

# Sprog i Norden

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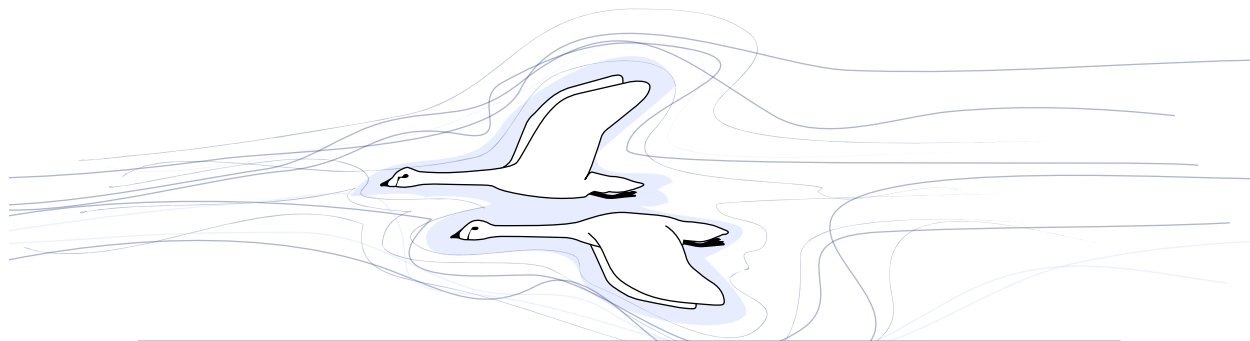
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## Søgbarhed

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## Nordic Language Coordination

*Sabine Kirchmeier-Andersen*

*The mutual understanding between speakers of the Nordic languages has long been a subject of concern for politicians in the Nordic countries. Recent investigations (Delsing et al. 2005) have shown that Nordic adolescents increasingly have difficulties understanding each other and often choose to speak English rather than Swedish, Norwegian or Danish to each other. Therefore, the Nordic Council of Ministers has decided to declare Nordic language understanding a special focus area. First and foremost, the teaching of neighboring languages has to be intensified. But the Council of Ministers also observed that it has been difficult for language councils and similar organizations in the Nordic countries to find the resources to coordinate their activities. Consequently, a greater interdisciplinary coordination between language teaching and language council activities was envisaged.*

On October 28th 2008 the Nordic Committee of Officials for Education and Research (EK-U) introduced a new organization of the language activities under the Nordic Council of Ministers to be implemented on January 1st 2009. The new organization is based on a new coordinating institution called 'Nordic Language Coordination' and affiliated with the Danish Language Council.

The purpose of the Nordic Language Coordination is:

- to coordinate Nordic language activities that have not previously been coordinated
- to ensure that the important players (language counselors and teachers) are encouraged to cooperate
- to create synergy in the interaction between the Nordic language councils and Nordic language courses, i.e. activities organized by Nordspråk (courses for university teachers), Nordkurs (courses for teachers in primary and secondary schools and teacher education) and "The Nordic

Pearls” (Nordic language courses at the Nordic conference centers: Lysebu, Voksenåsen, Schæffergården, Hanaholmen and Hässelby Castle)

- to ensure efficiency through a common timeframe for activities and a through continuous monitoring of results
- to create continuity at the organizational level
- to make the cooperation between the Nordic countries on language issues better known to the public

The political point of departure for the work of the Nordic Language Coordination is the articles of the Nordic Language Declaration which ensures the following rights and goals for all Nordic citizens:

Rights:

- to develop a proficiency in a Scandinavian language and reach an understanding of the other Scandinavian languages in order to become a member of the Nordic language community

Goals:

- to enable all Nordic citizens to communicate with each other primarily in a Scandinavian language

The Nordic Language Coordination shall

- coordinate activities held under the auspices of the Nordic Network of Language Councils and the Nordic language courses, for example by bringing together representatives of the Network of Nordic Language Councils and the Nordic language courses, as well as other relevant stakeholders
- ensure that program activities in the Nordic language courses will be coordinated, for example by bringing together representatives from Nordkurs, Nordspråk and the ”Nordic Pearls” and discussing the training activities and opportunities for interaction and synergy between language courses
- perform outreach activities, like using intermediaries to inform users (schools, colleges, vocational training, teacher education, universities) on the activities taking place in the network of the Nordic language councils and the Nordic language courses
- strengthen information and communication on language issues, for example by preparing a quarterly newsletter. Information and communication activities are coordinated with the Nordic Council of Ministers’ secretariat, which is responsible for information and communication in general

- collect experience and results from the Nordplus Language and Culture program and ensure that the results are disseminated and transformed into good practice in the sectors working with children and adolescents
- strengthen the language comprehension of children and adolescents through separate initiatives, for example by coordinating joint Nordic activities for and with children and adolescents.

In relation to the Nordic language councils and similar institutions the Nordic language coordination shall

- arrange meetings, conferences and seminars on language planning, language monitoring, language consultancy and language technology
- publish reports, the yearbook "Sprog i Norden" (Languages in Scandinavia) and other writings
- manage a joint website for the Network of the Nordic Language Councils.
- From 2009, a part of the network activities will be targeted at children and young people and their comprehension of neighboring languages, e.g. at least one of the annual conferences held must address a broad audience and include children and adolescents and their comprehension of neighboring languages as a topic.

The new coordinating institution and the planned network activities will be evaluated before the end of 2012. The annual budget for 2009-2011 amounts to 1.8 million DKK. On January 1st 2009, the Danish Language Council established a project group consisting of Pia Jarvad, Rikke Dybdahl Harpsøe and Sabine Kirchmeier-Andersen with the task of establishing the Nordic Language Coordination. A reference group was created, and it consisted of educational consultant Lis Madsen (Ministry of Education) and Hulda Zober Holm (Secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers).

During spring 2009, the project group met with all involved parties in order to introduce the Nordic Language Coordination, to identify relevant issues and to establish a basis of mutual understanding. The main participants were the Nordic secretaries of the language councils and similar institutions, the leaders of the Nordic language councils, the persons responsible for Nordkurs, Nordspråk, the Nordic Pearls and the Nordplus Language and Culture program. A general agreement was reached on the division of labor between the network of language councils and the other participants: the language councils focus on providing relevant linguistic data, whereas the other participants use the data in class room projects and teaching programs. Co-operation is envisaged on the

development of fundamental linguistic resources (e.g. contrastive language descriptions, dictionaries, corpora), teaching materials and research projects as well as a on the evaluations of ongoing projects.

Concurrently with the initial work, a common information platform, i.e. a website ([www.nordisksprogkoordination.org](http://www.nordisksprogkoordination.org)), and a newsletter have been developed, which ensure that all stakeholders as well as the public have better knowledge of the Nordic language co-operation.

The position of the Nordic language coordinator was advertised in September 2009. The new coordinator, Bodil Aurstad, was employed on November 1st 2009.

The project group of the Nordic Language Coordination produced a draft work plan for 2009-2011 in the summer and autumn of 2009 which was agreed upon by the main participants. A consensus was established on organizing a series of conferences and initiating a series of joint projects such as to strengthen knowledge sharing, to create a better basis for the assessment of the development of language understanding and to provide more educational tools for both teachers and pupils. Emphasis is given to projects that embrace as widely as possible the many different participants involved, i.e. not only teachers of neighbor language comprehension and language council staff, but also journalists, librarians, other kinds of educators, researchers and politicians.

The knowledge-sharing activities include a conference series on the situation of the Nordic languages in the new social media (e.g. blogs, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, texting and instant messaging) exploring the significance of the use of these media for Nordic language understanding, and how they can be actively used in the teaching of neighboring languages.

The data-oriented activities include the development of a Nordic language barometer involving, among other things, an assessment of the Nordic curricula for neighbor language understanding. Some activities focus in particular on children and adolescents, including the preparation of web-based glossaries and dictionaries related to issues raised in the class rooms such as climate conferences and cultural events. Furthermore, it will be examined how the new social media can be used in the comprehension of neighboring languages in addition to teaching. The Nordic language councils are developing a Nordic database on contrastive language issues, which will be made available to teachers and scientists. In the database, they can find answers to questions about the latest developments in the Nordic languages.

The Nordic Language Coordination has been met with great interest and enthusiasm by language councils and educational institutions who consider it a strong support of their daily work.

## Literature

Delsing, Lars Oluf og Lundin Åkesson, Katrina (2005): *Håller språket ihop Norden? En forskningsrapport om ungdomars förståelse av danska, svenska och norska*, TemaNord 2005:573, Nordisk Ministerråd, København.

## Resume

Embedsmandskomiteén for Uddannelse og Forskning (EK-U) vedtog den 28. oktober 2008 en ny organisering af sprogområdet i Nordisk Ministerråd gældende fra den 1. januar 2009. Den nye organisering indebærer blandt andet oprettelsen af en ny koordinatorfunktion for sprogsamarbejdet: Nordisk Sprogkoordination. Dansk Sprognævn har af Nordisk Ministerråds Sekretariat fået overdraget opgaven at varetage den nye koordinatorfunktion.

Ideen er at den nordiske nabosprogsforståelse skal styrkes – og målgruppen er især børn og unge. Derfor har man valgt at lade grupper der ikke tidligere har arbejdet sammen, indgå i et tæt koordineringssamarbejde via Nordisk Sprogkoordination. Det drejer sig om:

Sprognævnenes netværk (de nordiske sprognævns samarbejde), Nordkurs (kurser for universitetsstuderende i de nordiske lande), Nordspråk (et netværk for lærere der underviser i et nordisk sprog enten som modersmål eller som fremmedsprog), og De nordiske Perler (kurser i nabosprog på Lysebu, Voksenåsen, Schæffergården, Hanaholmen and Hässelby Slot).

Man kan læse mere på [www.nordisksprogkoordination.org](http://www.nordisksprogkoordination.org).