

# The Semantic and Pragmatic Value of Norwegian Greetings the Last Hundred Years

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This article addresses changes in Norwegian greeting rituals during the last century seen from two viewpoints: First, an article in *Maal og Minne* (Lundeby 1995) against the answers to a questionnaire on greetings and address forms conducted by *Norwegian Ethnological Research (NEG)* in 2008. Secondly, the claims from the NEG corpus are tested against a modern text corpus with a wider age distribution. Using linguistic theories from semantics and pragmatics, the study finds that, with some exceptions, greetings with a semantic content related to religious belief, situation, task and time are replaced by greetings that are similar to primary interjections in that they no longer carry descriptive meaning. Because of that, they function as short, quick and context-free greetings to anyone, even to strangers, which makes it questionable to what degree they increase relational intimacy as claimed by Lundeby. The new greetings are described as empty, superficial and informal by the NEG-informants; the reasons for this, however, are thought to be their lack of the information, formality and tradition that the older greetings possess.

## 1 Introduction

In this article, Norwegian greetings during the last hundred years are seen through two lenses: First, the content of an article in *Maal og Minne* (Lundeby 1995) is compared to the answers to a questionnaire on greetings and address forms conducted by *Norwegian Ethnological Research (NEG)* in 2008. Secondly, the claims from the NEG corpus are tested against a modern text corpus with a wider age distribution. The article has two objectives: (a) to add to the limited body of linguistic research on changes in Norwegian greeting rituals, and (b) to gain insight into the attitudes and linguistic ideologies of those who have experienced such change.

In studies written in English, the term *greeting* is usually used only about what Goffman (1971: 79) calls an “access ritual”, i.e. an initial invitation to share in a mutual activity. For the opposite notion when access terminates, English studies prefer the terms *closing* (Akindele 2007), *leave-taking* (Rababa’h and Malkawi 2012), *parting* (Firth 1972) or *farewell* (Goffman 1971). This article, however, bases its discussion on a data set of metapragmatic comments in Norwegian about Norwegian *helseformer* [greeting forms], a term used in the present corpus for both opening and closing formulas. Therefore, the term *greeting* here is meant to cover both. Another study that does the same is Rash (2004), who uses it because the German verb *grüßen* too encompasses both greeting and leave-taking.

Greetings are among the most *formulaic* and *ritualised* forms of politeness (Watts 2003). Formulaic because they have been reduced from grammatical structures to extra-sentential markers of polite behaviour (ibid: 168, see also the semantic properties of greetings below), and ritualistic because they follow recurrent patterns restricted to time and place recognizable to and expected by the interlocutors (Terkourafi and Kádár forthcoming). Greetings are also linked to the term *routine formula*, meaning “highly conventionalized prepatterned expressions whose occurrence is tied to more or less standardized communication situations” (Coulmas, ed. 1981: 2). Routine formulas/rituals tend to build on traditions and serve a socially binding function among people who are familiar with them (Ong 2002).

The narrow interpretation of rituals is that of normative social conventions recognised by the vast majority of members of a society (Terkourafi and Kádár forthc.). In line with this, many studies have described greetings in specific cultures or languages. The literature ranges from the older works of Malinowski (1923) (Papua New Guinea), Irvine (1974) (West Africa), and Duranti (1997 [2009]) (Samoa) to newer studies such as Rash (2004) (Switzerland), Takekuro (2005) and Ide (2007) (Japan), Akindele (2007) (Southern Africa), Rababa’h and Malkawi (2012) (Jordan, Arabic), and Saberi (2012) (Persian). Among these, especially the older studies point to universal properties of greetings too. First, Malinowski emphasises their phatic function where the main aim is not to share information but to enhance social bonds (Duranti disagrees with Malinowski that it is the only goal). Second, languages are believed to have large frameworks of greetings which allow both

elaboration and reduction of forms depending on place and type of event, time of day, time elapsed since the last encounter, urgency (e.g. a passing greeting), number of individuals, and the interlocutors' relative age, social status and degree of familiarity (Firth 1972; Irvine 1974; Ferguson 1976). Third, a person's choice of greeting is "a strong indication of (his/her) belonging, social identification, or acculturation" (Coulmas 1994: 1293).

When looking at older studies on English greetings such as Goffman (1971), Firth (1972), and Ferguson (1976), it is not difficult to see that greetings are under constant change. Some greetings appear as new reduced forms of older ones. An example is *Hi!*, which according to Ferguson (1976: 148) is a reduction of *how are you* and a change observed "in the past forty years". Others become archaic such as *God be with you*, which no longer is used as a daily farewell greeting (ibid. 148). Firth (1972: 17) argues that religious greetings were more common in Europe in "earlier times when faith was stronger", something which may be linked to other studies on how secularisation has gradually replaced Christianity in Europe (McLeod and Ustorff 2003). Another typical feature is a strong tendency for greeting formulas to spread across language boundaries (Ferguson 1976). Sauciuc (2006) has studied this phenomenon in European languages and examples from her work are given in part 5.2.

To the best of my knowledge, there are very few works on Norwegian greetings. Aasen (1813–96), a Norwegian philologist best known for having created *Nynorsk*, one of Norway's official written languages, wrote about *Helsinga* 'greetings' in a letter dated 1852–53 (reprinted in Djupedal 1958) where he explains the use of common greetings from the area where he lived in North-Western Norway. Extracts from his work are used in part 5.1 below.

With regard to changes in Norwegian greeting rituals, the Norwegian linguist Einar Lundeby was Professor Emeritus when he published an article in *Maal og Minne* in 1995 with a title translatable as 'Intimatisation and brutalisation; some new features in Norwegian language use in the last fifty years' (see the references for title in Norwegian). In the article, he claims that "totally meaningless" (all translations from Norwegian are mine, KR) greetings have taken over but that these have also caused a higher degree of relational intimacy among Norwegians. The present article aims to discuss the claims made by Lundeby against the responses to a questionnaire about greetings and

address forms sent out by *Norwegian Ethnological Research* (NEG) in 2008. 90 % of the respondents were born before 1960, and thus, similar to Lundeby, grew up with other rituals than what they experience today. As mentioned above, when greetings are looked at as social conventions it is expected that people in a society share meta-knowledge about which greetings are appropriate to use when and to whom. What bothers the respondents of the questionnaire (hereafter called the NEG-data), however, is that they feel somewhat “out of sync” with the younger generation of Norwegians. Thus, rather than to think of greetings as social conventions that all people in the discourse community have in common, it may be useful to think of them as ingroup rituals (Terkourafi and Kádár *forthc.*) that some recognise and others do not, and the attitudes attached to them as something that defines the ingroup rather than the whole discourse community. This study finds that the NEG-data partly coincides with Lundeby’s claims, partly challenges them, and, generally, provides a fuller picture of Norwegian greetings during the last hundred years.

Greetings can be studied from many different perspectives within linguistic theory but this study focuses on two: a semantic perspective comparing greetings to interjections proper suggested by Ameka (1992) (cf. part 2) and a pragmatic perspective where greetings are related to politeness research and especially the notions of formality and intimacy (part 3). Part 4 addresses methodological issues, parts 5 and 6 present and discuss the NEG-data, and finally, in part 7, the claims from the NEG corpus are tested against a modern text corpus with a wider age distribution.

## 2 Greetings in a semantic perspective

Ameka (1992, 2006) groups greetings such as *hi*, *hello* and *bye* with interjections such as *oh*, *wow* (primary interjections), *okay* and *good* (secondary interjections) because they all express a speaker’s reaction toward an element in the linguistic or extralinguistic context, they may constitute an utterance by themselves, they do not take inflectional or derivational affixes, they are commonly accompanied by physical gestures, and they tend to receive a phatic interpretation. Many later discussions seem to build on Ameka’s framework (e.g. Wharton 2003;

Gehweiler 2008; Norrick 2012), and this study does the same in order to discuss to what degree greetings are “meaningless” as argued by Lundeby above.

According to Ameka, *primary interjections* are typically monomorphemic words that do not belong to any other word class, such as *oh, uh, ouch, oops* and *wow*. Primary interjections may be defined as nonlexical conversational sounds (Ward 2006), and, for this reason, Goffman (1981) described them as “response cries” and “non-words”. On the other hand, *secondary interjections* have a semantic form that dictionaries also group under other lexical classes such as *okay, good* (also classified as adjectives), *boy, shit, God* (also nouns), *damn, fuck, help* (also verbs) or *bloody hell, what on earth* (phrasal elements with lexemes from various word classes). These only function as interjections when they do not enter into construction with other word classes. Thus, whereas Ameka (1992) defines a secondary interjection such as *bloody hell!* as one with overt/independent semantic value (i.e. the lexemes themselves carry descriptive meaning), an interjection such as *wow* has less (Wharton 2003) or none (Goffman 1981) (see a critique in part 3 below).

Looking at an arbitrary webpage for learning European languages today ([www.babbel.com](http://www.babbel.com)) and seeing what greetings it introduces to beginners (assuming that those are high-frequency items), there are the initial greetings *Hej!* (Swedish and Danish), *Hallo!* (Dutch and German), *Oi!* (Portuguese), *Ciao!* (Italian), *Bonjour! Salut!* (French), and *¡Hola!* (Spanish). Among these, only the French *bonjour* ‘good day’ and *salut* ‘health’ carry semantic value. The rest are similar to primary interjections in that they do not. There are no religious greetings such as *Al-salāmu ‘alaykum* ‘peace be upon you’ found in Arab-speaking communities (Rababa’h and Malkawi 2012). An exception in Europe might be *Grüß Gott* which, according to Haumann et al. 2005, is common both as an opening and a closing in Austria and parts of Southern Germany. However, even though some interjections have less semantic content than others, it does not mean that they cannot be defined in terms of “semantics of use” (Kaplan 2004). This is the concern of pragmatics below.

### 3 Greetings in a pragmatic perspective

In a special volume on interjections in the *Journal of Pragmatics* (1992), Ameka (1992), Wierzbicka (1992) and Wilkins (1992) all argued against defining primary interjections as “non-words” because they are conventional, language specific elements known to the discourse community, and therefore not empty or meaningless to them. Greetings, which Ameka groups under the term *routine formula*, differ from interjections proper because they are always directed towards an addressee (i.e. they appear in adjacency pair format, cf. Schegloff 2007; Duranti 2009), and because they function as an intentional and socially expected reaction to more or less standard communication situations (cf. Coulmas 1981). Thus, one cannot substitute the greeting formula *hi!* with another interjection such as *oh!* even though none of them carry lexicalised semantic value, because pragmatically, only *hi* gives meaning in a greeting situation.

In addition to the claim that some greetings are “meaningless”, there are two other layman’s terms often used in relation to greetings in the present data that need to be grounded in pragmatic research: “intimacy” and “formality”. These are strongly related to studies on politeness, when politeness is defined broadly as encompassing “all types of interpersonal behaviour through which we take into account the feelings of others as to how we think they should be treated” (Kádár 2013: 24).

On the one hand, the concept of *intimacy* (i.e. to “build rapport” (Tannen 2005), “to show interpersonal involvement” (Scollon and Scollon 2012)) is linked to the informality by which intimates talk among themselves and where there is no need to be occupied with politeness. On the other hand, intimacy is linked to politeness research (Lakoff 1973; Brown and Levinson 1987; Scollon and Scollon 2012) when politeness is “the assumption that interaction and connection are good in themselves and that openness and niceness are the greatest signs of courtesy” (Lakoff 1990: 38).

The term *formality* is often mentioned as an opposite to intimacy. For instance, referring to Sifianou (1992), Watts (2003: 14) argues that whereas Greek politeness has much to do with showing “intimacy, warmth and friendliness”, English conceptualisation of politeness has more to do with “formality, a discrete maintenance of distance, and a wish not to impose upon addressees”. Thus, intimacy is associated with

closeness while formality is related to distance; both a wish to show distance due to hierarchical difference in age and/or status, i.e. *vertical distance* (Leech 1983: 126), and distance due to social distance which is here limited to length of acquaintance or lack of familiarity (strangers or out-group members), i.e. *horizontal distance* (Rygg 2012).

In European languages, formality is frequently mentioned with regard to pronouns of address: “The V-form (vous, Sie) is generally said to indicate formality, whereas the T-form (tu, du) embodies intimacy” (Bowe and Martin 2007: 98). In Norwegian, however, linguistic manifestations of formality are few (Fretheim 2005). Haugen (1978) elaborates on how the Norwegian language was in a transitional period in the early 1970s as a result of the younger generation rejecting elite culture, which had been the bearer of the V-pronoun *De*, a word that had never been part of the folk culture. Thus, an investigation in the early eighties (referred to in Braun 2014) reported that Norwegian informants aged 20–25 years used the T-form to anyone, even to strangers and people forty years older than themselves. Yli-Vakkuri (2005) argues that the same transitional period also affected greeting rituals in the Scandinavian countries. Lundeby (1995) is, to the best of my knowledge, the only article written about greetings before and after the transition in Norway. We get a clear picture of what Lundeby himself thinks of the change, but we do not know to what degree his views are shared by others. The corpus presented below is meant to provide a fuller picture.

#### 4 Corpus and analysis

The NEG-corpus is a corpus of essays written by 77 Norwegian individuals on the topic of Norwegian greetings and address forms (*Norske hils- og tiltaleformer*). It was collected by *Norsk Etnologisk Gransking* (*Norwegian Ethnological Research*) which regularly sends out questionnaires on a variety of topics to its members. The one in question was distributed in 2008 as a follow-up to a similar questionnaire from 1952.

The questionnaire<sup>1</sup> contains detailed questions such as: “How do you usually greet people you know (family members, neighbours, colleagues at work, superiors, school mates, and teachers) the first time you meet

1. <http://www.norsksfolkemuseum.no/PageFiles/1587/224.pdf>

them in the morning? [...] Does the greeting change during the day? Elaborate”. Questions related to leave-taking are such as: “What do you say when you leave home, when you say good bye to relatives and friends, when you leave work, meetings, public offices etc.? What do you say when someone leaves you? Does it vary with the situation?” The answers were, for a large part, hand-written essays with a length of 6–10 A4 pages relating to the informants’ own use and personal experiences. In the present study, the answers have been analysed by marking and counting every comment related to opening and leave-taking.

The informants have a large variety of occupational backgrounds, come from all regions in the country with an overweight from Eastern Norway, but with more women (61) than men (16). 90 % were born before 1960 (i.e. at least forty-eight years old in 2008) and report feeling somewhat “out of sync” with younger Norwegians, which makes it necessary to limit the scope from greetings as national conventions to ingroup norms. The most useful method to determine which pragmatic purpose a linguistic expression serves is to observe how it is recognised by members of the ingroup (Kádár 2013), here manifested as metapragmatic comments (reflections about one’s own and others’ contextualised language use, Spencer-Oatey ed. 2008: 333) from the NEG-informants. Comments are categorised in part 5 and further discussed in part 6. Translation from Norwegian to English has been done by the author but proofread by a professional translator familiar with both languages.

Even though I base this article mainly on the NEG-data and think most of their statements about which greetings are typical today resonate with Norwegians’ common sense, I find that it is a limitation not to be able to test the validity of their claims. Ideally, I would have liked to test it against a modern national spoken corpus with a wide geographical and generational distribution. However, most are small and local (e.g. the *NoTa-Oslo* (only Oslo) or the *BigBrother Corpus* (only people in their late teens and early twenties talking to each other)). Others are geographically wider (e.g. the *Nordic Dialect Corpus*) and contains spontaneous speech data but my impression is that there are few recordings of conversations between two people where greetings would naturally occur. Thus, I opted to compare the findings from the NEG-data to a written corpus for the following reasons:

The *NoWaC* (Norwegian Web as Corpus) is a web-based corpus of *Bokmål* Norwegian currently containing about 700 million tokens.<sup>2</sup> Hence, it is larger than the others with a wide geographical and generational distribution. However, the most important factor is that it is collected from the internet's .no top-level domain from November 2009 to January 2010 and, therefore, contains many language samples from web forums and e-mails where people do greet each other. Thus, when Johannessen and Guevara (2011) compared the *NoWaC* corpus to one other written and two spoken corpora, they found that although it resembled the written corpus in many ways, it did have more interjections (greetings are marked as interjections in the corpus) than the written corpus. The findings are presented and discussed in part 7. Below are the findings from the NEG-data.

## 5 Results from the NEG-data

The following findings are divided into three parts: 1) greetings mentioned as extinct, 2) greetings mentioned as common today, and 3) greetings believed to be under threat of extinction.

### 5.1 Extinct greetings

The following greetings were mentioned in the NEG-data as greetings that are no longer in use:

- *Guds fred* [God's peace]. Used as an opening ritual when entering someone's house.
- *Fred i huset* [Peace in the house]. Used as an opening ritual when entering someone's house.

I remember from my childhood that people greeted *Guds fred* when visiting a home. *Fred i huset* was also common. (NEG-data, female, born 1933, Northern Norway)

Aasen (in Djupedal 1958: 293), who writes about Western Norwegian greetings in a letter dated 1952–53, confirms their statements (his style

2. Accessible from <http://www.hf.uio.no/iln/tjenester/kunnskap/sprak/korpus/>

of Norwegian has been modified to modern *nynorsk*):

When you enter a house, the first thing you say is *Guds fred*, and when the people there are people you know, you go up to each of them, shake their hand and say *god dag* [good day], *god morgon* [good morning] or *god kveld* [good evening] depending on the time of the day. They answer you *Gud signe deg* [God bless you], and so should you when you are greeted.

Other greetings from the NEG-data:

- *Signe dagen* [bless (v.) the day (n. definite form)]. Ellipsis of '(God) bless the day'. Used as opening ritual when entering a place where others are gathered.
- *Signe stunden* [bless (v.) the moment/occasion (n. definite form)]. Ellipsis of '(God) bless the moment'. Used as opening ritual when entering a place where others are gathered.
- *Signe møtet* [bless (v.) the encounter (n. definite form)]. Ellipsis of '(God) bless the encounter'. Used when meeting someone.
- *Signe kvila* [bless (v.) the rest/break (n. definite form)]. Ellipsis of '(God) bless the break'. Used when meeting someone who is having a break.
- *Signe maten* [bless (v.) the food (n. definite form)]. Ellipsis of '(God) bless the food'. Used when entering a room where someone is eating or passing someone who is having a meal.
- *Signe arbeidet* [bless (v.) the work (n. definite form)]. Ellipsis of '(God) bless the work'. Used when entering a room where someone is working or passing someone who is working.

I remember from my childhood when we were out working in the field, the neighbour might come by and say *Gud signe arbeidet* or *signe maten* when we were having dinner. (NEG-data, male, born 1956, Northern Norway)

Aasen (in Djupedal 1958: 293–94):

When people sit working you say *Gud signe arbeidet*. Then they answer *takk for det* [thank (you) for that], *takk skal du ha* [thank you shall have] or something to that effect. If it happens that they are eating, you say *Gud signe maten* and they answer *takk* [thank (you)], and so shall you when someone comes and blesses your food.

More greetings from the NEG-data:

- *Godt mot* [good encounter]. *Mot* is related to *møte* ‘encounter’. Used when meeting someone.
- *Stå i fred* [stand in peace]. Used when meeting/passing someone who is standing.
- *Sit(t) i fred* [sit in peace]. Used when meeting/passing someone who is sitting.
- *Gå i fred* [walk in peace]. Used when meeting/passing someone who is walking.

When older people met on the road, one said *godt mot* and the other answered *like eins* [likewise]. When people conversing were approached by someone else, the newcomer greeted them with *stå i god fred* [stand in good peace]. If the answer was just *takk* [thank (you)], the newcomer was not welcome, but if the answer was *takk kom så til* [thank (you) come then to (us)], the newcomer could join in the conversation. (NEG-data, female, born 1929, Western Norway)

Aasen (in Djupedal 1958: 294):

When you meet someone on the road, you greet him with *godt mot* and the other answers *godt mot*. If you pass someone who sits resting, you say *sit i fred* or *Gud signe kvila* [God bless the rest]. He then answers *takk for det, velkommen til* [thank (you) for that, welcome to (us/me)], and so shall you when someone comes by and blesses your rest. If someone stands waiting in the road, you say *stå i fred*, and if you catch up with someone walking the same way, you say *gå i fred*, and when someone says the same to you, you answer him back with *takk for det, velkommen til*.

Many of the old greetings are related to Christian faith but were, as mentioned by NEG informants, not restricted to people with a personal faith. Another commonality is that they are linked to specific situations or tasks. However, there is no mention of differentiation in greetings relative to the interlocutor’s age, social status or degree of acquaintance. The greetings above have not only become archaic but are probably unknown to many Norwegians today. Interestingly, they are not mentioned at all by the thirty-six NEG-data informants from the East of Norway regardless of age, and one might therefore suspect that at

least some of them were linked to regional rather than to national traditions, or that they disappeared earlier from the East.

### 5.2 Common greetings today

The following greetings are mentioned in the NEG-corpus as new and typical greetings today. As will become apparent below, most of them are reduced or elliptical forms of older greetings.

- *Hei, hei hei, heisan* 'hi'

There are very few informants who do not state that *hei* is their most common opening ritual. *Heisan* is mentioned only by one. A few (8 people) from Eastern, Mid (Trøndelag) and North Norway state that they use *hei* or *hei hei* as a telephone closing.

According to Sauciuc (2006), who looks at greetings in different European languages from a historical linguistic viewpoint, *hei* and derivatives are interjectional borrowings from German into the three Scandinavian languages. *Hej* 'hi' was common in Swedish as far back as in the 1840s together with the derivative *hejsan*, but the semantic origin in German is unclear (ibid.). According to Lundeby (1995), its popularity came from the common belief at the time that the greeting derived from the Norse term *heill* 'healthy' or *heill ok sæll* 'healthy and happy'. The Norwegian equivalents *hei* and *heisan* were borrowed from Swedish and, according to Lundeby, became common in Norway as late as the 1970s and 80s. This is what one of the NEG-informants writes:

When I was a child and a youth in the 1940s and 50s, the word *hei* was never used as a greeting, at least not in Lofoten where I grew up. *Hei* was just a word to call for attention and tell someone to watch out. (NEG-data, female, born 1935, Northern Norway)

- *Hallo, halloen, hallois* 'hello'

*Hallo* is mostly mentioned as a telephone greeting in the NEG-data but 20% of the informants state that they also use *hallo* as an opening in face to face conversations:

## NORWEGIAN GREETINGS THE LAST HUNDRED YEARS

In the mornings, I greet people I know with *hallo* or *javel* [I see, all right] accompanied by *god morgen* (see under 5.3) and a little wave (NEG-data, female, born 1962, Southern Norway (Vest-Agder))

When I enter a room or someone comes towards me, I usually greet them with *hei* or *hallo*. Some years back, I probably would have said *morn* or *morn morn* (see below) (NEG-data, female, born 1946, Eastern Norway)

According to Sauciuc (2006), *hallo* is a borrowing from Middle German, originally derived from the imperative of the German verb *holen* ‘fetch’. The use on the telephone, however, is believed to be a result of American influence. For other uses of *hallo* in Norwegian, see e.g. Svennevig (2012).

- *Mor’n, morning, mornings*. *Mor’n* is a phonological reduction of *morgen*. *Morning* and *mornings* are probably forms inspired from English, but *morning* is also the word for ‘a morning’ in some Norwegian dialects. Used in early morning or when seeing someone for the first time that day.
- *Morn, morn morn*. Reduction of *morgen*, but used throughout the day as an opening ritual.
- *Morna (morn’a)*. Reduction of *morgen da* [morning then] and an ellipsis of *god morgen da* [good morning then]. Closing ritual any time of day.
- *Ha det*. An ellipsis of *ha det bra* (see under 5.3). Used when parting. *Ha det* is the most frequently mentioned closing ritual in the NEG-data.

When I grew up in the 1950s, I greeted grown-ups politely with *god dag* and *adjø* (see 5.3) but said *morn* and *morn’a* to other children and to adults I knew well. Today, I say *hei* and *ha det* to everyone. (NEG-data, female, born 1945, Eastern Norway)

Eastern Norway differs from the other regions in that they had reduced forms (*morn, morna*) even before the 70s. About 1/3 (31%) of the NEG-informants from this region mention *morn* as one of their most commonly used opening rituals even today.

- *Snakkes*. Ellipsis of *vi snakkes* [we speak (v. inf.) (with each other again)] Used with the same meaning as the English parting formula ‘talk to you later’.
- *Sees*. Ellipsis of *vi sees* [we see (v. inf.) (each other again)] Used with the same meaning as the English parting formula ‘see you later’.

(*Vi*) *snakkes* and (*vi*) *sees* were the second most mentioned closing rituals in the NEG-data after *ha det*.

### 5.3 Greetings under threat of extinction

Most of the NEG-informants report on greeting people *god morgen* [good morning] and half of them (49%) use *ha det bra* or *ha det godt* [have it good] on a regular basis. Further, 42% claim they use *god dag* [good day] either as a daily greeting or specified to formal occasions, when greeting strangers for the first time, or to elders. Even so, the greetings listed below are those that the informants in the NEG-corpus fear are about to become extinct.

- *God morgen* [good morning]. Opening ritual used in early morning or when seeing someone for the first time that day.
- *God dag* [good day]. After early morning until sunset.
- *God formiddag* [good forenoon]. Opening ritual used after early morning until noon.
- *God ettermiddag* [good afternoon]. Opening or closing ritual used from noon to sunset.
- *God kveld* [good evening]. Opening or closing ritual used after sunset.

Comments from NEG-data informants:

When I was a child, we greeted people we met on the road with *god dag*, *god ettermiddag* or *god kveld*. (NEG-data, female, born 1933, Northern Norway)

People used to say *god dag* and *god kveld* but now it is used mostly by those older than myself (NEG-data, female, born 1935, Eastern Norway)

## NORWEGIAN GREETINGS THE LAST HUNDRED YEARS

Nowadays, *god morgen* is often replaced by *morn* or *hei*, I think. *God dag* is something I seldom use. (NEG-data, female, born 1935, Mid-Norway (Trøndelag))

Greetings (*god dag/morgen/kveld*) are often replaced by more superficial and empty forms such as *hei*, *heisan*, *halloen*, *morn*, *morning*, *mornings*. (NEG-data, male, born 1938, Mid-Norway)

To acquaintances I always say *hei* and always have done. Maybe *god dag*, but it is so seldom that it's hardly worth mentioning. (NEG-data, female, 1969, Western Norway)

More greetings from the NEG-data:

- *Lev vel* [live well], *du må leva så vel* [you must live so well]. Closing formula any time of day.
- *Adjø* [from French *a Dieu*]. Closing formula any time of day.
- *Farvel*, *far vel* [fare 'travel' well]. Closing formula any time of day.
- *Ha det bra* [have it well], *ha det godt* [have it good]. Similar in content to the English greeting 'wish you well', but functions like 'good bye'. Closing formula any time of day.

Comments from the NEG-data informants:

One never hears the old, fine greetings *Godt mot!* *Far vel!* *Du må leva så vel!* *Signe maten!* any more. It has turned into *hei!* and *ha det!* (NEG-data, male, 1927, Western Norway)

I guess many elderly think that young people's use of *hei*, *morn* and *ha det* is a bit too superficial. They might be sorry that *god dag*, *farvel* and *adjø* more or less disappear. (NEG-data, female, 1935, Mid-Norway)

Unfortunately, I too say *ha det* in some situations. But I feel I shouldn't use this shortened form of *ha det bra*. I would have liked to use the terms *adjø* and *farvel* more often. (NEG-data, female, born 1941, Northern Norway)

Quite some years ago it was common to say *god dag* when someone came to visit and *adjø* or *farvel* when departing. Today I think *hei* is used in most situations. (NEG-data, female, born 1947, Mid-Norway)

## 6 Discussion

The overall impression from the NEG corpus is that many thought it was a pity that empty [*tomme*], superficial [*lettvinte*], and informal [*uformelle*] greetings such as *hei* and *hallo* have taken over.

From a semantic point of view, the old greetings resemble secondary interjections in the sense that their lexical items carry semantic value. This is a natural consequence of being restricted to a specific situation or task (when eating, working, resting, sitting, standing and walking) or time of day (morning, before and after lunch, and evening). The oldest greetings were religious greetings wishing for God's peace ('peace in the house', 'stand/sit/walk in peace') and blessing (on the day/occasion/encounter/work/food/resting time). With the gradual increase in secular thought in parts of Europe, Christian greetings have disappeared. However, as mentioned before, it does not necessarily mean that people at the time related the greeting to its literal Christian content. For instance, Rash (2004) reports that modern users of Swiss German never think of the religious dimension of the parting ritual *bhüet-di Gott* 'may God keep you', and the same might be true for the French *adieu* or the Spanish *adios*.

The new greetings, on the other hand, are similar to primary interjections in the sense that they do not carry any semantic value because their origin has been forgotten and their meaning changed from attention getters to greetings (*hei* and *hallo*), or because the original forms have been reduced to semantically empty (*morn*, *morna*, *ha det*) or elliptical (*mor'n*, *snakkes*, *sees*) constructions. A property of modern greetings is that they are no longer situation-specific but general, and thus, serve as greetings any time of day, in any situation, and regardless of people's background.

This poses the question of why the informants grieve the loss of the older greetings when the new are practical in the sense that they have a wider area of usage. Pragmatically, *god dag* and *hei* have similar phatic functions. That is, the lack of semantic content in *hei* does not make it less of a greeting (cf. Ameka, Wierzbicka and Wilkins, part 3). So, what is it that makes the NEG-informants describe the new forms as empty and superficial or makes Lundeby use the phrase "totally meaningless"?

### 6.1 *No informational content*

Without semantic content, the new greetings rely more on their purely *phatic* (Malinowski 1923) function, where there is little commitment to the propositional content, and “maximum commitment to positive relational goals” (the social function) (Coupland et al. 1992: 214). What Coupland describes as a positive virtue here may not be evaluated equally positive by all. In another study (Rygg 2016), I examined Norwegian responses to a critique about Norwegian lack of phatic talk (greetings and small talk) towards strangers. Those who defended Norwegian norms did not hold rituals in their own right or talk merely for social purposes in high regard. Rather, politeness, in their view, was not to disturb the interlocutor with unnecessary talk, and when one did talk, to be meaningful, genuine, to the point, and quiet rather than to engage in phatic talk. By defining the new greetings as empty and superficial, the NEG-informants too indicate that even greeting rituals, ideally, should have an informational content.

### 6.2 *No tradition*

Another article written on the basis of the NEG-data (Skjelbred 2009) is entitled “*Folkeskikk, hva er nå det?*” ‘What is really good manners?’ and suggests that the NEG-data provides answers. When the participants argue that empty, superficial and informal greetings are taking over, it might give the impression that younger Norwegians are less polite. However, if we look at politeness from Terkourafi and Kádár’s ingroup perspective (cf. the introduction), what is at stake here is merely the fact that the rituals that this group of Norwegians, mostly born before 1960, grew up to learn were appropriate and polite are not there anymore, and therefore a loss to them, not necessarily to younger Norwegians. Some prefer to use *god dag* to elders because that is what they expect:

I do not brush elderly people aside with a *bei* (NEG-data, male, born 1938, Mid-Norway)

As mentioned by Ong and by Coulmas (see the introduction), greetings bind people with similar traditions together and are strong markers of belonging and social identification. To the NEG-informants, typical greetings today are new with foreign origins (cf. part 4.2). Thus, there are two reasons why the informants feel a loss of tradition: the disappearance

of the rituals that used to identify polite behaviour and the lack of sufficient identification with the new ones.

### 6.3 No formality

To the NEG-informants, *god dag* is “formal”:

Before, people said *god dag* and were more formal, but now everyone says *hei* (NEG-data, female, born 1945, Northern Norway).

On the other hand, *hei* is defined as “informal”:

30 to 40 years ago shop assistants greeted you with *go morn / god dag / go kveld* ‘good morning, good day, good evening’. Now shop assistants in the chain stores greet you with *hei*. Everything has to be so informal these days. (NEG-data, male, born 1956, Northern Norway)

Formal greetings being replaced by informal ones is mentioned as changes that have occurred in the NEG-informants’ lifetime together with other changes such as: a. the nonverbal greetings handshake, bow, curtsy and tipping one’s hat replaced by hugs (prevalence varies with age, gender and place of residence), b. surnames, male/female titles (‘Mr’, ‘Mrs’) and professional titles (‘Doctor’, ‘Professor’) replaced, by and large, by first names., and c. the V-pronoun *De* replaced by the T-pronoun *du*. Does this mean that formal greetings are linked to a wish for more linguistic markers of vertical distance? On the contrary, there are many comments about the relief of not having to care about linguistic markers of social hierarchy anymore:

I do not use *De*. With the *du*-form all are equal, with the *De*-form some are ‘better’ than others and that is not something we want in 2008. (NEG-data, female, born 1946, Western Norway / born in Eastern Norway).

I have never used anything but *du*. We are all God’s creatures and we easily end up being embarrassed or embarrassing others if we have to sort people into *De*’s and *du*’s. (NEG-data, male, born 1920, Western Norway).

In the NEG-data, there is no mention of the old greetings representing formality in the sense of more respect for vertical power structures. Rather, the following seems to be a commonly held view about the difference between the older *god dag* and the new *hei*:

Usually, we say *hei* when we meet acquaintances and *god dag* when we meet people we know less. (NEG data, female, born 1937, Western Norway)

Instead of indicating vertical distance, *god dag* versus *hei* indicate horizontal distance, depending on the degree of intimacy. Further, the informants do not seem to always wish to be formal but to have the opportunity to be so in order to avoid being importunate or to show respect for seniority:

My most common greetings are *hei*, *morn*, *god morgen* and *god dag*, depending on how well I know someone. [...] I would like my greetings to be heartfelt but am afraid to be importunate. (NEG data, female, born 1937, Mid-Norway)

To elders I say *god dag* but to others *hei*. (NEG-data, female, born 1945, Northern Norway)

As mentioned in the introduction, most languages have large frameworks of greetings which allow both elaboration and reduction of forms depending on contextual and relational factors. In the NEG-informants' view, when the range of greetings becomes limited to informal ones alone, the opportunity to signal polite distance and respect, when one wishes to, is lost.

#### 6.4 *Has less formality resulted in more intimacy?*

Lundeby (1995) claimed that the new greetings signal increased intimacy, which is linked to relational closeness, friendliness, warmth, involvement and informality (part 3). Thus, above we saw *hei* used to intimates and *god dag* to non-intimates. However, I am doubtful about Lundeby's claim that the new greetings are used to increase intimacy. Rather, I suspect *hei* to take over from *god dag* also among relative strangers without creating intimacy. That is, most of the NEG informants report on customarily greeting shop assistants and people they meet on outdoor hikes with *hei*. This is not in order to create a family-like intimacy with shop assistants or other hikers, but simply because *hei* is a short, quick, uncommitted, and context-free greeting, often reported to be accompanied by a short nod and a smile.

I say a quick *hei* when I don't want further contact. (NEG data, female, born 1933, Northern Norway)

Morphologically, informality tends to be signalled by shorter and less ceremonial greetings than formal ones (Duranti 2009: 192). In Dutch there is the greeting *Dag* (opening and closing). The same ellipsis of 'good day' is found as informal greetings in Danish (*dav*) and Icelandic (*daginn*). One might wonder if the Norwegian *god dag* 'good day' would have had a better chance of competing with *hei*, *hallo* and *morn* had it undergone a similar reduction into *dag* or *dagen*.

## 7 A comparison with a national corpus and ideas for future research

As mentioned before, a limitation so far is that we do not know whether the NEG-informants' claims are right. Thus, I decided to test them on the NoWaC corpus for the reasons given in part 4. The corpus was analysed by using its search engine to find the quantitative distribution of opening and closing greetings followed by a qualitative check of each token. Unfortunately, the corpus design does not make it easy to see the context or type of text where an item belongs, but I have done my best to determine whether the item functions as a greeting directed toward an addressee or whether it is used in other ways (see examples of *adjø* and *farvel* in table 1 below). The only function not included in "no. of tokens" is when the item is part of a set phrase or proper noun (see "details" in table 1).

The analysis finds that the clearly most common openings in the corpus are *hei*, *heisan* 'hi' (the latter predominantly written *heisann* adhering to Norwegian orthographic rules, Hagtvet et al. 2013) and the various regional, generational and sociolectal variants of *hallo* 'hello' (the most common variant after *hallo* being *halla*, a new greeting that is believed to originate in the capital area with influence from immigrant communities). The fact that *heisann*, a greeting hardly mentioned by the NEG informants, came second might be due to the wider age distribution but may also be a reflection of the online genres (e-mails and web forums) where it was found.

Since online communication such as e-mails and web forums tend to be informal, one might assume that reduced, informal greetings are more common than the unreduced, formal ones. However, the analysis finds

## NORWEGIAN GREETINGS THE LAST HUNDRED YEARS

	Lexeme	No. of tokens	Relative frequencies in %	Details (no. of tokens in parentheses)	Examples of use
Reduced forms	Hei	197,708	84.18	<i>hei!</i> <i>hei, hei, hei!</i> <i>hei!</i> <i>hei!</i> <i>D, hei!</i> (104,734), <i>hei igjen</i> (4567), <i>hei hei!</i> (3643), <i>hei på deg</i> (1023), <i>hei du!</i> (463).	In addition to the examples of tokens under "details", <i>hei</i> is often used with a first name: <i>Hei Helene!</i> or without any pause between greeting a message: <i>Hei helt enig</i> 'Hi totally agree'. Because of the limitations of the NoWaC corpus design, it was very difficult to find clear tokens of <i>hei</i> used in closings, but I believe there were few.
	Heisan(n)	12,249	5.22	<i>Heisann</i> (10,940), <i>heisan</i> (1309).	Similarly to <i>hei</i> , <i>heisann</i> is often followed by emoticon, punctuation mark, first name, nickname and sometimes with no pause between greeting and text. Examples: <i>Heisann!</i> <i>I dag var heller ikke skolen spennende</i> 'school wasn't exiting today either', <i>Heisann Egon, [...]</i> , <i>Heisann sveisann!</i>
	Hallo	11,984	5.10	<i>Hallo</i> (9162), <i>halla</i> (1881), <i>halloen</i> (342), <i>hallois</i> (189), <i>ballais</i> (179), <i>hælle</i> (78), <i>halloi</i> (47), <i>hallaien</i> (42), <i>hallaisen</i> (41), <i>hallat</i> (23). Not counted 124 tokens of "Hallo i uken" (radio program title).	Similarly to <i>hei</i> and <i>heisann</i> ; <i>hallo</i> and its variants are often followed by emoticon, punctuation mark, first name, nickname and sometimes with no pause between greeting and text. Examples: <i>Halla kjekken!</i> 'hello handsome', <i>Hallo igjen!</i> 'hello again', <i>Hallo, jeg er en gutt på 18 år [...]</i> 'hello, I am an 18 year old boy', <i>Halloen heter Espen E.</i> 'hello (my) name is Espen E.'
	Morn, mornings	853	0.36	<i>Morn</i> (499), <i>mårn</i> (59) (16 of these from the same person), <i>mornings</i> (295). <i>Morning</i> only used in texts written in English. No tokens of <i>mor'n</i> .	Common openings: <i>Morn!</i> <i>Morn morn!</i> <i>Morn du!</i> <i>Morn dø!</i> (dialect variation), <i>Morn folkens!</i> 'morn people' "MORNINGS. Det er så utrolig hardt å stå opp om morran" 'Mornings. Getting up in the morning (dialect) is incredibly hard'.
	Morna	70	0.03	<i>Morna</i> (57), <i>morn'a</i> (13). Not counted 34 tokens of "morna Jens" related to an incident in the political debate.	Typical closings: <i>Morna!</i> <i>Morna, morna!</i> <i>Morna så lenge!</i> 'bye for now'
	Ha det	1,000	0.42	<i>Hade</i> (498), <i>hadet</i> (422), <i>ha det</i> (80)	Because many tokens of <i>hade</i> were the verb 'had' in Swedish or a misspelling of <i>hadde</i> 'had' in Norwegian, I limited the search to: <i>Ha det/hade(t)</i> + emoticon or punctuation mark <i>Ha det/hade(t) da!</i> 'bye then' <i>Ha det/hade(t) og [...]</i> 'bye and (e.g. good night)' <i>Ha det/hade(t) så lenge/så lenge!</i> 'bye for now' <i>Ha det/hade(t) alle sammen</i> 'bye to all of you' <i>(si) ha det/hade(t) til [...]</i> 'say bye to (e.g. him)' Probably <i>ha det!</i> written in two words is used so little because it looks similar to constructions such as " <i>må ha det</i> " 'must have it' in written text.
Un-reduced forms	God morgen	1,385	0.59	<i>God morgen</i> (1268), <i>go morgen</i> (32), <i>godmorgen</i> (69), <i>gomorgen</i> (7), <i>go morn</i> (5), <i>go mårn</i> (4). Not counted 398 tokens of <i>God morgen Norge</i> (TV show title) and 37 tokens of use in other proper nouns.	Similar in use to <i>hei</i> . Typical openings: <i>God morgen!</i> <i>God morgen</i> ☺ <i>God morgen Maria!</i> <i>God morgen alle sammen!</i> 'good morning all of you'.
	God dag	617	0.26	<i>God dag</i> (352), <i>goddag</i> (177), <i>go dag</i> (34), <i>godag</i> (29), <i>godagen</i> (15), <i>goddagen</i> (10). Not counted 26 tokens of the set phrase <i>god dag mann økseskaft/ hostesaft</i> and 9 tokens of 'it is a good day for...'	Usually used as an opening but there were 14 tokens of use in closings: <i>ha en god dag/ønsker deg en god dag</i> 'wish you a good day'. As an opening, it is used with first names a couple of times such as " <i>God dag til deg Gunn!</i> " but more often with other nouns such as <i>god dag Iversen</i> (surname)/ <i>studenten</i> 'students'/ <i>soldater</i> 'soldiers'/ <i>dragoner</i> 'musketeers'/ <i>gentlemen/ gamle ørn</i> 'old chap/ karer' 'guys', which gives the impression that it is used more to or by men. It is also often used in what seems to be more formal requests starting with: " <i>god dag, jeg heter Frank Iversen</i> " 'good day, my name is Frank Iversen'.
	God formiddag	84	0.03		Opening: <i>God formiddag!</i> 3 tokens of use in closings: <i>(ønsker alle) en riktig god formiddag</i> 'wish you a good forenoon'

Table 1: Continued next page.

God Ettermiddag	147	0.06	Nearly half of the tokens (67) belong to five individuals	Opening: <i>God ettermiddag!</i> 8 tokens of use in closings: <i>ønsker dere/ha en (riktig) god ettermiddag</i> 'wish you a good afternoon'.
God kveld	764	0.33	Not counted 1585 tokens of "God kveld Norge" (TV program title)	Seldom used with a person's name. Sometimes used with nouns that give associations to old times: <i>God kveld godfolk!</i> <i>God kveld i stua!</i> Other typical openings: <i>God kveld!</i> <i>God kveld dere!</i> <i>God kveld alle sammen!</i> <i>God kveld folkens!</i> 3 tokens of use in closings: <i>ønsker dere/ha en god kveld!</i> 'wish you a good evening'.
Lev vel	21	0.01		Only two of these tokens were a personal greeting for leave-taking and seemed to come from old letters: " <i>Lev vel. Hilsen fra alle i Sjøraandstad, din moder</i> ".
Adjø	490	0.21	Not counted 32 tokens of "Adjø solidaritet" (film title)	Typically appears in public communication in phrases such as ' <i>adjø horrible world!</i> ', ' <i>adjø weed!</i> ', ' <i>adjø to a slim waste</i> '. Also commonly used with the verbs to say, waive, kiss, bow, nod <i>adjø</i> . I found only 39 tokens when <i>adjø</i> is used as a personal greeting to an addressee and written in modern Norwegian: <i>Adjø så lenge!</i> <i>Adjø for denne gang!</i> 'Bye for now', <i>Jeg må gå, adjø</i> 'Have to go, bye', <i>Ikke interessert, adjø!</i> 'not interested, bye!'.
Farvel	6,851	2.92	Not counted 36 tokens of "Farvel Falkenberg" (film title).	Typically appears in public communication in phrases denoting something or someone that is gone forever such as e.g., 'farewell to cheap plumbers', 'a tear dropping farewell with <i>Bram!</i> ' (football club), 'that means a farewell for the sitting government', or 'she takes farewell with her dying husband'. It also appears in the set phrase <i>takk og farvel</i> ['thank you and farewell']. Searching through the first half of tokens on <i>farvel</i> , I found only 8 used as a personal greeting to an addressee and written in modern Norwegian: <i>Farvel da!</i> <i>Farvel loosers!</i>
Ha det bra/godt/ fint	648	0.28	<i>Ha det bra</i> (266), <i>hade(t) bra</i> (193), <i>ha det fint</i> ['have it nice'] (112), <i>hade(t) fint</i> (6), <i>ha det godt</i> (65), <i>hade(t) godt</i> (6)	Limited the search to the same criteria as with <i>hade(t)</i> above. Examples: <i>Ha det bra så lenge!</i> 'Good bye for now', <i>Ha det godt da og hils familien!</i> 'Good bye then and say hello to the family', <i>Ha det fint til neste gang!</i> 'Good bye until next time'
Total	234,871	100		

Table 1: Distribution of Norwegian greetings in the NoWaC corpus. Source: The NoWaC corpus, accessed January 2016

that the reductions *morn* (also written *mårn*) and *mornings* are not as common as the unreduced form *god morgen*, something that indicates that *god morgen* might not be on the verge of extinction after all. Also, the unreduced closing rituals *ha det bra/godt/fint* ['nice'] are not quite as uncommon as one might expect from the NEG-informants' claims. However, the most common closing ritual is the reduced form spelled *hade* in one word, something which weakens the connection to its origin *ha det bra* ['have it well'] even further. *Farvel* and *adjø* might have diminished as personal greetings but are frequently used with other functions in public communication (online newspapers and magazines, informational web pages, blog posts, etc.). See examples of use in table 1.

Some of the greetings that the NEG informants feared to be on the verge of extinction such as *god formiddag*, *god ettermiddag* and *lev vel* are also marginal in the NoWaC corpus. *God dag* and *god kveld* are clearly used much less than *hei* and *hallo*, but to what degree they are about to

be extinct is less clear. Thus, a natural follow-up of this study may be to use other measures such as metapragmatic surveys, interviews or conversation analysis among younger people and more men (the latter especially with regard to the greeting *god dag*, cf. examples of use in table 1) to investigate these further.

In this article, I have looked at changes in Norwegian greeting rituals the last hundred years and how these changes are perceived by their users, especially those born prior to 1960. With some exceptions, older greetings with a semantic content related to religious belief, situation, task or time of day are replaced by greetings that are similar to primary interjections in that they no longer carry descriptive meaning. They, therefore, function as short, quick and context-free greetings to anyone, even to strangers, something that makes it questionable to what degree they increase relational intimacy as claimed by Lundeby (1995). Those born before 1960 describe them as empty, superficial and informal because they lack the information, formality and tradition that the older greetings possess. Greetings such as *halla* and the written form *hade* are evidence that Norwegian greetings continue to change.

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## Samandrag

Denne artikkelen tar for seg endringar i norske helseformer dei siste hundre åra sett frå to synsvinklar: Fyrst ein artikkel frå *Maal og Minne* (Lundeby 1995) opp mot eit korpus med metapragmatiske kommentarar om helseformer frå ei spørjeundersøking utsend av *Norsk Etnologisk Gransking* (NEG) i 2008. Deretter er påstandane frå NEG-undersøkinga testa mot eit moderne tekstkorpus med ei større aldersspreiing. Ved bruk

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av lingvistisk teori frå semantikk og pragmatikk finn studien at, med nokon unntak, er helsingar med innhald knytt til tru, oppgåve, situasjon og tid bytta ut med helsingar som liknar på primære intereksjonar i at dei ikkje lenger har semantisk innhald. Derfor fungerer dei som korte, raske og kontekstfrie helsingar til alle, sjølv til ukjende, noko som set spørsmålsteikn ved Lundebys påstand om at dei nye helsemåttane har ført til meir intimitet blant språkbrukarane. Dei nye helsingane blir skildra som tomme, lettvinne og uformelle av informantane i NEG-undersøkinga, og grunnen er truleg at dei manglar innhald, tradisjon og formalitet som eldre helsingar har.

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