilsen din venn NN* 'love, your friend NN'.



3.3. COMPOSITIONAL DEFINITENESS. Spoken Norwegian expresses definiteness with a suffixed article on the noun. In contrast to Danish (3a), Norwegian keeps the suffixed article on the noun, even in NPs, after a determiner. Such structures, as in (3b), are known as compositional definiteness.

- (3) a. *det*        *nye*        *hus*  
          the.neu.    new.def.    house.ind.  
          ‘The new house’
- b. *det*        *nye*        *huset*  
          the.neu.    new.def.    house.def.  
          ‘The new house’

Again, we see a conflicting pattern in the vernacular of an HN speaker and in written Danish – as well as English.

Because of the limitations in the displayed hits in NNL, we excluded the determiners *den/det/de* (see above) in this study and focused on *denne* ‘this’; *det(t)e* ‘this’; *disse* ‘these’. Among the 695 occurrences in the early era, we found only one occurrence, followed by a suffixed article in our material: *dette landets Anligender og Beskaffenhed* ‘this country’s affairs and conditions’.

In the late era, the same determiners *denne/de(t)te/disse* had decreased to 471 occurrences, but the use of compositional definiteness increased to 26 occurrences. Although we did not examine the determiners *den/det/de* (see §2), we tried to get an impression of the use by searching for them connected with some frequently used adjectives, such as *nye* ‘new’; *gamle* ‘old’; *store* ‘big’; *lille* (sg.)/*smaa* (pl.) ‘little’, as in *den/det nye* ‘that new’. We found none in the early era, but 20 in the late era: *det nye Aaret* ‘the new year’; *den gamle veien* ‘the old road’; *den store hæsten* ‘the big horse’; *den lille gutten* ‘the small boy’.

As with postnominal possessives, the use of compositional definiteness rarely occurs compared to spoken Norwegian, but we clearly observe an increase in both features from the early to the late era.

It is also interesting to note that van Baal (2022: 5) identified a third pattern as a novation in HN, an NP without the determiner, cf. (3c). This structure might resemble adjective incorporation, which is common in some Norwegian dialects (*nyhuset*), but adjective incorporation is realized as a compound and not as a multi-word phrase.

- (3) c. *Nye*        *huset*  
          New.DEF    house.SG.DEF.  
          ‘The new house’

This novation is also documented in the early letters, as in (4), even though these seem to be very rare. However, this may indicate that this novation had a modest start more than a century ago.

- (4) Letter 21, 1905

[...] *der*    *staar* *vi*    *begge*    *to*    *i*    *gamle*    *klæderne*    *vores*  
 [...] there stand we    both    two    in    old    clothes    our  
 ‘there we stand both of us in our old clothes’

**4. Conclusion.** In this preliminary study of Norwegian-Americans’ writing skills based on the letters that crossed the Atlantic in the mid-19th and early 20th centuries, we believe we have identified several interesting traits that deserve to be pursued.

Hence, in the following, we summarize and give a few methodological considerations for the research to come.

In the study of topicalization and V2, we found that during this period topicalization fell from more than 40% down to around 20%; the first percentage corresponds with spoken Norwegian, while the latter might be due to the writer's inexperience with written HL, and in line with what we find in written Norwegian as a second language. In both periods, we observed V2 violations, but they were limited to only a few occurrences. To gain more insight into this, we need to include a much larger dataset to ensure that the findings are more robust. We would also like to include a third measurement point to obtain a better understanding of the time at which the reduction of topicalization sets in. The same is the case for V2; we know that we can find non-V2 structures in these letters, but without a larger dataset, we cannot stipulate how frequent this phenomenon is. Closer reading is required here.

Postnominal possessives are very rare in the old material and not very common in the newer material, and their increased use might be linked to the emerging private nature of the letters. Prenominal versus postnominal possessives are more manageable to examine since the search function in NNL can easily provide data. However, in our work, we have only partly taken spelling variations into account – and it is difficult to predict the full range of the different spellings used. Nevertheless, we think these variations are important since writers with nonstandard spelling are probably also those who have the most distant relationship to written language and thus employ the widest set of strategies when struggling with the pen.

We observed an increase in the use of compositional definiteness between the two periods examined, and we have already commented on the difficulties a search on the most frequent determiners might pose. The particles are often used in other constructions, and the hit limit built into the NNL's search engine poses a problem here. Again, a close reading of the material would provide us with more data and, above all, provide more information on how common van Baal's (2022) definite constructions without a determinator really are.

## References

- van Baal, Yvonne. 2022. New data on language change: Compositional definiteness in American Norwegian. *Heritage Language Journal* 19(1). 1–32.
- Berggreen, Harald, Kjartan Sørland & Vigdis Alver. 2012. *God nok i norsk? Språk og skriveutvikling hos elever med norsk som andrespråk [Good enough in Norwegian? Language and writing development in pupils with Norwegian as a second language]*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm.
- Chafe, Wallace & Deborah Tannen. 1987. The Relation between written and spoken Language. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 16. 383–407.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2155877>
- Corneliussen, E. (reviewer). 1847. *Vor Herres og Frelzers Jesu Christi nye Testamente*. Christiania: C. A. Dybvad.
- Eide, Kristin Melum & Arnstein Hjelde. 2015. Verb second and finiteness morphology in Norwegian heritage language of the American Midwest. In B. Richard Page & Michael T. Putman (eds.), *Moribund Germanic Heritage Languages in North America*, 64–101. Leiden: Brill.
- Eide, Kristin Melum & Arnstein Hjelde. 2023. Linguistic Repertoires: Modeling Variation in Input and Production: A Case Study on American Speakers of Heritage Norwegian. *Languages* 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages8010049>

- Haugen, Einar. 1969 [1953]. *The Norwegian Language in America: a Study of Bilingual Behavior*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Hjelde, Arnstein & Camilla Bjørke. 2022. Reading skills among young Norwegian American heritage speakers in the early 1900s. In Kelly Biers & Joshua R. Brown (eds.), *Selected Proceedings of the 11th Workshop on Immigrant Languages in the Americas*, 18–28. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press. <http://www.lingref.com/cpp/wila/11/paper3603.pdf>
- Hoel, Oddmund Løkensgard. 2018. Unionstida med Sverige (1814–1905) [The union period with Sweden (1814–1905)]. In Agnete Nesse (ed.), *Norsk språkhistorie IV: Tidslinjer [Norwegian Language History IV: Timelines]*, 425–502. Oslo: Novus.
- Høigård, Einar & Herman Ruge. 1963. *Den norske skoles historie [A history of the Norwegian school]*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oslo: J. W. Cappelens forlag.
- Mathiesen, Olav Henrik. 2022. *The Epistolary Practices of Norwegian Emigrants and the Emergence of a Transatlantic Public Sphere, ca. 1835–1870*. Oslo: University of Oslo dissertation.
- Rolfsen, Nordahl. 1892. *Læsebog for folkeskolen [Reader for the Common School]*. Kristiania: Dybwad Forlag.
- Statistics Norway. 1995. *Historical Statistics 1994*. Official statistics of Norway, C 188. Kongsvinger, Oslo.
- Torp, Arne & Lars S. Vikør. 2014. *Hovuddrag i norsk språkhistorie [Trends in Norwegian Language History]*. Oslo: Gyldendal.
- Vannebo, K. I. 1984. *En nasjon av skriveføre. Om utviklinga fram mot allmenn skriveferdighet på 1800-tallet [A nation of literates. The development towards general literacy in the 19th century]*. Oslo: Novus.
- Westergaard, Marit & Merete Anderssen. 2015. Word order variation in Norwegian possessive constructions. In Janne Bondi Johannessen & Joseph C. Salmons (eds.), *Germanic Heritage Languages in North America: Acquisition, Attrition and Change*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Øverland, Orm & Steinar Kjærheim. 1992. *Fra Amerika til Norge: Norske utvandrerbrev 1838–1857 [From America to Norway: Norwegian emigrant letters 1838–1857]*. Vol. I. Oslo: Solum
- Øverland, Orm. 2011. *Fra Amerika til Norge: Norske utvandrerbrev 1905–1914 [From America to Norway: Norwegian emigrant letters 1905–1914]*. Vol. VII. Oslo: Solum.