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## TWO DIFFERENT LANGUAGES

*You need some connective  
word like "yet" or "but" here.*

It sounded like nonsense at first, and I wondered how I could ever understand it; after undergoing for a year the largely unintentional process of absorbing the language, Norwegian, I enjoyed speaking it more than I did English. The many similarities between Norwegian and English make the former quite easy to learn. Words like "arm," "mann," "hand," "penn," "glass," "kalender," "kontroll," "symbol," "bank," "karakter," "kombinasjon," and "land" hardly need to be learned at all. The Norwegians have borrowed "business," "bacon," and "all right" from English, complete with pronunciation. The abbreviation for "automobile" is not "auto," but it is "bil." Some Norwegian words, identical to words in English, have different, but similar, meanings, like "fly," which means "airplane," and "time," which means "hour." There are some similarities which seem to have no reason: why do "uttrykk" and "anta," which mean "express" and "assume," respectively, also have the same literal meanings as their English counterparts, namely "press out" and "take toward," although the literal and the practical meanings are far apart? The idioms "that has nothing to do with it" and "you can count on it," when translated literally, have the same meanings in Norwegian, although the principal

*What general  
condition does this  
illustrate?  
Tell us -*

meanings of both "count" and its Norwegian counterpart are the arithmetic operation.

Not only was I fascinated with such interrelationships between the two languages, but more interesting were the differences which I noticed. Norwegian pronunciation changes with time, as does English, but unlike us, the Norwegians revise their spelling to conform to the pronunciation, so that Norwegian is, compared with English, very phonetic. We Anglicize in speech, but not in writing, the words which we borrow; Norwegians do the opposite, as with "chauffeur," which they pronounce as in French but which they <sup>have</sup> respelled "sjåfør." The most striking part of Norwegian pronunciation is the intonation. Every question ends with a high pitch, and the pitch glides up and down elsewhere according to a? some rule which is easy to follow but hard to define.

As in German, Norwegian nouns acting as adjectives are often prefixed to the noun they modify, making it possible to compose acceptable words of any length. "Livsforsikringselskap," for example, means "life insurance company." Compound words are also used to designate "state hospital," "steamship company," and "hot water faucet." The

problem of whether to answer "yes" or "no" to negative questions, arising from the fact that the intended meaning is usually opposite to the logical meaning, does not exist in Norwegian, which has a special word for saying "yes" by denying negative questions. While this word could usefully be made a part of English, one that could not is the word which many Norwegians habitually add to abrupt-sounding sentences, as if to round them out. It has almost no meaning when used thus, but in any other context it means "therefore," so it has probably been used to lend the air of logical conclusions to shaky statements. Now, however, it is often used even at the ends of questions.

Learning Norwegian taught me new ways to regard things. If I had ever been asked to name the outstanding property of a fuse, I would have named its low melting point; a Norwegian, however, might well name the safety which it affords, since the Norwegian name for it means "assurance." I had always regarded a spring as a piece of metal shaped so as to provide elasticity and had never wondered what had been used for the purpose before metal springs could be made; the Norwegian word for "spring" gave me a clue, for it means the same as the word for

"feather." I had never noticed that light bulbs are similar in shape to pears until I learned that those two objects have the same name in Norwegian. Learning a new language made me take a closer look at the tool which I had been using for communication and made me see clearly that there is not only one tool for the job.

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*A first-rate essay — your tone is dignified but friendly, flexible but well-controlled; the personality which you present to the reader is agreeable without being obsequious and authoritative without being pontifical. Best of all, you talk interestingly about an interesting subject.*