

## Stylising a “Jewish Accent” within Norway’s 19th-Century Language Ecology

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“You allow yourselves to be aggrieved by our language. Many of us arrived in the country as adults and speak imperfectly. It has become its own kind of humour, all these jokes with broken speech about Isak.”

Line delivered by the character Feige in Eva Scheer’s genealogical novel *Vi bygger i sand* (*We build upon sand*) (1948, p. 232; my transl.).

Throughout its recorded history, Norway has been characterised by a relatively high degree of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic homogeneity. Within the political-ideological climate that slowly took shape after Norway in 1814 withdrew from its centuries-old union with Denmark, this homogeneity was increasingly overstated in ways that echoed the nationalist and national-romantic ideological currents of the period. In the decades around 1900, extensive assimilationist policies were directed at minority groups perceived by many as “un-Norwegian”, most notably the Indigenous Sámi population. In the same period, Norway also acquired a new minority group through Jewish immigration. Yet when the first Jewish individuals settled in Norway, they found that they had been preceded by a host of cultural imaginaries of what Bauman (1998) has termed “the abstract Jew”. Newspapers, magazines, and a wide range of literary texts abounded with representations of the stereotypical “Jew”, who was frequently recognisable above all through his linguistic style.

This paper examines the Norwegian branch of a long-standing European tradition of anti-Semitic (or allo-Semitic) caricature in which language plays a central role. Drawing on analyses of a wide range of mass-media texts, the characteristics of the “Jewish accent” are identified, after which the phenomenon of stylisation is set against the language ecology that prevailed in Norway in the decades around 1900. A key aim is to consider whether this may offer a partial explanation for why the dominant language of Jewish immigrants, Yiddish, rather rapidly lost ground in the period leading up to the Second World War (cf. Hårstad, 2025).

### References:

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