

Is Norwegian threatened as an academic language?

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Introduction

There is reason to maintain that Norwegian is threatened as an academic language. The threat has taken on new proportions in recent years and has become the concern of many Norwegian academics. In an article to be published in the *International Review of Education* (No.6.2007) I have gone deeper into the problems we face and into the debate both in Norway and Sweden than the space offered me here will allow me to do.

Higher rewards for academic publications in English than in Norwegian

In 1991 Norwegian state institutions were given the possibility of introducing "performance salary" as a part of local salary negotiations. One of the institutes in the Faculty of Humanities started not long after rewarding the academic staff for their published books and articles. The following rewards were paid by the Institute of Philosophy at the University of Oslo in 1997. An author who had got a book published in Norwegian received a bonus of 7 000 NOK (about 1 100 US\$) while an author who had got a book published in English received a bonus of 15 000 NOK. An academic member of staff who had edited a scholarly book or professional journal in Norwegian received a bonus of 2 000 NOK. If the book or journal was published in the English language, the editor got a bonus of 5 000 NOK. The author of a doctoral thesis written in Norwegian received a bonus of 7000 NOK, while an author of a doctoral thesis written in English was given a bonus of 15 000 NOK. The author of an article in a professional refereed journal got a bonus of 1 000 NOK if the article was in Norwegian and 7000 NOK if the article was in English.

When this example was presented to the staff of the Institute for Educational Research at an end of the year seminar in 1997, there were protests among our academic staff. We saw the system as a danger both to our own language and to the obligation a

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university has to the rest of society. We saw it as a threat to democracy. Unfortunately the example from the Institute of Philosophy was the beginning of a trend which was to continue and become institutionalized.

Publish in English or perish

In 2004 the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions published a dossier called: *Vekt på forskning* (Emphasis on Research). This publication institutionalized a reward system dividing journals and publishing companies into three levels, level zero (no reward given to the institution or researcher – most publishing companies in developing countries belong to this category even if they publish in English), level 1 (reward given), level 2 (higher reward given – often three times higher as level 1).

On the internet one can find a list of 486 ranked publishing companies. Of these 55 companies are ranked at level 2, while 431 companies are ranked at level 1. No Norwegian publishing company is ranked at level 2, not even the University Publishing Company or other academic publishers like Fagbokforlaget, Gyldendal Akademisk, Cappelen Akademisk or Tapir Akademisk.. More than 80% of the publishing companies ranked at level 2 are based in the US.² Points are given for one-authored books published by a publishing company ranked on level 1 (5 points), and one-authored books published by a publishing company ranked at level 2 (8 points). Chapters in books published by a publishing company ranked on level 1 is rewarded with 0.7 points, at level 2 with 1 point. Each point was in 2006 rewarded with 40 000 NOK (6 500 US\$) which comes to the university centrally. Normally the central university unit keeps 25% and sends the rest to the faculties where the academic staff members who have generated the revenue are employed. The faculty keeps some of the money and distributes the rest to the different departments. The departments decide how much of the money will go to the academic staff member who has written the article/chapter/book and how much will be part of a research fund which everyone in the academic staff can apply for. At my

² This is the web-site dealing with the ranking of publications:

www.uhr.no/forskning/publisering/utvalget/om_vitenskapelig_publicisering

From this web-site you are led to the up-dated lists which can be found at: <http://dbh.nsd.uib.no/kanaler/>.

institute the academic staff member who has generated the points will get about a tenth of the sum for her or his own research purposes.

When it comes to academic journals, a list of 1758 ranked journals are given, among which a tenth are ranked at level two and the rest at level one. Only four of the many peer-reviewed academic journals published in Norwegian have been ranked at level two - *Tidsskrift for Rettsvitenskap* (Journal of Law³), *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Journal of History⁴), *Edda* (A name from the Norse Saga⁵) and *Maal og Minne* (Oral and written literature⁶). Within the field of Educational Research no academic journal where any of the articles is in another language than English has been ranked at level two. Scholarly articles on level one are rewarded with 1 point and at level two with 3 points. This system has now been institutionalized and forms part of the basis for university funding.

The change in the Law of universities and colleges in 2005

The law of Norwegian higher education of 12th of May 1995 contained the following paragraph: “The language of instruction in Norwegian universities and colleges is normally Norwegian” (§2.7). The paragraph had come into the law after quite a lot of pressure from the Norwegian Language Council. At one point the Ministry of Education tried to delete the paragraph but Parliament put it back in. In 2002 a new law of

³ All laws in Norway are written in Norwegian.. *Tidsskrift for Rettsvitenskap*, has since its first issue in 1888 been a channel for Nordic academic law studies and builds links between lawyers in the Nordic countries. This is the academic journal where interpretations of laws and discussions around them take place. The journal also publishes reviews of current books

⁴ The journal is the longest running academic journal in Norway. It has since its first issue in 1871 been the central channel for Norwegian historians, read by researchers and students as well as teachers of history. *Historisk tidsskrift* is the journal of the Norwegian society of historians, a society for those who have had at least two full terms of study of history at a Norwegian university and are engaged in historical research or dissemination of such research. The editorial board had to fight hard to have the journal be recognised at level 2.

⁵ Edda was the name of a book of stories and tales written by Snorre Sturlason around 1200. The journal *Edda* was founded in 1914 as a Nordic journal for the academic study of Nordic literature. The journal is one of the leading journals within studies of literature written in the Nordic languages.

⁶The direct translation of *Maal og Minne* is “Language and Memory”. The journal publishes articles which deal with Norwegian language and Norwegian oral and written tradition like literature from the Middle Ages, names of places in Norway, folk tales and oral literature still alive among people in remote areas. *Maal og Minne* publishes two numbers each year. It publishes articles mostly in Norwegian, Swedish and Danish but also some in German and English.

Norwegian higher education was proposed. Here it was again suggested to do away with paragraph 2.7. There were protests against the deletion of this paragraph from the University of Tromsø, from the Norwegian Language Council and from some academics. Yet the paragraph was taken out of the new law of Norwegian higher education of the 1st of August 2005. It was argued that the paragraph had to be taken out because of the current internationalization of universities. When this important paragraph is not there any more, we cannot demand from non-Norwegian speaking university professors that they learn the Norwegian language in order to teach and tutor our students in our language and in order not to force the academic staff to hold their meetings in English. This development is also a threat to Norwegian as an academic language.

Conclusion

The Norwegian case shows how a smaller European language like Norwegian is threatened as an academic language. When Norwegian academics are discouraged from publishing in Norwegian it means that academic Norwegian will deteriorate and vocabulary will not be further developed. We shall reach a situation which African academics are in when they have difficulties discussing academic matters in African languages because the academic concepts have not been developed in their languages. All languages develop through use and they also fail to develop or stagnate through disuse. The Norwegian case also shows the threat to Norwegian publishing houses. The fact that no weight is given to journals or chapters in books published in developing countries discourages Norwegian academics to use such publication channels. The fact that no bonus is given for publishing in non-refereed journals or newspapers also discourages Norwegian academics from using time for such publishing. This all means a threat to democracy, to enlightening the public.

A discussion about the anglicization of European universities is going on in many countries in Europe and is very lively both in Norway, Sweden and Denmark at the moment. Norwegian academics seem to be more prepared to defend the Norwegian language as an academic language than colleagues in some other European countries. On the 5th of May 2006 a petition signed by 223 well-known Norwegian professors from the humanities and the social sciences was published in our largest newspaper *Aftenposten*,

the newspaper which also had been the leading news channel for the debate. The petition was called: *To the defence of Norwegian as a language of research*. The text referred to the publication “*Snart to hundre*” (Soon two hundred⁷) from the University of Oslo where it was stated that the universities have a fundamental responsibility to preserve and further develop Norwegian as an academic language. The publication launched as a principle that there should be no connection between financial reward and choice of language of publication. The petition supported this principle and argued that it had to be established as a norm for the whole of the university and college sector. The professors who signed the petition challenged the academic Norway to rethink the reward system which had been built up. The social sciences and humanities need provisions which do not discriminate against Norwegian. The petition has, however so has (April 2007) had no effect. The reward system continues.

The engagement of many Norwegian academics in the defence of Norwegian as an academic language can be contrasted with the attitude of many Dutch academics. In 1989 Prof. Ritzen was appointed the Minister of Education in Holland. Minister Ritzen who had a doctoral degree both in economics and physics and had studied in the United States, had as a professor of economics in Holland felt frustrated because of the use of Dutch in the academia. As a minister he now proposed that English should be the sole medium of instruction in all Dutch universities. His proposal met with overwhelming support from the academia. His proposal met with harsh critique when it was presented in Parliament, however. Parliament insisted on regulating the language issue because it didn't trust the Minister⁸ and the academics. Therefore Parliament actually passed an amendment to the university law now saying that no courses can be offered in another language if it is not offered in Dutch. This was actually seen as a step backwards for those professors who wanted more English language instruction in Dutch higher education. There has, however, still been a steady growth of Master courses taught in English within Dutch higher education. There is reason to watch closely the threat to smaller European languages as academic languages posed by increased anglicization of the academia.

⁷ Referring to the fact that the University of Oslo, which was founded in 1811, soon is two hundred years old. The publication came from a committee which had been appointed to look at the language issue at the University of Oslo.

⁸ Former Minister Ritzen later worked in the World Bank in Washington DC.

