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Nordic language policies

Central problems in language
policies for universities and people
in the era of globalization

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Overview

- The Nordic region
- Central problems in the present language policies
- What do we know about Nordic intercomprehension?
- The Nordic declaration of language policy
- Challenges ahead

The Nordic countries as a region

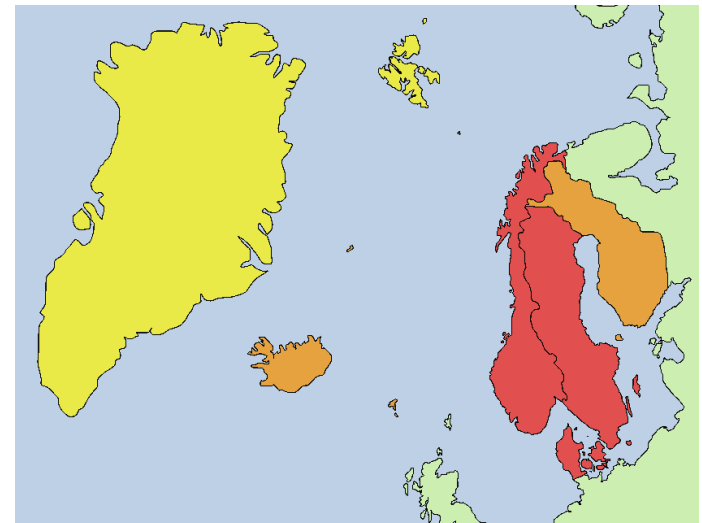
A Nordic language policy?

- The Nordic states have cooperated since the Helsinki treaty (early 1950s)
- Nordic cooperation is based on the fact that the five member states should benefit from it
- The Nordic member states are: Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Denmark
- Finland, Sweden and Denmark are members of the EU, Iceland and Norway are not
- Anyway, do these five states really make a region?

THE NORDIC STATES as one or more REGIONS

Geographically:

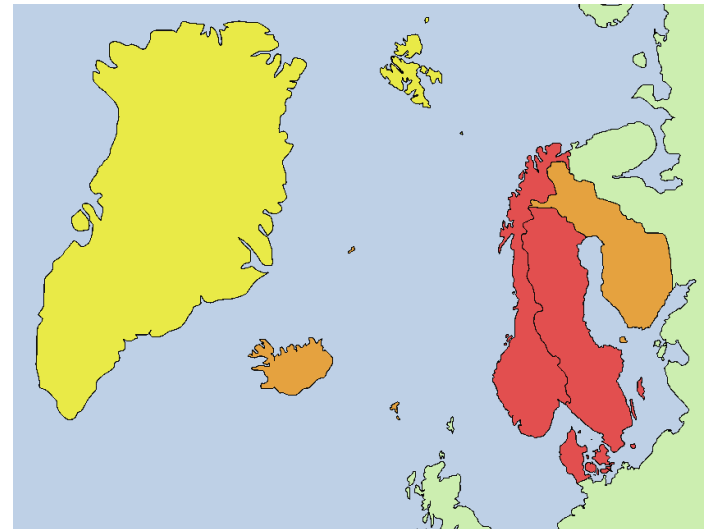
- Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland:
The Far North or the *North Atlantic*
- Norway, Sweden, Denmark, (*Scandinavia*)
+ Finland
- The Baltic states,
- North West Russia



The NORDIC countries as a REGION

Historico-culturally:

- Scandinavia, the Faroe Islands and Iceland: historical common background
- Finland has historically been tied both to Sweden and Russia
- Greenland was once a Danish colony



From a linguistic point of view

- The Faroe Islands, Denmark, Norway, Iceland and Sweden and Swedish-speaking Finland make up *a special Nordic branch of Germanic*
- Finnish is not Indo-European but belongs with Estonian (and Hungarian) to the *Fenno-Ugric family*
- Greenlandic forms part of the *Eskimo family*



Conclusion

- **Geographically** the Nordic countries have much in common with the Baltic states, but why not then include also Polonia and Germany (united by borders along the Baltic sea)?
- **Historico-culturally** the Nordic countries (incl. Finland) form a close knit unit based on the ideas of the welfare state, secularization and gender equality
- **Linguistically** Scandinavia, Iceland and the Faroe Islands form a unit; Finland is the odd man out and Greenland is peripheral both geographically and linguistically

Central problems in
the present

Language policies

What language policy is

State regulation of the conditions for the use of various languages as resources within the domains regulated by the state, i e. primarily:

- education
- research
- culture (books, films, journals, newspapers, magazines etc.)
- mass media (radio, television)
- tourism as a special case

Education

- What languages should be taught in schools?
 - 'mother tongue'
 - other 'official languages'
 - 'linguae francae', 'foreign languages', 'minority languages', 'international auxiliary languages'
- How much for each language?
 - When (at what age) does teaching start?
 - How many lessons?
 - What strategy?
- Who will teach?
 - Which prior education, if any, do the teachers have?

Culture and media

The fundamental question is once again:
Regulated by the market or what?

- television products
- films, dubbing or sub-titling?
- games
- theatre
- the silent arts: dance, music, paintings, sculpture, performances

The special case of tourism

- Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries
- In particular cultural tourism flourishes; all metropolises are competing here
- Cultural tourism is language intensive:
 - messages and captions have to be translated
 - guiding, round trips, culture walks have to be performed in many languages
 - advertising

Linguistic practice in these connections reveal who you see as your target tourists

Central problems

- If we let the market forces decide, ENGLISH will soon become the ONLY international language, but that would be tantamount to having no language policy at all
- What about the future fall of English? Should we start developing Spanish, Chinese as viable alternatives?
- What about the other traditional European foreign languages, what role for them?
- How should we treat all those citizens who do not have a Nordic language as their first language?

**RESEARCH ON
NORDIC INTER-
COMPREHENSION**

Maurud

- Starting point: pedagogical
- Results: Huge differences between spoken and written language. In particular Danish as a written language versus spoken Danish. Swedes had difficulty in understanding spoken Danish, Norwegians excelled on both accounts
- A critical view: Only young men as informants, (soldiers); the metropolis syndrome
- It is a very period-typical piece and a very thorough report

INS

Focus on youngsters but includes several sites so that geographical distance may be estimated as a determinant. Two generations. English competence also tested.

A lot of information in the report, here just two observations: Informants in Copenhagen fared worse as to understanding the neighbouring languages than their class mates in Aarhus, despite the geographical proximity to Sweden

The older generation were better at understanding the neighbouring languages than their children

Importord i Norden

Again too comprehensive to be summarized briefly

A couple of cues:

Primary focus: The influence from English in vocabulary and language attitudes to loan words; both quantitative (questionnaire) studies and qualitative ones

We get some surprising results as to the commonly held view that Norway and Iceland are puristic while Denmark and Sweden are English-loving; actually, quite the opposite is true

DASVA

Project: The BRIDGE (yes it is the same one) gave the impetus to studies on both sides of Øresund as to inter-comprehension and language attitudes

The idea: Frequency of contact and attitudes held to the neighbour is the determinant for inter-comprehension

This could not be answered since we did not find anyone who were negative while frequently in contact

What we did find is that it is difficult to measure comprehension and that attitudes to L1 differs

Summary

We think we know a whole lot about how much the Scandinavians, including the Swedish speaking Finns, understand each other but we may have looked in the wrong places

A lot indicates that school children and high school students could not care less about Nordic unity

At the same time we can see that trains are full and bring a lot of people in daily contact across the Øresund as well as between Sweden and Norway

We ought to change focus to the work place

**THE NORDIC
DECLARATION ON
LANGUAGE POLICY**

The Nordic declaration (2006)

- Background
- Content and structure
- Effect

- You may download the text from this site:
- <http://sprogkoordinationen.org/sprogpolitik/nordisk-sprogpolitik/deklaration-om-nordisk-sprogpolitik-2006/>

Sprogdeklarationen: baggrund

- The Nordic Council of Ministers are in charge of the Nordic Cooperation
- They wanted a document which would focus the effort
- As it turned out they did not want to make the declaration legally binding as such but they committed to working in the direction outlined in the declaration

PROCESS

- written by a group of Nordic scholars and then delivered to the Nordic Language Board
- sent to all interested parties with a call for a response within a not too strict time limit (actually a lot of comments were received)
- after the hearing, changed accordingly by the Nordic Language Board
- delivered to the Nordic Committee of civil servants so that they could prepare the text for the final signing process during the assembly of the Nordic members of parliament 2006

Structure

A **preface**, an **introduction**, a main text of **declaration** and a **background paper**

- ◆ The preface states that the ministers are agreed to work in the directions specified in the main text
- ◆ The introduction states the terminology used
- ◆ The text itself states the point of departure, the aims and objectives (based on the rights of every citizen living in a Nordic country) and finally details four questions to be worked on in future collaborative efforts

Rights

Anyone living in the Nordic region has a right to

- acquire the language of the society he or she is living in
- to acquire a Scandinavian language
- to acquire an internationally significant language
- to maintain and develop his or her L1

Aims for a common Nordic language policy

- that everybody is capable of reading and writing the society-upholding language of his or her country
- that everybody in the Nordic region may communicate freely with each other - if necessary through an interpreter
- that everybody has good knowledge of their own language rights and the language situation in the Nordic region
- that everybody has very good knowledge in one language and in addition knowledge of at least one more internationally important language
- that everybody gets support for the development of their L1
- that everybody has a general knowledge of what language is and how it works

The four areas to work with in further collaboration

- language comprehension and language skills
- parallel use of languages
- multilingualism
- the Nordic region as a forerunner in Europe

Strategies

- The Nordic Council of Ministers has decided to focus on:
- Children and youngsters and their comprehension of Nordic spoken languages
- Following up the Nordic declaration, currently focussing on internationalization as a linguistic challenge at the universities

Higher education (university level)

- There is a premium on *internationalization*, i.e. attracting students from other countries
- These students do not necessarily understand nor speak the national language
- So the market calls for teaching in a lingua franca (read: English)
- Hence universities want their teachers to be good at teaching in English and their students to be able to benefit from being taught in English

Research and research training

- In which language do we *teach researchers*?
- In which language do researchers *publish*?
 - in the (natural) sciences
 - in the health sciences
 - in the human and social sciences
- The written/spoken dimension
- Which language(s) is/are the most prestigious to publish in?
 - grant giving factors
 - the (more or less local) meritocracy of research

Fac/country	DK	IS	SE	NO	FI
HEALTH	10	18	-	18	-
SCIENCE	3	3	0.5 (physics)	5	4
SOCIAL S	36	48	64 (law)	50	50
HUM	44	55	55 (Hist)-15 (Ling)	50	47

All numbers indicate percentage of publications in the local Nordic language (as opposed to English). For Finland Swedish and Finnish have been merged. The Danish and Norwegian numbers are totals nationwide for the year 2010 while the figures for Swedish, although from 2010, are for separate disciplines as indicated. Finally, figures from Iceland only cover the number of doctoral dissertations at the HI for 2011 while the figures for Finland solely cover the University of Helsinki/Helsingfors

CONCLUSIONS

A new research agenda

- Ethnographic studies may give us a very much more detailed picture of which languages are used for which purposes at the universities
- Work place studies may give us a much more realistic picture of what professionals do when they have to be understood
- Basic research may focus on comprehension of varieties of speech, including accommodated varieties and must include the study of language attitudes

A new policy

- Based on new information we may forge a new Nordic policy using the means we have at our disposal to strengthen the Nordic linguistic agenda in schools and teacher training, further exchange between universities on best practices (NB the 'national minority children) and get new research based information on what the reality for Nordic inter-comprehension is at the work place

THANK YOU!
(FOR PATIENCE ETC...)

**Bonus slides:
Regions in Europe**

The concept of a region

Scale

- Several nation states with some common features
 - Nordic states, Benelux
- Parts of a nation state
 - The North of Italy
- Areas around the metropolises
 - the München region, the Copenhagen-Malmö-region

Basis of region

- geography
- historico-cultural unity
- linguistic unity

The alternative?

The alternative to English as the European lingua franca might be a conscious effort to promote a regionally divided Europe with a number of related languages based on the concept of **receptive bi- or multilingualism**:

- German: Germany, Austria, parts of Switzerland
- Dutch: Holland, (the Flemish part of) Belgium
- 'Romance': France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, parts of Switzerland, Roumania
- English: United Kingdom, Ireland
- 'Slavic': Polonia, Czechia, Slovakia, Bulgaria; RUSSIA?!