

The influence of English on the languages in the Nordic countries

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English has a special position in the world as a global or international language. This global English is sometimes described as a “lingua franca”; it is used by a large number of speakers in Europe and internationally. It functions as a life-line for the tourist and as a language for communication in the sciences, transport and business world and is important for cultural exchange.

An important aspect of the increasing dominance of English in the “expanding circle” is its effect on other languages. The influence of English on other languages has given rise to much heated debate. What happens to other languages if English comes to dominate the linguistic scene? English has spread into and partly taken over domains such as popular music and entertainment, fashion, sports, advertising and trade. Massive borrowing has taken place on all levels of language. The rise of English has resulted in a concern with issues such as the loss of particular domains and the maintenance and preservation of the domestic language. As one contributor to this volume suggests with regard to the language situation in the Scandinavian countries, “language death in Scandinavia should by no means be ruled out” (Gottlieb).

As Stig Johansson has pointed out, “considering the frequency and the heat of debate, there have been surprisingly few major studies that systematically survey the use of English in Scandinavia and the influence of English on the Scandinavian languages, although there has been a tendency in recent years to pay more attention to the topic” (2002: 90). There are also differences between the Nordic countries which need to be described. It has, for instance, been suggested that Norwegian has been more influenced by English than Swedish (Graedler & Johansson 1995:271). The aim in this special issue of *Nordic Journal of English Studies* is to bring together a number of original contributions by scholars dealing with the role of English in the Nordic countries and the possible effect of English on the languages spoken there.

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The collection of articles reflects the rich spectrum of ongoing work in this field. The articles not only describe the English impact in the vocabulary of the Nordic languages but also deal with broader issues such as attitudes to English loan words and the language policies in the different countries, the threat of English in a more global world, interlanguage phenomena such as transfer in professional writing or “Finglish” in Finnish advertisements.

The spread of English looks different across languages and attitudes towards the English influx vary depending on factors like social class, education and age. Large-scale projects facilitating the comparison between speech communities are now underway. **Anne-Line Graedler** presents the Nordic project “Modern loanwords in the Nordic Countries” including Danish, Faroese, Icelandic, Norwegian, Swedish in Finland and Swedish in Sweden. The new project has the purpose to investigate the volume of loanwords, their adaptation to the domestic language, native substitute forms and standardisation. It is also concerned with attitudes towards loanwords and substitute forms.

Jacob Thøgersen deals with the issue whether some Nordic populations are more purist than others. Attitudes to the influx of English were investigated by the use of questionnaires. Another issue discussed in this contribution is whether a society’s official purism (as in Iceland) or laissez-faire attitude (as in Denmark or Sweden) is the official language policy or represents the educated elite’s self-image.

Most observers agree that the English language has a more important position in Denmark than in the other Nordic countries. As **Henrik Gottlieb** shows, modern English loans tend to retain their spelling and morphological endings. Gottlieb proposes a model of Anglicisms distinguishing for example between code-shifts and loans. Moreover he shows that some loans which seem to be unnecessary in fact fill a void in the lexical field.

Philip Shaw shows that academic writing by Danes writing in English may be structured differently from “Anglos” writing in their native language. For example, the placement of adverbials is influenced by Danish when Danes write in English. However, according to Shaw, Danish writers “want English to be a foreign language for them” and write in English as spoken by native speakers of English.

We also need historical studies taking into account changes over time. Within the framework of the Swedish project ORDAT, **Mall Stålhammar**

has investigated the influx of English loanwords on the Swedish vocabulary 1800-2000. The focus is on their diachronic distribution on the basis of when they first appeared in the Swedish vocabulary and their frequencies in different domains of use. As for the development in quantitative terms it is shown that there is a steady increase of loanwords over the whole period with a peak after the Second World War.

The construction *den förste att gå* studied by **Magnus Ljung** is a so-called “construction loan” where a grammatical construction has been copied using Swedish linguistic elements. The study is particularly welcome, since previous work on this type of borrowing is virtually negligible. Ljung shows on the basis of data from Swedish newspapers that the construction is growing in frequency. **Anders Lindström**’s article deals with the influence of English on spoken Swedish with regard to word formation and segmental phonology. In the Xenophones production study the aim was to identify “foreign” speech sounds. On the basis of this study and studies on other spoken corpora it is shown that English influence on Swedish can be a problem for speech and language technology applications.

In Iceland there is a well established interest in the national language and the official policy has been that of keeping the language free from loanwords. In the last decades English influence on the language, especially the vocabulary has grown considerably with an increased interest in the phenomenon as a result. In her article **Gudrun Kvaran** deals with Icelandic language politics and the impact of language purism. It is shown that in order to be accepted into the borrowing language a word has to fulfil a number of criteria involving for example phonological and morphological rules. In **Ásta Svavarsdóttir**’s article, lexical borrowings are looked at in connection with the age of speakers in an apparent-time study. The article also reports on a study based on a collection of personal diary entries by a number of Icelanders. The results confirm the claim that younger people use more words from English than older and that the choice of words is also different.

We also need studies of English in particular domains. The study by **Irma Taavitsainen** and **Päivi Pahta** is an in-depth study of English in advertisements on the yellow pages of the Helsinki telephone directories over the past fifty years. It is found that some of the new names and coinages are in a language imitating English but not quite what native speakers would use.

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References:

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