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Introduction

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1. The Nordic Countries and their Languages

The term "Nordic" generally refers to the five countries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, along with the three autonomous territories associated with these states: the Faroe Islands and Greenland (part of the Kingdom of Denmark) and the Åland Islands (part of Finland). The Nordic region thus covers a vast geographical area, spanning from the North Atlantic across Scandinavia to the Baltic Sea, and is home to three linguistic families: Indo-European (the North Germanic branch), Uralic (the Finno-Ugric branch) and Eskaleut (the Inuit branch) (Vikør 2002, 32; Torp 2014, 24). In terms of numbers of speakers, the North Germanic languages – especially the closely related Scandinavian languages, Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish – are the most represented. The second most represented language family is the Finno-Ugric branch of the Uralic family, which in the Nordic countries refers to Finnish, Karelian, Kven, Meänkieli, and the Sámi languages (Peterson and Fägersten 2023, 3). One country in the region, Finland, is officially bilingual as both Finnish and Swedish are recognised as national languages under the Constitution.

Official policy specifies the Nordic region as multilingual. *The Declaration on Nordic Language Policy*, issued in 2024 by the Nordic Council of Ministers, the official body for inter-governmental cooperation, lists the many languages of the Nordic region and the roles they each play, emphasising both the multilingualism of the area as a whole and of the individual countries:

> The languages in the Nordic region that can be used for official purposes, and which are essential to our societies, are Danish, Finnish, Faroese, Greenlandic, Icelandic, Norwegian (Bokmål and Nynorsk), the Sami languages, and Swedish, of which the Sami languages and Greenlandic are defined as indigenous languages. Due to their long-standing presence in the region, the following languages also have a special status as national minority languages: Meänkieli, Kven, Finnish, the Sami languages, Romani (Chib), Romanes, Yiddish, and

German. The Region is also home to the Nordic sign languages. Many new languages and, by extension, new mother tongues have come into play over the years due to immigration from other language areas. At school, all children and young people learn English and, to varying extents, other languages. (2024)

According to the Declaration, all these languages are equal even though they occupy different social roles. Policy differentiates between "languages essential to society", "indigenous languages", "national minority languages", "sign languages", and "new mother tongues" as well as "languages taught at school". The Declaration encourages the preservation and development of all these different types of languages within each individual country. At the same time, however, it urges the safeguarding of "the Nordic language community" founded on the mutual understandability of the Scandinavian languages. This community, so the Declaration argues, is essential for "the continued development of a shared Nordic identity and for promoting the Nordic region as the most integrated region in the world" (*ibidem*).

2. The Nordic Language Community

The Declaration thus stresses that the ability to communicate in one of the Scandinavian languages and understand the other two is important for people's identification with and sense of belonging to the Nordic region and for Nordic integration – e.g. the possibility to work, study and live anywhere in the area. In so doing, it reiterates the traditional shared view according to which common language skills tie the Nordic nations and their populations together. Both the official organs of Nordic cooperation (the Nordic Council, founded in 1952, and Nordic Council of Ministers, founded in 1971) and civil society actors such as the Nordic Associations have long considered the language community to be the basis of Nordic communality (Strang 2023, 27). As stated in the 2021 report *Does the Nordic Language Community Exist?* commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers and authored by Andrea Skjold Frøshaug and Truls Stende:

> Mutual comprehension of Norwegian, Swedish and Danish has facilitated communication, cross-border mobility and trust. The language community has been a crucial factor in the development of a closely integrated Nordic region and extensive Nordic co-operation. (2021, 6)

According to this view, the closeness of the Scandinavian languages plays a fundamental role in making the Nordic region unified, shaping a sense of cohesion and shared identity, and furthering collaboration across borders. At the same time, however, the fact that the report has an interrogative title, rather than an affirmative one, indicates that there may be a gap between what the Nordic Council of Ministers desires in terms of regional inhabitants' language skills and what those skills effectively are. The report, based on a survey asking more than 2000 young people about their comprehension and command of different languages with an emphasis on the Scandinavian ones, produced results that were not very encouraging for those convinced that the mutual intelligibility of Danish, Norwegian and Swedish forms the backbone of regional identity and cooperation.

Indeed, 95 percent of the survey's participants found English easy to understand, while 65 percent reported sometimes finding it easier to express themselves in English than in their native languages. In contrast, across the Nordic region as a whole, 62 percent found Norwegian and Swedish easy to understand while considerably fewer – 26 percent – stated that Danish is easy (Frøshaug and Stende 2021, 4-5).

Although two-thirds of the participants also agreed that understanding a Scandinavian language is important for the Nordic community, the report suggests that the mutual intelligibility

of Scandinavian languages faces serious challenges. The authors cited globalisation, the pervasive presence of English in fields such as popular culture and social media, and the tendency for national school systems to deprioritise efforts to foster knowledge of neighbouring languages and cultures as factors contributing to the decline of Scandinavian language comprehension in the Nordic region. While also outlining how to potentially counteract the negative consequences of these factors, the report paints a picture of cracks and fissures in the Nordic language community. In some countries, particularly in Greenland, Iceland and Finland, many young people find it quite difficult to understand one or more of the Scandinavian languages and thus prefer to use English when communicating with other youths in transnational encounters. In other settings, particularly in Norway and the Faroe Islands, on the other hand, young people generally have good Scandinavian language comprehension. Overall, the report identifies many differences across the Nordic region, divergences both in specific language skills and in views on the relative importance of speaking and understanding Scandinavian languages.

The results of the survey prompted Andrea Skjold Frøshaug and Truls Stende to examine whether weakened language skills could cause the Nordic region to fracture. They discussed the possible negative consequences of the current situation for Nordic integration, identity, and cooperation, but without reaching any definitive conclusion. At any rate, the authors emphasised that the survey results should give the Nordic Council of Ministers reason to scrutinise some of its most basic tenets, e.g., the belief that Danish, Norwegian and Swedish should be the official working languages of official Nordic cooperation.

3. Coherence and Fragmentation

Spurred by this gap between established policy, which urges the preservation and cultivation of the Nordic language community, and the actual language competences of many young people in the Nordic region, the editors of this volume organised the international conference *Coherence and Fragmentation: The Languages of the Nordic Countries and their Interrelations Today* at the University of Florence from 14 to 16 November 2024 to explore the multilingualism of the Nordic countries and in the region from various angles. The conference addressed not only the reported decline in receptive multilingualism, defined as "a mode of multilingual communication in which interactants employ a language and/or a language variety different from their partner's and still understand each other without the help of any additional lingua franca" (Rehbein, Thije and Verschik 2011, 248-49; Blees and Thije 2015, 2; Gooskens 2020, 770-71), but also the role of English, the relationship between majority and minority languages, endangered languages (such as the Sámi languages), translation flows, and literary multilingualism both in itself and in translation. The conference was supported by *Samarbejdsnævnet for Nordenundervisning i Udlandet* (SNU, The Coordinating Committee for Nordic Studies Abroad), a forum that promoted Nordic languages instruction as well as Nordic literatures and cultures at universities both within and outside the Nordic countries.[1]

The terms "coherence" and "fragmentation" may seem value-laden, as "coherence" is generally considered a more positive quality, while "fragmentation" implies destruction, isolation, and incommunicability. However, fragmentation can also point to the plurality and equality of languages foregrounded by the 2024 *Declaration*. Historically, official national language policies

[1] Unfortunately, SNU ended its activities in 2025 due to lack of support from the Nordic partners participating in the forum.

have repressed such plurality and equality. In Norway, for instance, "The Policy of Norwegianisation" (*fornorskingspolitikken*, ca. 1850-1980) sought to eliminate Sámi languages and culture (Minde 2005; Sanders 2017, 162-64) through an internal colonisation process – that is, via the violent imposition of the "monolingual paradigm" (Yildiz 2012, 2) that defined the nation as a monolingual entity. Viewed from this perspective, "coherence" no longer has simply positive meanings but begins to connote colonial fantasies of control, domination, homogenisation and assimilation in which differences are erased, and everybody is made to speak the same language.

It could also be argued that the plurality and equality of languages have been, and are perhaps to some extent still, obscured by official Nordic language politics. The Nordic language community is undoubtedly hierarchised, divided into a core area consisting of Scandinavia and Swedish-speaking Finland ("the primary linguistic community") and an outer circle where various other languages are spoken ("the secondary linguistic community", Vikør 2002, 112). For speakers of these other tongues, Danish, Norwegian or Swedish must first be acquired and mastered, and it is not self-evident that proficiency in one of the Scandinavian languages will also open the door to the other two. Indeed, Johan Strang tellingly prefers the term "Scandinavian language community" to "Nordic language community", thereby terminologically stressing that such community is the prerogative of only a subset of the entire population living in the Nordic region. As he observes: "For these language groups, the Scandinavian language community can constitute not merely a hurdle, but an instrument of distinction and discrimination that separates 'genuine' from 'less genuine' members of the Nordic community" (2023, 24). To date, Danish, Norwegian and Swedish are the working languages of official Nordic cooperation; in recognition of the difficulty Finns and Icelanders face in accessing the Nordic language, however, simultaneous interpretation within the community to and from Finnish was introduced in 1977 and a few years later this practise was extended to also include Icelandic (37).

Even though Finland is geographically part of the Nordic region, its linguistic situation differs from the neighbouring countries in certain respects. Finland's two official languages are from different language families: mutual comprehension is thus much more difficult, if we exclude lexicon consisting of borrowings and loanwords. Finnish pupils are required to study the other domestic language (either Finnish or Swedish), but the mandatory teaching of Swedish has been under attack since the 1980s, particularly by nationalist groups (Väistö 2020). The Sámi languages are officially recognised as minority languages in Finland. However, despite significant improvements in recent decades, the relationship between the dominant culture and Sámi languages and culture is not equal. While Norway's assimilation policies were formally codified into law, Finland pursued a more indirect yet equally consequential approach (*settler colonialism*, Kuokkanen 2020). A central element of this process was the systematic marginalisation of Sámi languages, particularly up to the 1970s – marginalisation achieved by eliminating indigenous place names (Harley 2001) and establishing educational systems that favoured the national languages. As in other parts of Sápmi, the Sámi in Finland have borne the enduring consequences of externally imposed assimilation, rationalised by colonial narratives framing their language and culture as inferior (Lehtola 2022). In addition to Sámi, Finland – like the rest of the Nordic region – now hosts more migrant languages as well as English.

The Declaration on Nordic Language Policy counts the many languages in the Nordic area. Indeed, the region exhibits impressive linguistic diversity that transcends national borders. At the same time, this project of counting languages (see also Vikør 2002, 29-32) – which is undoubtedly highly important to linguistic minorities because it grants visibility and recognition to their languages – does not allow us to fully grasp how porous the borders between

languages are and leads us to disregard that the lives of many people, in the Nordic region as elsewhere, are multilingual. In literary research, multilingualism has become a flourishing independent research field during the last decades. In its many forms, the coincidence of multiple languages in a work of literature contests the notion "that a nation's and a culture's literature is best written and represented in one language" (Kauranen, Huss and Grönstrand 2019, 3), a notion that held sway for centuries and obscured the fact that multilingualism is a common aspect of literature rather than an exception.

This special issue of LEA contains five conference contributions, three of which are by keynote speakers.[2] They represent three of conference's key areas of focus: (i) receptive multilingualism, (ii) English in the Nordic countries, and (iii) literary multilingualism. We will here briefly contextualise the issue's contributions and present their main content.

4. Receptive Multilingualism

As a mode of interaction, receptive multilingualism is an alternative to other forms of cross-border communication, most notably the use of English as a lingua franca. It comes with certain benefits, particularly in terms of production. Charlotte Gooskens points out that "people can express themselves more easily and more precisely in their mother tongue than in a later acquired language" (2020, 771). This assumption, however, was challenged by *Does the Nordic Language Community Exist?* when the report showed that young people in some countries occasionally find it easier to express themselves in English than in their native tongue. In Denmark, for example, 70 percent of the respondents expressed this view. The report did not state whether this finding pertained to communication in general or specifically to cross-border communication within the Nordic region. Focusing on the latter, an earlier study from 2016 showed that young people are pragmatic when it comes to choosing a language. To reduce the risk of misunderstanding, they prefer English in formal and professional contexts whereas they opt for a Scandinavian language in more informal meetings such as coffee breaks and dinners. The choice of language thus depends on the given context (Brink 2016, 103-31).

In her article, Anja Schüppert, Associate Professor at the University of Groningen and one of the conference's keynote speakers, provides a synthesis of seven studies carried out in the framework of the Dutch research project "Linguistic determinants of mutual intelligibility in Scandinavian" in which she participated. Focusing on an important sub-question of the project, namely the asymmetrical intelligibility of spoken Danish and Swedish, her article summarises the research she and her colleagues conducted to investigate the origins of this phenomenon.

Danish and Swedish are the "problem children" of the Nordic language community. A 2012-13 study showed that young Danes and Swedes living in the region around Malmö and Copenhagen have difficulties in understanding one another: given these findings, the study's authors suggested that Danish and Swedish should perhaps no longer be considered *nabosprog* (neighbouring languages) that people can be expected to understand but rather *fremmedsprog* (foreign languages) that are easy to learn (Bacquin and Zola Christensen 2013).

The asymmetrical intelligibility of Danish and Swedish has been confirmed by numerous studies. *Does the Nordic Language Community Exist?* revealed that less than half of young Danes – 40 percent – find Swedish easy to understand, while only just over 20 percent of Swedes find

[2] Eleven other articles from the conference have been published in the special section of *Studi Finno-Ugrici* (2025): "Coherence and Fragmentation. The Languages of the Nordic Countries and Their Interrelations Today" <https://serena.sharepress.it/studifinno/issue/view/872> (01/2026).

it easy to understand Danish (24, 26). This relatively low degree of mutual comprehension between Danish and Swedish and the fact that it is asymmetrical indicate a weakness in the Nordic language community. Still, why do Danes find it easier to decode spoken Swedish than vice versa?

Schüppert's studies investigated both extra-linguistic and language-inherent factors that might be responsible for this asymmetry in mutual understanding. They showed that language attitudes, i.e., the attitude a listener holds towards a language, only explain the variance in intelligibility to a very small degree. Therefore, ideological barriers (negative attitudes and prejudices) are not primarily responsible for creating this asymmetry. Instead, Schüppert's research indicates that the main cause of asymmetry is the phonetic features differentiating the two languages. Spoken Danish has a higher articulation rate and a more significant level of syllable reduction than spoken Swedish. At the same time, Danish orthography is very conservative and corresponds only partially to present-day pronunciation. When Danes encounter cognate Swedish words, i.e. "historically related words in the vocabularies of the two languages" (Gooskens and van Heuven 2021), they rely on their native orthography to understand them. Due to the developments in spoken Danish, Swedes are unable to do so. Danish-Swedish mutual intelligibility is symmetrical in young children and only becomes asymmetrical in the period when children begin attending school. This indicates, Schüppert concludes, that "as Danish schoolchildren become literate, they can start to make use of their native orthography when listening to spoken Swedish, and as adults, their orthographic knowledge helps them to bridge the pronunciation gaps more efficiently than vice versa" (*infra*, 31). In other terms, Danish listeners often succeed in accurately understanding a Swedish word, owing to the similarity between the Swedish pronunciation and the Danish written form.

This monographic issue of LEA also presents another article focusing on receptive multilingualism in the Nordic region, but in this case viewed from a European vantage point. In many Nordic studies programmes outside Scandinavia, students choose to specialise in either Danish, Norwegian or Swedish as part of their degree. At the same time, they are encouraged to learn the other two languages, at least passively, for both cultural and historical reasons – to be able to access texts written in all three languages – and to improve their prospects for employment. And yet, what are the challenges of teaching receptive multilingualism in a non-Scandinavian environment and to students who do not have one of the Scandinavian languages as their first language?

In her article, Sarah Harchaoui, Associate Professor at the Sorbonne University, focuses on teaching Scandinavian mutual intelligibility to French-speaking students. The article is based on a survey she conducted in 2022 with seven BA students who had specialised in Norwegian and taken a one-year course titled "intercompréhension nordique" as part of their degree programme. The primary course objective was to help students identify the three languages – Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish – in both spoken and written form, to recognise the linguistic features separating them, and to understand the general meaning of texts and speech in all three languages. "It was not a course in learning a new language per se," Harchaoui writes, "but rather a course in accessing new linguistic material through previously acquired knowledge" (*infra*, 41).

Based on the students' feedback, the author emphasises that courses in receptive multilingualism need to address both linguistic and ideological aspects of understanding across language barriers. Students should not only be exposed to and learn to cope with linguistic variation in both written and oral forms; they should also be encouraged to reflect on their own linguistic habits and backgrounds, along with wider ideological factors – such as French monolingual ideology – that influence their views on linguistic variation. Such an approach, the author

argues, fosters greater awareness of and sensitivity to variation and helps learners develop the linguistic flexibility necessary to enable comprehension across languages. Teaching receptive multilingualism is thus different from teaching a specific language. Rather than relying on prescriptive norms and linear models of acquisition, Harchaoui writes, teachers should "cultivate metalinguistic insight, promote openness to variation, and embrace the dynamic nature of understanding across closely related languages" (*infra*, 49). One can only hope that, in the long run, experimental courses such as this will lead to the development of relevant didactic materials for Scandinavian language students outside of the Nordic region.

5. English in the Nordic Countries

Only a small portion of the overall population of the Nordic region have English as their mother tongue. For most Nordic citizens, English is an additional language, "a language acquired alongside or subsequent to the mother tongue(s)" (Peterson and Fägersten 2023, 1). Furthermore, English has no official status in any of the Nordic countries (Mortensen 2023, 104).

The Declaration on Nordic Language Policy states that all children and young people in the Nordic area should "learn English and, to varying extents, other languages". It is important to learn English, the Declaration continues, because it is "vital that we in the Nordic region have a solid grasp of languages used in international contexts". According to this official language policy, English is taught at school and learned by pupils and students because it is the language used in international interactions. However, extensive research shows that English has a very prominent status in the Nordic countries today. It is used not only in trade and international communication, but also among the inhabitants of the Nordic countries themselves. Having infiltrated both high- and low-status domains, it can no longer be considered a foreign language; instead, it is transitioning to the status of a second language (Gottlieb 2023, 2). It has also been called "an everyday language" in the Nordic countries (Lønsmann *et al*. 2024, 99).

According to Kristy Beers Fägersten, there are four reasons why the Scandinavians know English at such an advanced level: 1) lexical similarities between English and most Nordic languages, 2) early inclusion of English instruction in schools, 3) undubbed English-language popular culture products, and 4) an openness to learning and using English (2023, 70). The author suggests that these causes overlap and mutually support each other, but it is primarily exposure to and consumption of Anglophone popular culture that is responsible for the high levels of English proficiency documented among the Nordic populations. English is included in primary school curricula starting as early as first grade, but children are also exposed to undubbed English-language popular culture outside of the classroom – through cartoons, films, pop music, computer games, television programmes, YouTube videos etc. – and this effectively kickstarts their acquisition process (*ibidem*). Young people in the Nordic countries often consider popular culture a more important source for learning English than the formal educational system.

Fägersten points out that English has progressed from a source for lexical borrowing to "a valid, viable code for (inter- and intra-) Nordic communication, especially among younger generations" (74). In fact, fully gauging the extent to which English has permeated the Nordic societies and languages requires an examination of code-switching, i.e., the use of more than one language in social conversations or in any conversation between two or more people (Mabule 2019). There is ample proof that language usage is evolving in the form of frequent code-switches to English, with English-language popular culture providing a ready-made input. Citing a 2001 study by Harriet Sharp, Fägersten mentions that switching to English is predominantly characterised by 1) the incorporation of idioms, formulaic language, or other

simple phrases, and 2) the citation of popular culture sources (2023, 74). As an example of the former, Renée Höglin found Swedish-English code switching among young people in informal conversation to be characterised by fixed phrases such as "Shit happens", "Back to basics", or "No problem" (Höglin 2002, 56 quoted in *ibidem*; see also Gottlieb in this volume). When citing popular culture sources, on the other hand, the interlocutors build a sense of solidarity and shared intertextual identity among themselves by signalling their common knowledge of these sources. However, while it is true that many citizens of the Nordic countries speak English, proficiency levels and people's relative degree of comfort speaking English vary widely depending on a complex range of individual and social factors. Some people, particularly older citizens, have a more distanced relationship with English than younger generations (Peterson and Sippola 2022).

At the same time, however, it is also important to note that English has become a part of the linguistic landscape in the Nordic countries because of wider economic, political and technological transformations. The scholars behind the sociolinguistic research project *English and Globalisation in Denmark: A Changing Sociolinguistic Landscape* (2021-25) stress that English use in Denmark is closely tied to certain historical phenomena. At their core, such phenomena are not actually language-related. For instance, they include among the events favouring the integration of English into daily life in Denmark, British colonial history, America's military power in the 20th century, the spread of pop and youth culture in the 1960s, the EU principle of workers' free movement, the end of the state monopoly on television and introduction of commercial channels, the launch of the Internet, and the revolution in communication habits sparked by the introduction of smartphones in the early 2000s (Lønsmann *et al*. 2024, 101). Being closely tied to these massive changes, English use is not a phenomenon that can be easily regulated or eliminated. If the development of Danish society continues along the same pathways as in the last century, English will continue to be important. The scholars behind this project argue that, in practice, Denmark is a bilingual society where both Danish and English play prominent roles for most people (99). To ensure the democratic inclusion of the still-growing number of international workers who live in Denmark but are not proficient in Danish, they furthermore suggest policymakers begin assessing whether to introduce English use in local politics or associations (113-14). In the context of relations between the Nordic languages, English is sometimes also seen as a democratic, "neutral" language of inclusion. In Greenland, for example, Johan Strang suggests that English could have "the democratizing effect of overcoming the binary tension between Greenlandic and Danish languages in the construction of a new post-postcolonial Greenlandic identity" (2023, 32).

Not all the Nordic countries have embraced English to a similar degree, however. Whereas attitudes towards English-language popular culture are generally positive, some Nordic countries are clearly more wary of English influence than others, fearing the invasion of English loanwords and resulting domain losses. Focusing on loanwords, Lars Vikør distinguishes between countries characterised by linguistic purism and linguistic liberalism, respectively. He finds that Iceland and the Faroe Islands are the most purist, whereas Sweden and Denmark are the most liberal language communities (Vikør 2010, 27). For their part, Tore Kristiansen and Helge Sandøy (2010, 157) stress that both structural forces (linguistic similarity to vs. difference from English) and ideological forces (rooted in sociohistorical relationships of domination vs. subordination) shape Nordic differences in tolerance towards imports. Specifically, the countries whose languages are most similar to English and that have historically also dominated the Nordic region are the most open to English.

This issue presents two articles exploring the influence of English on the Nordic languages. The first is authored by Henrik Gottlieb, Emeritus Associate Professor at the University of Copenhagen and one of the conference's keynote speakers. Gottlieb uses his extensive research in "Anglicisms" – defined by the author as "any individual or systemic language feature adapted or adopted from English, or inspired or boosted by English models, used in intralingual communication in a speech community in which English is not the home language" (2020, 32) – to explore whether English influence will cause the Scandinavian languages to slide further away from each other and thereby lead to another fracture in the Nordic language community.

Relying solely on standard Scandinavian Anglicisms dictionaries, published in the 1990s or early 2000s and employing different criteria for including or excluding entries, it appears that the three Scandinavian languages differ significantly. Gottlieb, however, quantifies and evaluates English's contemporary influence on Danish, Swedish and Norwegian by exploring large contemporary text corpora to find that this influence supports convergence among the languages. In other words, considering the English influence to which they are exposed, the relationship between the Scandinavian languages is one of coherence rather than fragmentation. As such, English loanwords might help Scandinavians understand each other even if they each speak their own native language. As the author writes: "Using recognisable (whether visible or invisible) Anglicisms, typically content words or expressions with emotional power, young and old Scandinavians may continue to communicate without resorting to 'real' English" (*infra*, 71). This forecast is rather encouraging for those who deem the Nordic language community important.

The second article exploring the influence of English is written by Sofia Stolt and Jannika Lassus, a Lecturer at Hanken School of Economics and a senior University Lecturer at the University of Helsinki, respectively. Both authors also serve as members of the Matriculation Examination Board where they represent Swedish as a native language. This board is responsible for managing and administering the national matriculation examination in Finland. This examination is what is known as a high-stakes exam, i.e. one that forms the basis for admission to higher education. In their article, they give a corpus-based overview of traces of foreign-language influence in the essays written for the mandatory test in Mother Tongue and Literature by L1 speakers of Swedish. The test aims to measure the extent to which the examinees have achieved the objectives set out in the upper-secondary school curriculum and thus achieved maturity and readiness for further studies. Stolt and Lassus' study shows that the students are poised between the local and the global. Swedish in Finland is tied to the standard norms of Swedish, but the country's Swedish speakers are simultaneously surrounded by a Finnish-speaking majority and part of a global digital English-speaking environment. This reality is mirrored in the essays. Even in high-stakes exams with strong demands of normative language use, many of the essays show the influence of foreign languages, especially English, e.g., in the form of English spellings. While the content of these essays is comprehensibile, the texts receive lower marks because the language used is not considered standard Swedish.

The authors pose the important question of whether students know how to keep the languages separate, i.e. whether they use influences from foreign languages consciously, or whether language mixing is something they cannot refrain from using – a fact which would indicate a possible language change in the written language. In any case, Stolt and Lassus stress the need to consciously preserve the L1 even though today's society encourages multilingualism: "Actively using a standard variety of one's mother tongue is one way to preserve it, and that requires knowledge of the language", the authors write (*infra*, 84). To acquire such knowledge of the language, however, students must be exposed to text and media in the standard language as well as role models who use the language according to the established norms.

6. Literary Multilingualism

As Julia Tidigs and Helena Bodin point out, literary multilingualism is both a strategy and a concept. It is the strategy necessarily used by multilingual literature but it is also a broad and multifaceted concept in literary studies. The concept applies to texts written in two or more languages (including texts alternating standard language and dialectal variation), texts thematising and representing multilingualism without being necessarily written in more than one language, authors who write in two or more languages, and countries that have literary traditions in different languages (2020, 144).

Multilingualism is ubiquitous in the everyday life of many people and has been important throughout Western literary history (Rossich 2018, 50). Until recently, however, it has been obscured by what Yasemin Yildiz has famously dubbed the "monolingual paradigm", i.e., the set of beliefs according to which monolingualism is the natural norm and individuals have only one "true" language, their "mother tongue", which is in turn associated with a single national identity (Yildiz 2012, 2). The monolingual paradigm first emerged in late eighteenth-century Europe and has had a pervasive influence on the construction and perception of individuals, disciplines, institutions, literatures, cultures and nations. However, as Yildiz points out, there are signs that the tide is changing. Since the 1990s, multilingual practices in literature, the arts, and daily life have garnered growing public and academic interest; at the same time, however, such interest cannot be fully comprehended without also acknowledging monolingualism as the historically specific influence that still frames and shapes our interpretations of these practices (3-4). Today's positive attention to literary multilingualism has generated many new research threads. These include rediscovering and reevaluating writers who produced work in several languages, efforts to partially rewrite national literary histories, and an expanding interest in exile literature, migration literature and literature from and about border regions, e.g., Southern Schleswig which is home to a Danish-speaking minority (Friedrichsen and Sandberg 2025, 5).

In the Nordic countries, literary multilingualism studies have developed significantly in the last decade (see e.g. Kauranen, Huss and Grönstrand 2019, 3-23). One of the most prominent scholars in this field is Julia Tidigs, University Lecturer at the University of Helsinki. Tidigs has published widely on literary multilingualism and theoretical approaches to studying this phenomenon and was one of the conference's keynote speakers. She contributes to this volume with an article on the Swedish author Johanna Frid's debut novel *Nora eller Brinn Oslo brinn* (Nora or Burn Oslo burn), a novel that won Frid the Dagens Nyheter Culture Prize in 2019. Tidigs's article exemplifies the way literary multilingualism studies have shifted from focusing on multilingualism as primarily a textual quality impacting how characters are portrayed, milieus depicted, and themes developed, for example, to multilingualism as the result of interactions between the text and its readers. This new strand of research does not operate with a notion of an ideal reader who is fully linguistically competent and able to understand all the different languages or language varieties present in the text. Rather, it envisions readers in the plural, stressing that different readers – or even the same reader at different points in time – will interact with the text in different ways (Tidigs 2019, 225). In encountering multilingual texts readers are called to draw and dissolve the linguistic borders between languages. Readers do not consume multilingual texts passively; rather, they actively participate as co-creators of multilingualism.

Nora eller Brinn Oslo brinn, a work of autofiction, is about the complicated relationship between the young Swedish woman Johanna and her Danish boyfriend Emil. There is, however, a third partner in the relationship, or so Johanna suspects – Emil's ex-girlfriend, the beautiful Norwegian Nora, whom the narrator and protagonist Johanna never meets in person but compul-

sively stalks on the internet. Johanna feels inferior to Nora, considering the Norwegian woman a paragon of perfection, and her sense of inadequacy only deepens when she discovers that she suffers from endometriosis, a painful and debilitating disease affecting ten percent of all fertile women.

As Tidigs shows, the troubled dynamics of borders – their creation, transgression and permeability – is the central organising axis of the novel; it is the unifying principle that ties together what might otherwise seem to be very different thematic threads. On a thematic level, the novel foregrounds the many failures of receptive multilingualism in Scandinavia, with Johanna having more trouble with Danish than Emil has with Swedish – in other words, the lovers embody the typical asymmetry in mutual intelligibility between Danish and Swedish discussed by Schüppert. However, what the novel *says* about language is one thing – what it *does* in praxis is quite another. Not only does it alternate between languages, with Emil's utterances rendered in Danish, but it also allows borders to collapse by mixing languages so that Danish and Norwegian "penetrate" the narrator's Swedish.[3] In this way, as Tidigs observes, "the novel simultaneously exposes its readers to Scandinavian languages, presupposing intercomprehension […] or, at least, tolerance of being put in a position of partial fluency" (*infra*, 98). The untranslated multilingualism of the text places the reader in a position similar to that of the narrator-protagonist. By exposing readers to the neighbouring languages, Tidigs suggests, the novel not only invites them to learn these languages (or at least elements of them) but also and importantly offers them a first-hand taste of unfamiliarity and semi-comprehension, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the novel: "*Nora eller Brinn Oslo brinn* reinforces literature's ability to not only inform or represent but also to *enact* and allow readers to *experience* such crucial questions as those of linguistic and corporeal borders," Tidigs concludes (*infra*, 100).

As we have hopefully shown, the Nordic region offers a compelling study in both coherence and fragmentation. On the one hand, the languages of the Nordic countries exhibit remarkable coherence fuelled not only by their common origins but also by centuries of cultural exchange and shared political narratives. On the other hand, the region also features linguistic fragmentation due to, for example, political borders and the pressures of globalisation. Coherence persists in the Nordic region through shared communicative norms, institutional frameworks, and traditions of mutual intelligibility even as processes of diversification continue at individual and societal levels. Fragmentation in this sense entails not the breakdown of a once unified system but rather the proliferation of voices and perspectives within an increasingly complex linguistic landscape.

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[3] Apparently, while the Swedish text does not translate features of Danish and Norwegian, Nanna Lund, the Danish translator of Frid's novel (or her editor) did not believe that Danish readers would be able to grasp unadulterated Swedish passages. In the Danish translation, therefore, the main text is in Danish while Johanna's lines of dialogue are in Swedish. However, these lines were translated into Danish in an appendix to the novel (see Frid 2019, 188-96).

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