

Languages in scholarly publishing and support of scholarly publishing in the Nordic area

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Abstract

Based on data collected in the DIAMAS Survey of institutional publishing in the European Research Area, I show which languages are used for publication and service providing among respondents from the Nordic and Baltic region. I also discuss languages for service and support in the Nordic countries, in particular in Norway, in light of legal requirements.

Keywords

Scholarly journals, institutional publishing, Sami languages, Nordic languages, neighbour languages

In the [DIAMAS project](#), an EU-funded project to look at institutional publishing in the European Research Area, we sent out a large survey and asked respondents, amongst many other things, about which languages they published in, and which languages they provide service and support in. The survey targeted «Institutional Publishing Service Providers» (IPSPs), which is a term coined by DIAMAS to refer to institutional publishers, service providers to such institutional publishers, or a combination of service providers and institutional publishers.

The Nordic countries are Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland; the Faeroes, the Åland Islands and Greenland are also included but there are no responses from the latter areas. The Baltic countries are Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. They often seem to be “forgotten”, but in some contexts they are treated with the Nordic countries. There are historic ties between the Nordic and Baltic countries, and the journal [ScieCom Info](#), to which *Nordic Perspectives on Open Science* is in some sense a successor, had the Baltic countries expressly as part of its remit. I have therefore also included them in the discussion, though set (a bit) apart. They are not linguistically closely related to the Nordic languages, even if Estonian is related to Finnish. Below I list some important limitations to the numbers presented:

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1. The numbers represent number of respondents, generally institutions. One response may represent a single journal, or 100. And a journal may be small or large measured in number of articles, so the numbers do not (necessarily) represent the size of scholarly output.
2. The response rate was not overwhelming, but we strongly believe that for most Nordic countries a majority of the scholarly journals published by scholarly institutions are represented. For the Baltic countries we believe the response rate was lower and covers the institutional publishing sector less well, hence we must take the Baltic numbers more as indications. This is also a reason to treat the Baltic data separately.

Publication languages

Respondents were asked

Q3. What are the languages most frequently used in the publications of the IPSP? (Please rank up to five languages by indicating 1= most frequently used to 5= least frequently used)

They were presented with an alphabetical list of European languages with a field to enter a number for ranking, and with an ‘Other’ option and a field to fill in the missing language(s). The question was not obligatory, and some of the respondents chose not to answer it.

The below table tries to summarise the responses, for details and more information see the respective sections. “Not” is short for “not used”.

	Baltic			Nordic				
	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden	Denmark
Responses to survey	2	5	7	27	3	15	15	10
Response on language	2	4	5	25	3	15	15	9
Local language first	0	0	1	16	3	8	6	3
English first	2	4	4	9	0	7	9	6
Local language position	Second (1) Not (1)	Second (3) Not (1)	First (1) Second (3) Not (1)	Finnish first (14) Swedish first (2) Not (7)	First (3) Not (0)	First (8) Not (1)	First (6) Second (8) Not (1)	First (3) Second (4) Not (2)

Table 1 Responses to the question about publication language(s)

Baltic countries

Estonia

There were only two responses to the survey from Estonia. Both have English as the first language, one of them as the only language. The other has Estonian in second place, followed by Russian and German.

Latvia

There were five respondents, of which four have answered the question on publication languages. They all have English as their first language, one has only English, while the remaining three have Latvian as the second language. One has Russian as a third language.

Lithuania

There were seven respondents, of which five answered the question on publication languages. They all publish in English, four of them has English as the most important language, one as the second most important. Four publish in Lithuanian, one has Lithuanian as the most important language, three as the second most important. One does not publish in Lithuanian, but has French, Italian and Spanish in addition to English. One respondent mentions German and French in third and fourth place, after English and Lithuanian.

Summary of the Baltic countries

We notice that in the Baltic countries, English is by far the most important publishing language, only one respondent has the national language in first place, it is generally in second place. The response rate for these countries were rather low and not necessarily representative. Looking at similar data from DOAJ (*Directory of Open Access Journals*) we see that nearly all journals in these countries list English as a publishing language, while a minority mentions the local language. This suggests that English is a dominant publishing language in the Baltic countries, far more important than the local languages. We have no information that could lead us to say anything about why this is so.

The Nordic countries

Finland

Of 27 Finnish respondents to the survey, 25 answered this question.

The two major languages are Finnish and English. Nineteen publish in Finnish, three of these in Finnish only, 11 of those publishing in more than one language has Finnish as the most important language. Twenty-two publish in English, of these seven in English only, two of those with more than one language has English as the most important language.

Two respondents have Swedish as their primary language. Three mention German, two mention French and one Russian. Irish and Welsh is mentioned by one, this is closely connected to the subject field of what is published.

Iceland

There were three respondents from Iceland. They all have Icelandic as their first language, with English as the second. One also lists French, Spanish and Danish – this is related to the subject field of the respondent.

Norway

There were 15 responses from Norway, all answered the question about publishing languages. Twelve publish in Norwegian, one publishes only in Norwegian and seven has Norwegian as the primary language. Fourteen publish in English, one only in English, six with English as the primary language and five with English as the second most important language – while two have English as the fourth most important language. Danish is used by nine respondents, ranging from second to fourth place. Swedish is used by 10 respondents, ranging from second to fifth place. Spanish is mentioned by two, one also mentions Polish, Portuguese and French.

Sweden

We had 15 responses from Sweden, all answered the question about publishing languages. Fourteen publish in Swedish, six have Swedish as the most important language, eight as the second most important language after English. Fourteen publish in English, one in English only, eight with English as the most important language, five with English as second most important after Swedish. The one journal not publishing in English has Swedish as the most important language, with Norwegian in second place as the only other language. Danish is mentioned as a publishing language by six respondents, mainly in fourth place. Norwegian is mentioned by seven, placed from second to fifth place. German is mentioned by one, Romanian by one, French by two, Spanish by one, Portuguese by one and Finnish by one.

Denmark

There were 10 responses from Denmark, nine who answered the question about publication languages. Five of them publish in Danish, three of them with Danish as the most important language, the other two with Danish as the second most important language after English. All nine publish in English, two of them only in English. French is mentioned by three, German also by three, one mentions Swedish and Norwegian in addition to Portuguese, one mentions Faroese.

Summary of the Nordic countries

In the Nordic countries we generally see that the national language is the most important publishing language – except in Denmark (where only half publish in Danish) and Sweden (where nearly all publish in Swedish but less than half have Swedish as the most important language). English is very important in all Nordic countries, but in Denmark and Sweden English is more important than the national languages. Neighbour languages (Norwegian-Swedish-Danish) are very important in Norway, a bit less so in Sweden, and not at all in Denmark.

Service and support languages

Respondents were asked

Q56. In what languages is the IPSP able to provide and/or support services?

The respondents were given a list of European languages (in alphabetic order) to tick off, and an ‘other’ option with a field to fill in the language(s) in question, that were not on the list. As languages appeared alphabetically, it is not possible to say much about the relative importance of the various service and support languages for the individual respondent, but the number of respondents in a given country who have chosen a specific language may indicate the importance of that language for the country in question.

The Baltic countries

Estonia

Only one of the two respondents has reported to be using Estonian as a support language. Both respondents offer service and support in English.

Latvia

Four of the five respondents answered this question. They all use Latvian and English, one also Russian.

Lithuania

All the seven respondents answered this question. All seven use English, six also Lithuanian and one of these also Estonian and Latvian.

Summary of the Baltic countries

Whereas English is the most common language as a publishing language in the Baltic countries, national languages are better represented as service and support languages.

The Nordic countries

Finland

Twenty-five of the 27 respondents answered this. Twenty-two offer Finnish, 20 English and 13 Swedish, while one has German and one French.

Iceland

All three respondents use Icelandic, two offer English and Danish and one of these also Swedish.

Norway

All 15 respondents answered this question. Fourteen offer Norwegian, 11 English and five Danish and Swedish. Among other languages we notice Welsh, Dutch, Frisian, Russian, French and Italian.

Sweden

Thirteen of 15 respondents answered this question. Twelve of them offer Swedish, one of these only offer Swedish. Twelve offer English, one of these only offer English. Danish and Norwegian are offered by two respondents, two offer German.

Denmark

All 10 respondents answered the question on service and support languages. Seven offer Danish, 10 English, two Swedish, one Norwegian and two Finnish. A number of other languages are mentioned, amongst them also Swahili.

Summary of the Nordic countries

The national languages are generally best represented, except for Denmark where English is better represented than Danish. Neighbour languages are best represented in Norway, where five out of 15 offer Danish and Swedish. In Finland, 13 out of 22 offer Swedish, but Swedish has official status in Finland, where it is the first language of 5 % of the population.

Discussion

The choice of publication language probably says something about the status of the national language relative to English, as a scholarly language. It affects readership, authorship and recognition, and the selection of publication language is affected by these issues. Among the DIAMAS respondents, we see that in the Baltic countries, English is clearly more important than the national languages. In the Nordic countries, the picture is more varied. In Iceland, Norway and Finland the national language is more important than English, in Sweden Swedish and English are about equally important while in Denmark English is more important than Danish. The position of English versus local languages could be both a result of a wish to situate the journals in an international landscape, and on the subject

field of the journals – some subjects are more international than others. The information we have on this is not good enough for us to try an analysis, we only have information on the IPSP level, not on the journal level.

Service and support language has quite another function, it is used when helping editors, authors and readers navigate various sides of different publication systems. As one could expect, national languages are better represented in this role than as a publishing language. The Baltic countries have so few responses to the survey that it is difficult to discuss them further – for service and support languages we have no supplementary data from DOAJ to give a better foundation for a discussion, as opposed to publication languages.

A striking aspect is the absence of minority languages, both as publication and service and support languages. Finland, Sweden and Norway have Saami minorities, Sweden and Norway Finnish-speaking (Kven, Meänkieli) minorities. Denmark has a German-speaking minority, in addition to Greenlandic (Greenlandic Inuit) and Faeroese landscapes. Finnish, Yiddish, Romani and Romanes also have a special status in at least one country. This is not at all reflected in the languages offered as service and support languages. Reasons for this could e.g. be that this is not seen as a practical need as speakers of minority languages are also speakers of the relevant majority languages; that the speakers are so few that resources are hard to come by – or that this aspect hasn't been part of the planning of the services offered.

My university, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, has special obligations regarding Saami. Regulations under the Sámi Act of 1987 ("Lov om Sametinget og andre samiske rettsforhold" (1987) make us obliged to answer written communications to us in Saami, in Saami. I understand it so that this right applies to persons, not to institutions. It is a question whether an author or editor are representatives of an institution, or persons who have this right. A reader will generally have this right. But our publishing service is not equipped to meet this requirement.

One respondent puts the situation quite well: “[T]he languages that we are able to provide support in are the languages that the current staff accidentally speak - but this is person-dependent”. It is quite clear that this applies to all respondents – language capacity is not a result of a plan, but of what languages are offered by those who work there. This is also seen in the list of smaller languages offered by some respondents.

When it comes to neighbour languages – Danish, Swedish, Norwegian – the situation is not much better. A minority of Danish, Swedish or Norwegian respondents offer service in any of the other two languages. Is this a problem? It depends. A Norwegian public body is by law ("Act relating to Language [Lov om språk], " 2021, section 8) obliged to accept communications in Danish or Swedish.

They are not, however, obliged to offer to respond in Danish or Swedish, an answer in Norwegian will suffice. Inter-Nordic language comprehension is thus an obligation to both sides. If the 10 Norwegian respondents who didn't list Danish or Swedish as service and support languages by this say they are unable to respond to communication in these languages, they have a problem – if they are part of public bodies. A majority are, see ("Act relating to Language [Lov om språk]," 2021, section 3). HE institutions in Norway are, with a few exceptions, part of the Norwegian government.

I have been unable to find laws in Denmark or Sweden that give users of other Nordic languages the same rights as the Norwegian law gives. But there is a convention between Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway on the right of citizens of Nordic countries to use their own language in other Nordic countries ("Konvensjon mellom Norge, Danmark, Finland, Island og Sverige om nordiske statsborgeres rett til å bruke sitt eget språk i et annet nordisk land," 1981) when communicating with a public body – this is from 1981, my assumption is that today this also extends to services provided on the internet, not only in person. This convention is primarily directed towards use in specific areas but has passages that says that the use of the person's own language when in contact with an official body, is an ideal in general. Institutional publishing in the Nordic countries is to a large extent done by public bodies, they should have an intention to adhere to the spirit of this convention and allow for the use of the neighbour languages.

If the respondents not listing the neighbour languages as available in a support situation just intended to say they couldn't themselves produce an answer in Danish or Swedish, it is not a problem. But it is in itself interesting if being able to help someone who uses Danish or Swedish, is not seen as offering service or support in that language. The important thing must be that users can use a language, and get a response in a language that they understand – the languages do not have to be the same in both directions. I hope that the responses from Norway, Denmark and Sweden under-communicate the ability to respond adequately to users of neighbour languages.

A conclusion (or two) might be:

- Nordic institutions need to look at how they serve neighbour and minority languages. According to their current responses, they generally may have problems fulfilling legal requirements.
- When identifying and planning for the service provision languages, Nordic institutions need to consider capacity both to receive and to produce communication in a specific language, and – in the spirit of section 8 of ("Act relating to Language [Lov om språk]," 2021) – recognise that both sides have a responsibility to communicate across language differences.

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