**Language and Culture Show and Tell: Norwegian**

**Dr Elettra Carbone**

**Transcript**

**Visit Norway**

Imagine that you have decided to travel to Norway. You search for ‘travel to Norway’ and the first link that comes up is from the tourist website Visit Norway. The link is called ‘Travel to an Unspoilt Norway’. You click on it and the first thing you see when you are redirected to the website is a video moving from one dramatic landscape to the other. There is no doubt that nature is the focus here and, as suggested by the link, this is indeed mostly an ‘unspoilt’ nature where even man-made elements and people get lost or become one with the dramatic scenery.

**The First British Travellers to Norway**

You might not be surprised to find out that landscape was also what attracted the first wave of British travellers to **Norway** (and most of Scandinavia) in the early nineteenth century. As Britain became more and more urbanised and industrialised, Scandinavia become increasingly popular as travellers searched for less trodden paths leading away from the Grand Tourists of Southern Europe and closer to a wild and unspoilt nature. From the 1830s onwards Scandinavia and Iceland also became more accessible thanks to the development of public transport and the introduction mid-century of regular passenger ships across the North Sea. Scandinavia became fashionable both as a destination and as the topic of travel literature with the majority (50%, in fact) of travel accounts about the region being written by British travellers.

**UCL Collections**

An example of these early British representations of an uncorrupted Norwegian nature can be found in one of UCL's many museum and library collections. At UCL Art Museum, part of UCL Culture, we have seven engravings by the artist John Linnell, The Elder (1792-1882) based on drawings by the painter Edward Price (1800-1885). As an artist, Price would have been all but forgotten had it not been for his journey to Norway in 1826, which led to the publication of his journal *Norway. Views of Wild Scenery* in 1834. Price gave Linnell the task to turn some of his drawings in engravings which would then be used to print illustrations for his book. What we have at UCL are the seven engravings Linnell created for Price between 1827 and 1828, engravings that were never used when Price finally published his book in 1834. Price ended up commissioning 21 new illustrations to another engraver called David Lucas when Price and Linnell fell out.

My name is Elettra and, as Lecturer in Norwegian Studies at UCL, I will guide you through the landscape representation of one of the engravings at the UCL Art Museum called ‘View across the Fiord from Herrinsholmen’. I will use this illustration in a first instance to introduce you to some words (in Norwegian) that are essential for the description of Norwegian landscape. We will then also briefly use these words to understand one specific aspect of how the Norwegian noun system works before coming back to the context in which these engravings were produced.

**Herrinsholmen**

Let’s start by looking at Linnell’s engraving after Price. Like most of his fellow travel writers, in his book about his journey to Norway Price is mostly concerned with representing dramatic natural scenes somehow reminiscent of the panoramic views we saw earlier when landing on the website Visit Norway. Price here is wandering on what is today known as ‘Herandholm’, which he calls ‘Herrinsholm’. ‘Holm’ in this place name means the same in Norwegian and in English – it’s an islet, in this case one located in the Hardanger Fjord in the county of Vestland (Vestlandet, in Norwegian). This is a region that, due to its characteristic landscape, played an important role at a time when Norway, which in the nineteenth century was part of Sweden, tried to build its national identity. The famous painting *Bridal Procession on the Hardanger* (*Brudeferd i Hardanger*) from 1848 by the Norwegian Romantic painters Hans Gude (1825-1903) and Adolph Tidemand (1814-1876) is an example of this as it synthesizes landscape and cultural elements associated to Norwegian-ness.

But let’s go back to our engraving of Herandholm by Linnell… Which elements make up this picture? Can you match the Norwegian words for natural elements on the side with what you see in this image? Do these words remind you of any English words (or of words in other languages you know for that matter)? The words are…

(en) fjord

(en) sjø

(ei) sky

(en) himmel

(et) fjell

Ok, let’s check together...

**Fjord** means **fjord**. Now, it might not be very clear from this engraving but what we see here is part of the Hardangerfjord as you might remember from the map I showed you earlier. **Sjø** means **sea** – the words might not look similar but they sound similar and they actually come from the same root. **Sky** might look like the English **sky** but it actually means **cloud**. This is quite interesting as the word sky in English actually derives from the same Old Norse word as **sky** which means cloud not **sky**. **Himmel**, on the other hand, means **sky** in Norwegian. If you know German, for instance, this is the same word. Finally, the word **fjell** in Norwegian means **mountain**. This word actually exists in English too as **fell** which also comes from the Old Norse and indicates a high and barren landscape feature.

**Norwegian and the gender of nouns**

From the landscape words we just used to describe Linnell’s engravings after Price you will have seen quite a few similarities between Norwegian and English in terms of vocabulary. We can however also observe one key grammatical difference between the two languages. Have a look at the words and their translation again and see if you can work it out…

[wait a few seconds]

Can you see that the Norwegian nouns have the words **en**, **ei** and **et** in front of them. These little words are called indefinite articles and they are used the same way as **a** or **an** in English. However, while whether you use a or an in English is determined by the pronunciation of the noun (whether the word starts with a consonant or a vowel sound), in Norwegian the indefinite articles vary according to the grammatical gender of the noun in question. Norwegian has three genders, namely masculine (**en**), feminine (**ei**) and neuter (**et**). There is no simple way to tell the gender of any noun only by looking at it (even if there are a few patterns). However, since **en**, **ei** and **et** clearly show gender, it is a good idea when studying Norwegian to learn these indefinite articles together with the nouns. English nouns don’t have grammatical genders but nouns in lots of other foreign languages do – French, German, Italian, Spanish and so on.

Based on what I just explained, can you remember what the gender of these words is?

[wait a few seconds]

Ok, so **fjell** is neuter, **fjord**, **himmel** and **sjø** are masculine and **sky** is feminine.

**Price’s journey to Norway: the traveller vs the tourist**

As I mentioned earlier on, this engraving after Price by Linnell was supposed to be one of a set of illustrations for Price’s travel book on Norway called *Norway. Views of Wild Scenery* published in 1834. In the book Price writes about his experiences as he wanted to verify ‘the ardent description of travelers in that country’ and ‘to explore the mysteries of the western fi-ords’, as he says in his opening paragraph (Price 1834: 1). And throughout his book, Price represents himself as a ‘traveller’. The use of this word is really important here, actually. What do you associate to the word ‘traveller’? And how does this word relate to the word ‘tourist’? While the word ‘tourist’ initially appeared in English in the late eighteenth century as a synonym for ‘traveller’, by the middle nineteenth century the word ‘tourist’ acquired more negative connotations. While the ‘traveller’ seems to be led by her/his self-directed interests, the ‘tourist’ follows beaten tracks and favours comfort and familiarity. Bear in mind that these are not definition as such but more references to how the words have primarily functioned. As a traveller, Price insists on emphasizing the hardship of the journey, like in the following passage:

The evening was wet and I could not get any thing to eat; neither could I obtain a boat to Bolstadoren […] I therefore crept into a hovel which was filled with newly-gathered hay, and having opened my umbrella to keep off the wet, which trickled through the roof, I slept till morning. (Price 1834: 34)

The wild nature, the adverse weather conditions (it’s always either too cold or too hot), the lack of means of communication and at times the lack of a proper shelter and food are all elements that are used to convey Price's heroic attempt to ‘map’ Norway by travelling as extensively as possible. So, if we want to take Price’s advice here, never forget to take your umbrella with you. And the next time you travel have a think about whether you are a traveller or a tourist.

**Further resources**

If you would like to find out more about Price’s journey or the history of British travel to Norway, here are some useful resources: you can, for instance, read his travel book from 1834 as the whole book is freely available online. And here you can read more about the Nordic countries and even learn more Norwegian if you like. Finally, if you would like to see Linnell’s artwork after Price, or anything else from our celebrated museum collection visit the UCL Art Museum website o and get in touch with UCL Art Museum to make an appointment

That’s all from me today but let me just finish by saying that I do hope you get to Norway at some stage. I also hope you are able to see some of these dramatic landscapes and maybe more… ‘Takk’ which is Norwegian for ‘Thank you!’ and see you next time!