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Editorial

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Labour shortages all around, including in the Danish film industry

Oct 13, 2021

Theme: Language technology and Nordic cooperation



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Can language technology make Nordic cooperation easier?

The Nordic labour markets are starting to heat up. Unemployment in Denmark has come down below where it was before the pandemic. In Iceland, wages have been rising so fast that the country has had the highest wage increase in Europe.

EDITORIAL

13.10.2021

BY BJÖRN LINDAHL, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Lifting restrictions is about more than returning to normal. There is a sharp increase in demand for some products, while global shipping is fighting with the aftermath of closed harbours in China. The car industry and others are affected by a computer chip shortage. Meanwhile, much of the Eastern European labour force has gone home, including hundreds of thousands of transport workers.

In Iceland, wages have risen more than in other countries. The municipal sector has seen the greatest increase, somewhat surprisingly. Until August this year, the increase was nearly 8%. But that does not surprise Katrín Olafsdóttir, assistant professor of economy at the University of Reykjavik.

“Wages always increase more in Iceland than in other countries. There is regularly a discussion on trying to do this like other Nordic countries, with a more moderate salary increase. We just simply haven’t managed to get there,” she says.

In Denmark, one of the consequences of the labour shortage has been that the country’s film industry is now short of everything from scriptwriters to actors. As a result, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation stopped what was going to be one of Danish film’s largest productions.

While the pandemic forced us to travel less, we watch more TV. Streaming services like Netflix have become the new film giants, that increasingly make their own content. One of the largest successes right now is the Korean “Squid Game”.

That means unusual translations – no longer the usual translation of English to other languages or the other way around. Language technology is this edition’s theme and we look at various aspects of this. The technological development has been phenomenal, and the pandemic gave digital solutions an extra boost.

“The restrictions opened our eyes. Today we can run a production in front of a large audience here at The Black Diamond while transmitting it live to libraries and upper secondary schools in Denmark. We reach people across the country without them needing to be in Copenhagen,” says Lise Bach Hansen, Head of Talks & Literature at the Royal Danish Library.

Can new technology also help create closer cultural contacts between the Nordics, if language barriers can be overcome through technology? Or is language technology a further threat to the smaller languages, like Greenlandic and Sami?

Because in order to fully use the new language tools that allow your mobile to guess the words you want to text, to ask your digital assistant questions, to get your mobile camera to translate a sign, or get it to understand what is being said in a foreign language, you want to be able to communicate with your smartphone in your own language. That is not the case today. Siri does not speak Greenlandic and there is no option to choose a keyboard in Greenlandic.

Translating costs are spiraling in most of the Nordic languages. In Norway, they rose by 72% in six years. But is the problem actually the opposite – that not enough qualified interpreters are being used? Despite the pandemic, on-screen interpreting makes up only 1% of all translating jobs in Norway.

The Nordic countries have languages that are well documented and studied, with enormous collections of texts and words. In Norway, there are 50 billion words and Finland has 24 billion, according to Krister Lindén, head of the Finnish language bank. 200 years of newspapers have been added and the goal for the “Donate speech” campaign is to log 10,000 hours of spoken language in all dialects and language variants. This is hugely valuable for those who want to devel-

op new language tools, but licenses and fees also limit what can be used.

“The licenses are too expensive for us to be able to afford them. We can dream about publishing the Greenlandic-English dictionary containing 100,000 words, but it would cost too much,” says Beatrine Heilmann, at the Greenlandic language secretariat.



New Swedish delegation to fight work-related crime

On 27 September, the Swedish government took another step in the fight against work-related crime when it presented a delegation tasked with increasing knowledge about the issue while supporting the authorities working to stop it.

NEWS

13.10.2021

TEXT: GUNHILD WALLIN, PHOTO: NINNI ANDERSSON/REGERINGSKANSLIET

“Society must not compromise in its view of employers who exploit people and distort competitiveness. The national delegation will represent yet another increase in our ambition to fight cheating and crime in the labour market, and as a result increase security in our society,” Minister for Employment Eva Nordmark told a press conference presenting the new delegation.

The government has launched several initiatives to fight work-related crime in the past, including upping the Swedish Work Environment Authority’s budget by 30 million kronor (€2.9m). In next year’s budget, another 10 million kronor is proposed to fight work-related crime.

Police capacity has also been increased, and sanctions against employers that break the law have been strengthened. Exploiting people has become a new criminal offence. Since 2018, a range of authorities have been cooperating, including the Work Environment Authority, the Police and the Tax Agency, in order to better catch businesses that are in breach of labour legislation.

Since then, 4,000 businesses have been inspected without warning. One in ten were either completely or partially shut down, while half were found to be in breach of legislation and told to fix it.

Link to organised crime

There has been growing awareness about the increase in work-related crime. In the hardest-hit sectors, there is a lot of interest both among employers and employees for getting to grips with the problems. The most vulnerable trades include construction, hospitality and transport.

There is also a link between work-related crime and organised crime. There are large sums of money to be earned on criminal activities within the construction industry, for instance, where many people are being exploited while working entirely without benefiting from collective agreement rights. As a result, many serious companies are finding it increasingly hard to compete with those that can sell goods and services cheaper because they cheat.



Minister for Employment Eva Nordmark.

“Cheating and criminal activity in the labour market is an increasing social problem. Long subcontractor chains and a lack of regulation around labour immigration has resulted in players within several sectors systematically exploiting foreign labour while circumventing licensing and taxation rules. This type of work-related crime sometimes helps finance serious organised crime in Sweden,” said Eva Nordmark.

Work-related crime impacts most people

The new delegation will be working for over three years. Ola Pettersson is the acting chair, and comes from the positions as an economist at LO, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation. One week after the press conference he was already busy setting up a secretariat.

“What inspires me to do this task is that there are major issues with work-related crime and that this impacts on many people in Sweden. Anyone who pays tax in fact, but it also impacts on many people’s working lives,” says Ola Pettersson.

The delegation will publish a range of progress reports. It will document the scale of the problem and find solutions for how different stakeholders in Sweden and other countries can work together to fight work-related crime. That includes

both authorities and the social partners. The first task will be to define what work-related crime actually is.

“The word is important so that we can highlight something that has not been all that visible in Sweden. We will find a good definition of work-related crime and its scale, which will then allow us to propose measures,” says Ola Pettersson.

Work-related crime encompasses many different phenomena. It can be criminal exploitation of subcontracted employment, tax avoidance, breaking migration law and the rules for labour immigration – including sometimes pure human trafficking.

“If we are to come up with efficient measures and identify the problem, we need a good definition,” concludes Ola Pettersson.

Exposed sectors are participating

To help him in this work, he has a delegation of eight people. They represent both employers and employees and are recruited from the construction, transport and hospitality sectors. There is one police representative and an ambassador against human trafficking.



Ola Pettersson

“The partners will play an important role due to our country’s labour market model. When consensus exists between the partners, the measures become far more powerful and a lot of things are happening already – particularly in the construction industry. Work-related crime is an incredibly serious social problem and we need to do a lot to secure fair conditions and a level playing field for law-abiding businesses,” says Ola Pettersson.

Norway a role model

Irene Wennemo, Director-General at the Swedish National Mediation Office and former State Secretary at the Ministry for Employment, is one of the delegation members. She considers the delegation to be an important step in the fight against work-related crime, not least because the actual term work-related crime describes what this is all about.

She first heard the term in Norway, which the delegation describes as a role model for the fight against work-related crime. That country's efforts will be studied particularly closely.



“We have not taken this issue seriously enough before, but now it is time to talk about work-related crime in our country too. Employers have seen how important it is to them also, and that it is part of serious organised crime,” says Irene Wennemo.

Norway's experience also shows that when the issue is elevated to the highest political level, it gets far more traction.

“The exchange of experiences between the Nordic countries is incredibly important for finding solutions to problems in your own country. What works in Norway often works in Sweden if you adapt it slightly,” says Irene Wennemo.

Working with people who bring skills from different sectors makes it easier to identify obstacles in the work against work-related crime, and creates necessary bridges between authorities and trade organisations.

“I am really looking forward to working with the delegation. This is an important issue and I am happy that the politicians are strengthening and prioritising the fight against work-related crime,” says Irene Wennemo.



Labour shortages all around, including in the Danish film industry

It is hard to find tradespeople who have time for new projects and the Danish film industry is short of everything from actors to scriptwriters. Businesses are asking the government for more foreign labour.

NEWS

13.10.2021

TEXT MARIE PREISLER, PHOTO: MAGNUS FRÖDERBERG/NORDEN.ORG

Lovers of Danish culture were shocked when the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR) halted the production of a historic drama detailing Leonora Christina Ulfeldt's life. DR is behind internationally renowned and prize-winning TV series like "The Bridge" and "The Killing".

The new series about Danish King Christian IV's daughter is DR's biggest production to date and was due to premiere on Danish TV in 2024. But right before production got underway, DR put the breaks on saying it had become too expensive and difficult to recruit workers in a heated film market.

Danish film and TV fiction is experiencing a golden age thanks to a huge demand for Danish series, especially from international streaming providers. This has led to a shortage of all kinds of people, including actors, scriptwriters, producers, production technicians and anyone involved in overseeing major film productions.



There is no sign of the demand for Danish fiction – or the lack of labour – diminishing any time soon. The Danish film industry resembles the rest of the labour market in that respect – where employers in all kinds of sectors are wringing their hands over how hard it is to recruit people they desperately need.

Labour market under pressure

The Danish economy has caught up with the Corona-induced recession a long time ago. There is, in fact, so much action that the Ministry of Finance expects 2021 to produce the highest level of growth in 15 years. At the same time, there are many job vacancies, competition for labour is growing and the labour market is currently under considerable pressure, writes the Ministry of Finance in its latest economic survey for August 2021.

The ministry is reporting a considerable lack of labour across all sectors. In construction, one in two businesses does not have enough workers. The shortfall has grown for seven months in a row and is now at the highest level since Statistics Denmark started collating statistics on labour shortages in 2005.

Industry also lacks labour, as do the service sector and others – including the film sector. Unemployment numbers are at their lowest since the 2009 economic crisis. 3.6% of Danish people of working age are registered as unemployed, which is fewer than before the Corona pandemic when unemployment levels were already low.

A growing labour force

This has led to problems across many sectors, but the Ministry of Finance expects the acute and historically high lack of labour to pass. The labour force is in fact set to grow, mainly because the retirement age will rise from 66 to 67 in 2022. That means more people in the age group will stay in the labour market for longer. However, the government has also granted workers in physically demanding occupations the right to retire early, and this will somewhat reduce the effect of the general higher retirement age.

Foreign labour is also helping to grow the labour force, the Ministry of Finance believes. Since 2010, foreign wage earners have represented a growing proportion of the total number of employed people, and their numbers now stand at 10%. Half come from EU countries, but an increasing number of non-EU workers are also arriving. Right now there are more foreign citizens with a work visa in employment in Denmark than before the Corona crisis.

The Ministry of Finance also estimates that a lot of labour will become available for the rest of the labour market as more Danes get vaccinated and fewer people are needed to work with test and trace and inoculations.

More foreign labour

But Danish businesses do not want to wait for that. They are calling for swift political action to solve the labour shortages. In August 2021 the Danish government launched the programme "Danmark kan mere" (Denmark can do more) which aims to increase the workforce by, among other things, focussing on education and helping people stay in work into older age. But even more initiatives are needed to secure a larger labour supply and improve businesses' competitiveness, argue organisations like the Danish Chamber of Commerce. They want to import a further 18,500 foreign workers.

"We are far from good enough at exploring the potential of foreign labour from outside of the EU. In the very short term, we need to invite more foreign workers," said the Danish Chamber of Commerce's CEO Brian Mikkelsen.

Parts of the trade union movement is also pushing for more foreign labour, but the Danish Trade Union Confederation (FH) has called foreign labour a "too easy solution" for employers. It argues it would be better to work harder to help Danish people outside of the labour market find work.

The Employment and Integration Administration at the City of Copenhagen has launched a campaign to get unemployed people and students to apply for some of the thousands of jobs available in the capital's service sector.



Copenhagen needs chefs, waiters, cleaners and bartenders. This is a very serious situation for the city, according to the Employment and Integration Mayor Cecilia Lonning-Skovgaard (Left, Denmark's Liberal Party).

"If Copenhagen is to rise again after Corona, our service sector must flourish. That is why we are launching a campaign to highlight to unemployed people and students the many jobs that are available right now," she says.

Lonning-Skovgaard is also talking to her colleague in Malmö, Deputy Mayor for social affairs and integration Sedat Arif, about matching some of the more than 24,000 citizens of that city who are out of a job with available jobs on the other side of Øresund, writes the Sydsvenskan newspaper.

The Danish government and the social partners have started tripartite discussions about the labour shortages.

Businesses: Tripartite agreement not good enough

The Danish government and the social partners entered into a tripartite agreement on 6 October, which in the short run aims to address the labour shortage and get more people into the labour market, partly by helping businesses recruit labour from elsewhere in Europe. The agreement is also meant to help match job seekers and businesses, it introduces tighter rules on unemployed people applying for jobs and it aims to get more seniors back into work.

Minister of Employment Peter Hummelgaard called it "a good first step" and a "balanced" agreement that helps fight labour shortages while also getting more citizens currently



outside of the labour market into work. FH is happy that the tripartite agreement aims to get unemployed Danes into work, while the Confederation of Danish Employers (DA) is less content.

"It is good that money is being set aside to speed up the process of allowing foreign workers into jobs. But the agreement completely fails to solve the critical and acute lack of labour which our members and the society are facing," says DA's Director-General Jacob Holbaard.

Why Iceland's wage increase outstrips the rest of Europe

In August, Iceland's monthly wage index increased by 0.3%. The index had then risen by 7.9% in the last 12 months, which is more than in most other European countries. The increase from the first to the second quarter of this year was 8.1%, the third-highest in Europe.

NEWS

13.10.2021

TEXT: HALLGRÍMUR INDRÍÐASON

Anna S. Sigurdardottir, supervisor of salaries at Statistic Iceland, told the Morgunblaðid newspaper that this could be explained with special Covid benefits and simply a sharp increase after a drop in hourly salaries last year because of the pandemic. So the main cause of this is not necessarily a straightforward salary increase. Sigurdardottir also says there is a tendency for more increases in salaries where there is higher inflation.

That last part is a well-known economical phenomenon in Iceland. Katrin Olafsdottir, assistant professor in economics at Reykjavik University, says that salaries always increase more in Iceland than in most other countries.

“So instead we have more inflation than other countries. It almost doesn't matter what country you compare with. There is a 2 – 3% salary increase in other countries, while it's 6 – 8% here. However, purchasing power has increased substantially.”

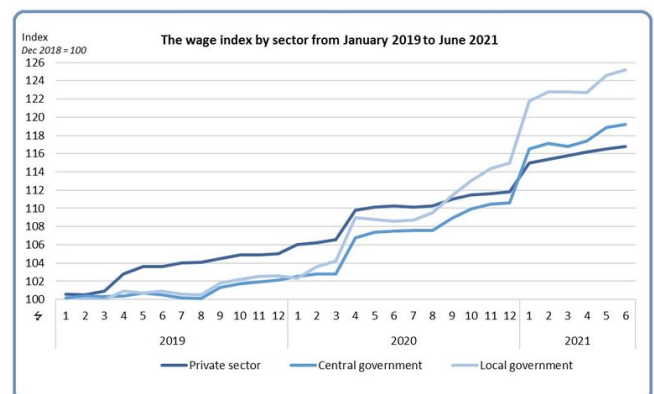
Olafsdottir says that this is simply how it has always been in Iceland.

“There is regularly a discussion on trying to do this like other Nordic countries, with a more moderate salary increase. We just simply haven't managed to get there. In my lectures, I've always taken random countries and random periods, and the conclusion is always the same – there are larger salary increases in Iceland than anywhere else in Europe.

“This can be explained in the collective agreement model or the lack of such a model. Someone starts, and then all the others come and want a bit more, instead of using the Nordic method, which defines what is available and then the discussion is about how to divide it.”

Olafsdottir says that the currency value also plays a part.

“The small currency means that our competitive position varies constantly. Sometimes we're expensive, sometimes cheap, and this large salary increase can be a factor in this.”



The municipal sector has seen the highest wage increases in Iceland, but the timing of the agreements in the different sectors also plays a part. In the private sector the partners agreed to wage increases in April 2019, April 2020 and January 2021, writes Statistics Iceland. Source: Hagstofa Íslands.

The increase is a bit more in the municipalities than in other sectors. Olafsdottir says that has an explanation.

“The municipalities have a larger portion of their employees on the lowest salary. In the last collective agreement, the emphasis was to increase the lowest salaries more than others. It might look like the municipalities are being more generous with their employees but that's not the case.”

Olafsdottir says that it is difficult to predict the future. The central bank, however, has been predicting strong economic growth.

“We see unemployment fall rapidly and employers, especially in tourism, are even having a hard time finding staff. We don’t know why that is, it could be low salaries but it could also be that people are not ready to take temporary jobs. And it’s also possible that those who went home when the pandemic hit are not coming back. I know this is also the case in Denmark.”

But inflation, which has gone from 3% to 4.4% in just over a year, can not be explained through higher salaries alone. What increases it now are two things – the housing market and more expensive imports because of higher prices in the world market.

“There are snags in the system. Transport has become much more expensive. Many people say it is a temporary situation but we don’t know how long it will last. We thought this would only take a few months, but this will not work itself out any time soon.”



NIVA restructured its entire business in one month and got flush with cash

The Nordic institution NIVA, with headquarters in Helsinki, organises courses within the field of occupational health and safety for participants in and outside of the Nordic region. When Corona hit, NIVA managed to cancel all future courses and replace them with online versions – all in one month.

NEWS

13.10.2021

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

“We should be a case for the Harvard Business Review,” jokes Henrik Bäckström, who has been NIVA’s Director for the past six months.

“Few companies have managed to turn their ship around so fast,” he tells the Nordic Labour Journal. We are standing on a balcony at Hotel Clarion in Helsinki with a view to Helsinki Shipyard, with its cranes and long history of manufacturing everything from ice breakers to cruiseships.

“It was, to be fair, quite a small fishing vessel we turned around,” he says.

With Henrik Bäckström at the helm together with three other colleagues, it did not take long to make a decision. But the result was surprising: The digital courses got more participants and were much cheaper to run. As a result, NIVA’s finances improved so much that the owner, The Nordic Council of Ministers, has asked for a plan on how they will get their equity back down to normal levels – enough for three months of operations but no more.

“To be fair, the major change of direction in 2020 towards a digital business happened while my predecessor Birgitta Fos-

ström was at the helm. Thanks to the creativity and enthusiasm of our staff the transition was made possible," he says.

One out of twelve institutions

The Nordic Council of Ministers owns 12 institutions, but NIVA is the only one belonging to the work life sector. It was founded in 1982, which means it will turn 40 next year. NIVA has always had its headquarters in Helsinki.

"What surprised me the most was how enthusiastic both my colleagues as well as speakers and course participants were about the new way of organising courses. It has also brought us new participants. We had, for instance, one person who was following a course from Brazil, despite the fact it meant he had to stay up all night," says Henrik Bäckström.

When the number of participants passed 100 for some of the courses, NIVA's digital transmission certificates became too small. But to invest in new certificates was cheap compared with the cost of travel, hotels, conference venues and food for the participants.

Hybrid courses and social gatherings

During the whole of 2020, NIVA offered only digital courses, while 2022 will see a mix of digital, traditional and hybrid courses.

"There are of course limits to what you can do online. We have for instance one work environment course for people working in cold storage, and this is tricky to do online. But I, who have worked with courses for decades, am surprised at what is possible."

Participants miss the social aspect of meeting new people and discuss with them after the course.

"We open up the courses 30 minutes earlier in the morning to allow participants to socialise and they often ask whether we can organise something in the evenings too.

"We have also added one new item to the courses – an exercise programme for those working from home. This has become popular," says Henrik Bäckström.

Doubling the business

He has reassured the civil servants who are guarding the Nordic Council of Ministers' expenses that the money saved in the budget will not be spent on any extravagant 40 years celebration next year. Instead, they will launch twice as many courses as usual in 2022.

Since the beginning back in 1982, NIVA has hired 13,000 experts from more than 40 countries who have participated and networked through NIVA. Some 30% of these came from countries outside of the Nordic region.

The digital courses have seen a slightly different distribution with 50% Nordic participants, 25% from EU countries and 25% from the rest of the world.

NIVA usually organises some 15 webinars every year, as well as two to three conferences. The next conference is part of the Finnish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers and will focus on how climate change and the green transition will impact on the Nordic labour markets.



Nordic vision zero for workplace accidents inspires world congress

The Nordics have considerable influence in the international debate on work environments. That was also evident during the 22nd world congress on work environments and security, held from 20 - 23 September in Toronto, Canada.

NEWS

13.10.2021

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL

This year's conference was hosted by Canada, the International Labour Organisation ILO and the International Social Security Association (ISSA) – the world's leading international organisation for social security institutions, government departments and agencies.

The conference focused on how to prevent workplace accidents and occupational ill health – or as the programme put it; "Prevention in the Connected Age: global solutions to achieve safe and healthy work for all".

ISSA has a vision zero for no workplace injuries or illnesses, which the association presented at the conference.

"Vision Zero is an idea that emerged in Sweden on road safety. That was in the 90s, where the possibility of having zero road accidents was raised. From there it was slowly but surely translated and integrated into the world of work," Bernd Treichel, an expert on prevention work at ISSA and one of the conference organisers, told the Human Resources Director magazine.



Guy Ryder, Vera Paquete-Perdigão, bägge ILO samt Bernd Treichel, ISSO, var bland talarna på kongressen. Foto: XXII World Congress on Safety and Health.

The Nordic contribution was not as prominent as during the previous conference in Singapore, but the Nordic work environment authorities' joint report "Work Today and in the Future", which the NLJ has written about in the past, was presented at a pre-conference fringe event, attended by the ILO Secretary-General Guy Ryder.

"During the ILO's centenary year of 2019, we presented a wide-ranging report on the future of work, and then Covid-19 brought the future to us in a way and at a speed which we had no chance to foresee," said Guy Ryder.

"At the right time"

He said the Nordic report came "at the right time since it raised issues that have been a focus over the past few months".

The Nordic report was published one year ago, in September 2020, and contains an entire chapter about pandemics. It is coloured by the fact that in the beginning there was a major lack of personal protection equipment, PPE, for people working with infected people. The report warns the race to approve new products must not lead to a lowering of quality standards.

"Thus, market surveillance of PPE and other safety equipment remains an area of critical concern for occupational safety and health in times of pandemics. Labour inspectors today are far from equipped to handle situations of this magnitude, and their pandemic preparedness is likely an area that needs both more attention and investment moving forward."

One of the report's 72 points of advice is to:

"Initiate collaborations with national emergency preparedness agencies so that occupational safety and health aspects are considered fundamental in planning in the local, national, and global emergency preparedness plans."

The pandemic has also led to a big increase in remote working.

"As the risks of working from home are well known, the labour inspectors need to follow closely what this might entail in the long run for occupational safety and health, OSH,

and work-life balance for the workers, and the employers' OSH responsibility in the workers' private homes."

When it comes to remote working, the advice given to Nordic work environment authorities is to:

"Develop a framework – based on evaluations – for pragmatic home office OSH regulations for long-term or permanent work from home. Special attention should be paid to employers' responsibility while regulating workspaces in the workers' home and still ensuring the privacy of the workers."

Another effect of the Corona pandemic is how certain businesses, like home delivery firms, experienced a positive outcome. Meanwhile, new platform economy employers rarely take responsibility for the people working for them. The ILO recently published a comprehensive report on atypical work, which was presented by Uma Rani Amara during the fringe event.

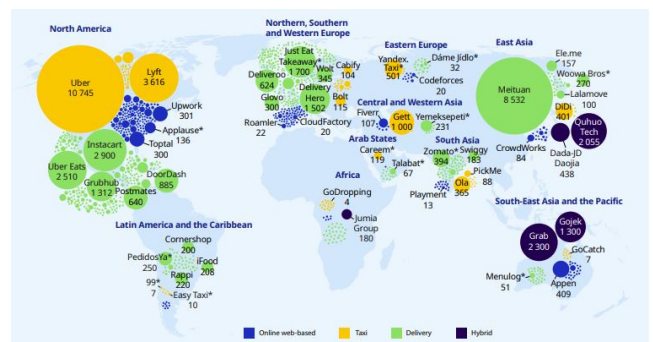


Uma Rani Amara, ILO. Photo: YouTube

"The platform companies create new jobs, but they are making the border between employment and self-employment harder to see," she said.

Globally, so far, two types of businesses are behind most of the turnover – taxi operators like Uber and restaurant food home delivery services like Foodora.

This is a breakdown of the turnover for the different platform companies:



Foodora is owned by Delivery Hero, and Chinese Meituan is also a home delivery company. Uber also serves the home delivery market under the brand Uber Eats.

“82% of taxi or home delivery drivers say they work more than normal hours,” said Uma Rani Amara.

The ILO’s report is based on surveys conducted among 12,000 workers across 85 different companies. The ILO has also mapped different legislation which has been introduced and agreements between platform businesses and workers.

“It is not enough to simply solve national problems. What we need is a coordinated, international pulling together, where one aim should be to secure collective negotiation rights for platform workers,” said Uma Rani Amara, who coordinated the report and was one of the lead authors.

The final discussion explored on what level work environment issues can best be addressed. Taking part in this debate were Stefan Olsson from the EU, the ILO’s Vera Paquete-Perdigão and Monica Seem from the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority.

“In this very fast-changing environment we need to be sure that we take the decisions at the right level,” said Stefan Olsson, director at the DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion at the European Commission.



Stefan Olsson, archive image: EU-OSHA

“What will the member states do, what will the social partners do and what will be done at the EU level? It would be very dangerous if it is perceived that if the EU doesn’t tackle this no one else will. In the Nordic concept, this would naturally be for the national social dialogue, and we have to have a participative process because we cannot sit and wait for the EU legislation – that will take too long,” said Stefan Olsson.

One problem is the fact that EU legislation is very much focused on employees and employers. As soon as you move outside of those concepts, joint EU legalisation no longer applies, he pointed out.

Vera Paquete-Perdigão, who is the Director of the Governance and Tripartism Department at the ILO, has been work-

ing on the first joint report that the ILO and the World Health Organisation have produced, looking at how many workers die every year in workplace accidents or from work-related illnesses.



The results were presented on 16 September this year and showed that 1.9 million people died in 2016 due to the 19 different occupational risks which the two organisations focused on in their report. The largest risk factors were long working hours, which led to 750,000 deaths, and air pollution in the workplace, which led to 450,000 deaths.

Between 2000 and 2016, the number of deaths fell by 14%, but there was an increase in coronary disease and strokes linked to long working hours – 41% and 19% respectively.

“We must reassert the gains we have made on traditional OSH challenges, like work-related cancers, accidents, musculoskeletal and psychosocial disorders. We cannot lose sight of these traditional OSH issues and must see to it that we consolidate these gains as we move forward and tackle new and emerging risks,” said Monica Seem at the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority.

The Congress program features over 200 speakers in six technical sessions and 21 symposia.



Language technology – threats and opportunities

Language technology development has accelerated rapidly. This is important not only for those who make a living from translation – be it interpreters or translators – but for all businesses that have to relate to different languages. Are the Nordic countries ahead of the curve or are the IT giants like Google, Apple and Microsoft about to take control over important parts of our languages?

THEME

13.10.2021

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Being able to translate with the help of computers seemed an impossible dream for a long time. The first attempts were made already in the 1950s with rule-based machine learning. But words are different from numbers. As the Danish Language Council put it in the introduction to its report “Danish world-class language technology”:

“A major part of our knowledge is formulated in a language. Most of what we know about Denmark, about Danish conditions and about each other is formulated in Danish. Artificial intelligence is usually based on the analysis of large amounts of data.

“You get good results when this data consists of numbers, but it is a much tougher challenge when data is made up of lan-

guage in the shape of text and audio. Numbers are unambiguous and fit in with the way in which computers are organised. Language is ambiguous and far more complex since it is part of our existence and closely interwoven with the way our societies are made and the culture we grow up with.”

In the 1990s people believed it was possible to bypass the problem by going for statistical machine translation. With the enormous amounts of text available on the internet you just had to find someone who had translated something similar in the past, the argument went.

Machines recognise patterns

But many words have different meanings, and if you do not know anything about the context things often end up being

wrong. Google translate had a bad reputation for a long time. But the translation service has improved considerably, especially between the larger languages like English and Spanish or English and French.

“Google and other players introduced new technology a few years back in their translation programs. The machine learning which is now being applied means machines can learn to recognise patterns through examples, rather than being programmed to translate individual words,” says the Swedish government report “Understanding and being understood”. (SOU 2018:83).

“We have gone from statistical translation to a model based on deep learning. The system can then understand context better, which makes translations better. A large amount of data is analysed and the computers look for patterns and learn to recognise them.

“This has made it possible to do translations that really stand out in terms of quality from the translation services that were presented around a decade ago. One crucial question is just how good the machine-based systems can become. There are researchers who claim there are nearly no limits to this.”

Language technology is about more than just translating texts. We now have a rich flora of different technology which in turn can be combined to work together:

- Voice recognition – which allows you to transform spoken language to text or search terms for smart assistants like Apple’s Siri, which turned ten this October.
- Text to speech – which makes it possible to hear texts read by a machine with a quality that makes it difficult to tell whether it comes from a machine or a human.
- Spell checkers – which automatically discover spelling mistakes and propose a correct alternative.

These systems are also beginning to work in realtime, which means live TV news can get subtitles as they are being transmitted, or your search engine will guess what you are looking for after you have typed just a few letters.

Early success

In Denmark, one of the first success stories of language technology involved a voice recognition program used by doctors, Peter Juel Henriksen told the Nordic language days which this year had language technology as a theme. The doctors could read their reports and have them written down in text by the program. This saved time and meant doctors no longer needed their secretaries.

This is why speech recognition accounts for 50% of the turnover of Danish language businesses.

“Later, the same program was tried by Danish municipalities, but it did not work as well for them. It needed to work for many different types of municipal worker, and there is a lot of difference between what a solicitor and a social worker does,” says Peter Juel Henriksen.

Out of the 60 Danish municipalities that used the speech recognition program, none of them had a positive business case.

New, large customer group

A new, large customer group is streaming providers like Netflix, HBO and Disney. They offer thousands of programmes and need to dub these or give them subtitles in hundreds of different languages. And this is not just about translating English programmes into other languages. We can for instance watch Korean or Spanish TV series with subtitles in our own language.



The Korean series Squid Game took only nine days to be the biggest success on Netflix in a language other than English. Photo: Youngkyu Park/Netflix

Using speech recognition programs for subtitles or translation of foreign films is not good enough, says Michel Stormbom at Finnish Lingsoft.

“Creating subtitles for a film is also about putting the text in at the right time and use time codes to indicate how long it should remain in vision. Because it is quicker to listen than to read, the subtitles must also be shortened and checked by humans.”

The Swedish company Plint, founded in 2002 to specialise in subtitles for company videos and the Swedish film industry, experienced a huge increase in jobs when Netflix started streaming films. The company’s turnover went from 11 million kronor (€1.1m) in 2015 to 241 million kronor (€23.8) in 2019. As soon as next year it could reach 500 million kronor (€49.4), CEO Örjan Serner told breakit.se.

Company	Country	Employees	Turnover 2020	Ranking
Semantix	Sweden	350	74 mill \$	27
LanguageWire	Denmark	400	66 mill \$	29
Språkservice	Sweden	62	42 mill \$	40
Transvoice	Sweden	140	29 mill \$	57
Plint	Sweden	40	27 mill \$	61
CBG	Sweden	20	22 mill \$	72
Lingsoft Group	Finland	150	15 mill \$	91

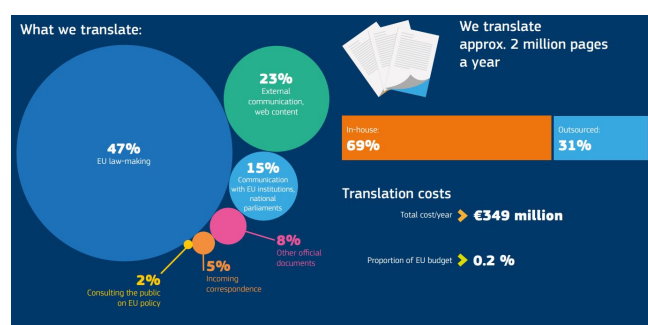
Seven of the world's 100 largest language technology companies are in the Nordics. Source: Nimdzi

The number of employees does not give a fair impression of how many people the company engages, since so much of their work is freelance based. Both Swedish Semantix and Danish LanguageWire claim to have a network of 7,000 language specialist who translate between nearly 250 languages, while Plint has a network of 1,000 translators.

The amount of translation being done has already gone beyond what is possible to do only with the help of human beings. But they are still needed to control and correct the translations that have been done. There will always be a need for translators of fiction who have knowledge of the spoken language, which develops faster than dictionaries.

So far we do not know very much about how conditions for interpreters and translators have changed as a result of technology, and how these platform-based jobs are being organised. We also do not know what impact this has on the languages. Will the technological development give smaller languages the opportunity to blossom or will English become ever more dominating?

The EU is one of the largest purchasers of translation services, with two million pages translated every year with the help of 2,000 in-house translators and supporting staff – in addition to thousands of freelancers.



Legal work makes up nearly half of all translations made in the EU. A larger version of the statistic can be found [here](#):

When what would later become the EU was founded in 1958, there were four official languages: French, German, Dutch and Italian. Each new member state has had its language

recognised as an official language, which means today everything is being translated into 28 languages.

Before Brexit, 13% of EU citizens spoke English. Today less than 1% do – Ireland and Malta are the only countries that have English as one of their main official languages. 38% of EU citizens have English as a second language, yet only one in five consider their English skills to be “very good”. No more than a quarter of EU citizens say they can understand what is being said in a radio programme or on the TV news.

Despite this lack of knowledge, nothing points to Brexit being followed with a weakening of the English language’s position in the EU’s institutions. On the contrary, believes Alice Neal, who herself has worked as an interpreter in the EU and who this year published a book called “English and translation in the European Union” (Routledge).

She points out that preparatory work for new legislation is now nearly exclusively carried out using English. In 1997, 45% of the drafts for legislation and regulations were done in English. Ten years later this had risen to 62% before reaching 85% in 2020.

If the working language is English, why then spend 350 million euro on translation into the other languages?

The answer is that there is no main language to write EU legislation in. All the languages enjoy equal status and no language version is superior to another. The EU Court of Justice, like all other EU courts, must consider all language versions to be equally correct.

“When all the language versions are original, the borders for what is original and what is a translation of the original are erased and the linguistic hierarchy is hidden,” writes Alice Beal.

Maltese – an Arabic language with a Roman alphabet – has seen a massive lift as a result of the country’s EU membership. A unique Brussel-Maltese has emerged, containing words that are not used in the everyday language. Other, far bigger languages like Catalan, Basque and Romany have not seen the same translation support as Maltese, since they are not official EU languages.

A lot of the current discussion among Nordic linguists is about how important it is for countries themselves to keep control over the development and support of national terminology databases and how to safeguard confidentiality and integrity when using new language technology.



Understanding each other – digital services ease cultural exchange

A common digital platform for topical conversations with Nordic profiles could raise awareness about what is going on in our neighbouring countries – just like television once did. New technology makes it easier to cross national borders.

THEME

13.10.2021

TEXT: FAYME ALM, PHOTO: THE DANISH ROYAL LIBRARY

“We know far too little about each other. Although Nordic societies are privileged, built on welfare and high levels of trust where everyone contributes, we often know little about what conversations our neighbouring countries are having,” says Lise Bach Hansen in Copenhagen.

She heads a new “sounding board” with a discussion group and network which she initiated together with the Öresund Institute in Malmö and others. The aim is to improve contact between the Nordic countries’ culture sectors.

She is also Head of Talks & Literature at The Black Diamond – the modern extension of the Royal Danish Library facing the city’s harbour.

Bridging borders digitally

There is a Swedish proverb that roughly translates into “Every cloud has a silver lining”. It fits well with the potential of digital communication, which was highlighted by the pandemic when physical meetings and gatherings became lim-

ited or impossible. That was also true for the international writers’ stage at The Black Diamond.

“The restrictions opened our eyes. Today we can run a production in front of a large audience here at The Black Diamond while transmitting it live to libraries and upper secondary schools in Denmark. We reach people across the country without them needing to be in Copenhagen,” says Lise Bach Hansen.



Lise Bech Hansen in one of The Black Diamond's Corona-empty auditoriums, before Denmark reopened.

Live-streamed shows are introduced locally by librarians around Denmark who present the evening's writers before handing over to the transmission from The Black Diamond.

This autumn the stage has been featuring Swedish Alex Schulman, and Canadian-born English author Rachel Cusk comes in November. Next year's bookings include Finland-Swedish Kjell Westö and Norwegian Karl Ove Knausgård.

"Imagine if conversations like these could be transmitted to Swedish, Norwegian and Finnish libraries too. That would give us a chance to learn more about not only the author but the environment they write about, which often is their native country. This happened when television arrived in the Nordics and we could start watching each other's programmes. Now we have a fresh chance to pick up topical issues," says Lise Bach Hansen.

A broader perspective

She mentions one example of such a topic. Copenhagen's Lord Mayor Frank Jensen had to step down after admitting to sexual harassment the day after the international writers' stage had hosted Matilda Gustavsson.

She was the Swedish journalist who exposed the scandal at the Swedish Academy before writing the book "The Club" where she "exposes a world known to few and depicts power struggles and corruption in the most elevated of cultural circles" as the publisher writes. The conversation at the writers' stage was partly about the #Metoo debate in Sweden.



Matilda Gustavsson is one of the Swedish authors who has been invited to The Black Diamond.

"If we broaden the perspective in such a setting with a range of relevant profiles, a lot more people would become interested in listening to our conversations, and we would learn more about our Nordic countries," says Lise Bach Hansen.

Other issues that might be interesting from a Danish point of view include why electric cars have become so popular in Norway and why gender equality in Sweden is almost "avant-garde" in Denmark, as she puts it.

"We also do not know each other's opinion-makers. Few people in Denmark know that Peter Wolodarski is the editor-in-chief at Dagens Nyheter. And in Sweden few people know anything about Danish literature beyond the fact that Suzanne Brøgger is a Danish writer," says Lise Bach Hansen.

Necessary translations

She believes it would be necessary to translate conversations to the respective Nordic languages in order to succeed with a joint digital platform.

"This is after all something that works in the film industry. Many Nordic films have actors from Scandinavian countries speaking in their own language, and it is genius. I do believe it is important that we get to hear the Nordic languages, that we know what they sound like and that we can pick up the odd word or expression while also fully understanding the underlying context of what is being said. We must make it possible to understand each other."

Lise Bach Hansen has a vision for how a Nordic digital platform might look. This is something she has developed together with a film production company in Stockholm, in-between working at the Royal Library.

"With a platform like this, the Nordic countries would move closer together. New technology makes it easy to cross national borders," says Lise Bach Hansen.

A growing word bridge



A digital platform is already under construction, with Swedish and Danish language and language culture. The initiative to this word bridge came from Johanna Rivano Eckerdal, head of the Centre for Oresund Region Studies at Lund University.

“It is important to be able to understand each other’s languages. Often you either realise that you don’t understand, or you think you understand and miss out on a lot. So the challenge can be found on different levels,” she tells the Nordic Labour Journal.

People with different native tongues and backgrounds contribute to the word bridge by describing their own thought about a Danish or Swedish word, term or saying. Contributions include texts involving the Swedish words or sayings “Lagom”, “Hoppas att allt är bra med dig!” and “Folkhemmet”, as well as the Danish “Det kan man ikke være bekendt”, “Pyt”, “Lige”, “Træls” and “Fjernsyn”.

Language should be inclusive

Johanna Rivano Eckerdal agrees with Lise Bush Hansen about the importance of languages when it comes to people’s knowledge about their neighbouring countries.

“It would be good if we understood each other’s languages. This is a prerequisite for being able to benefit from what is going on in our different countries,” she says and points out another linguistic aspect that faces her as a senior lecturer at Lund University’s Division of ALM and Digital Cultures.

“When cooperating with researchers from the Nordic countries where not everyone has a Nordic language as their native tongue, you walk a tricky tightrope where you must be aware that we don’t fully understand each other all of the time.”

Situations like that require negotiations for which language we should use, thinks Johanna Rivano Eckerdal, but not only negotiations.

“We must also take into consideration the consequences of our choice of language. While it is important to be inclusive it must also be possible to maintain an interest in local colour,” she says.

Listening with a keen ear is always an advantage

Many young Nordic citizens speak English rather than Scandinavian, which might make it easier to communicate. But, points out Johanna Rivano Eckerdal, we are often far more nuanced when speaking our native language. She reiterates the consequences of which language is chosen and the importance of being aware of the meaning of words and terms and being humble in conversation.

“This might sound like a problem, but there is great potential in aiming for good communication. Listening to each other with a keen ear is always an advantage,” says Johanna Rivano Eckerdal.



Norway's interpreter costs rise, yet interpreters are underused

The cost of interpreter services in the public sector has risen sharply in Norway. In 2019 the total cost was 843 million kroner (€85.3m). In six years interpreter costs have gone up by 72%. But not using interpreters at all can quickly become even more costly. New interpreter legislation could improve the situation.

THEME

13.10.2021

TEXT: BJØRN LØNNUM ANDREASSEN, PHOTO: BJØRN LINDAHL

The Norwegian Association of Interpreters chair is Alexandra Therese Solaas. She is an authorised interpreter who perform tasks like interpreting during court cases and police interrogations, as well as translating between Norwegian and English. So what is behind this sharp increase in public sector interpreter costs?

“The increase is partly a result of considerable underuse of interpreters. If there is a misunderstanding during interpretation in a public sector case, things might suddenly get more expensive as the case must then be treated again on several

levels. In Norway, highly qualified interpreters are a scarce commodity,” says Solaas.

This was also one of the conclusions in the public investigation ahead of the introduction of new interpretation legislation in Norway.

The Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity, IMDi, is the public body for interpreting in the public sector. It is responsible for making sure the public sector has access to qualified interpreters. The IMDi 2019 annual report states:

"In 2018, more than 800,000 interpretation jobs were carried out in the public sector, worth approximately 835 million kroner (€85.3m). The use of qualified interpreters has risen from 38% in 2017 to 42% in 2018. This means a full 58% of the interpretation jobs were carried out by interpreters without documented qualifications in the National Register of Interpreters. Although this is a slight improvement on 2017, the high number of unqualified interpreters represents a challenge both to the rule of law, trust in the public sector and the professionalisation of the interpreter sector."



Joanna Godlewska. Foto: Privat

Joanna Godlewska is a state authorised interpreter who studied interpretation with the languages Polish and Russian at the University of Oslo. She also sits on board of the Norwegian Association of Interpreters.

"Interpreters are now being used in areas where they were not used before. The public sector saves a lot of money by using qualified interpreters. I know of cases where unqualified interpreters have done a bad job. I have been asked to check recordings of interrogations where unqualified people have been interpreting. This cost could have been avoided if a qualified interpreter had been used in the first place," she says.

"It might also cost more when the public sector uses interpreters who are not in the interpreter register. The users of interpreter services must understand that qualified interpreters are the key to good communication, which again will save the public sector a lot of money. Good interpreting safeguards the rule of law, patient security and children's welfare services," she says.

New interpreting legislation

Now, for the first time, Norway has got its own legislation regulating the public sector's responsibilities when using interpreters.

"The legislation was changed in June 2021. The law says qualified interpreters should be used and it defines what a qualified interpreter is," says Joanna Godlewska.

The interpreting legislation says that a public body must use an interpreter when it is necessary in order to safeguard the rule of law or to provide secure medical assistance and other public services. Qualified interpreters must be used, meaning interpreters who fulfil the requirements for being listed in the Norwegian Interpreter register. The new legislation means Norway will need far more qualified interpreters than before, even though exceptions can be granted until 31 December 2026.

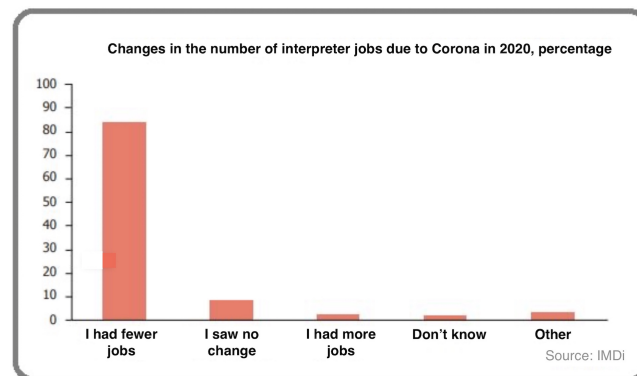
Qualification of interpreters, including authorisation, education, testing and coursing, has been the responsibility of the Oslo Metropolitan University, but since 2020 the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences has also been running an interpreters' course.

At the start of this year, the interpreter register included 1,653 interpreters in 72 languages.

"The legislation classifies interpreters into several categories. It takes four years of training to become an interpreter at level A. Level E is the lowest and for that, you need a two-day course," says Joanna Godlewska.

The pandemic created trouble

The 2020-2021 pandemic has had major consequences for interpreters, and it means statistics are not entirely comparable to previous years.



85% of all interpreters in Norway had fewer jobs in 2020, according to a survey commissioned by IMDi.

There has been an increase in the use of remote interpretation and on-screen interpretation. Both interpreters and users of interpreters say they are positive to this, despite some technological challenges, according to IMDi.

"By using on-screen interpreting more, the interpreters can work more efficiently and secure good access to interpreter services across the country. The use of on-screen interpreting has only represented 1% of the total," writes IMDi in their annual report.

The technology must work

Alexandra Therese Solaas at the Norwegian Association of Interpreters points out that the technology must work.

"It is not good enough to use a mobile telephone and interpret an entire meeting with several parties in a meeting room. You need equipment so that you can hear what is being said. We depend on functioning equipment in order to carry out our work in a responsible way. The courts have suddenly been granted funds for video interrogations, but the technological solution they have today cannot be used for simultaneous interpretation," she says.

"The quality of technological solutions are very important. When you as the interpreter cannot hear what is being said because of a bad connection, you cannot do your job. Interpreting using sign language is impossible if the video connection is bad," says Solaas.

"It is frustrating standing in a court of law and interpret when the sound is bad or you cannot quite hear what is being said. So technological solutions have great advantages, but also some weaknesses. You need to be very aware of both," she says.

"In meetings, all technology must function properly. If not, you need a good plan B, because the interpreter is not a technician and is not responsible for backup solutions," Solaas says.

Depends on the situation

Good technical solutions have given many people in many kinds of jobs a good experience with working from home.

"For interpreters, it depends on the situation where interpreting is needed. It is, for instance, difficult to work from home if you are interpreting in a psychiatric setting, or when children are involved.

Are legal interviews and meetings concerning children's welfare so sensitive that they must be interpreted by someone who is physically present?

"There are many considerations to take and you need to be in the same room in many situations. There can be big differences between cases, for instance when you are dealing with serious crime. One person might handle having the interpreter on the telephone from somewhere else, while another person might not understand what is happening," says Alexandra Therese Solaas.

Corona contrast

The Corona pandemic has led to major changes to the use of interpreters in Norway's public sector. The number of interpreter jobs was dramatically reduced for several months as a result of the March 2020 lockdown. This was in stark contrast to the increased need for information among the immigrant population and especially among those who do not

speak good enough Norwegian, says the IMDi 2020 annual report.

The dramatic fall in the number of new interpreter jobs, married with an increase in the cancellation of planned interpreter assignments, highlighted the need for more organised working conditions and terms for interpreters in Norway. The pandemic showed how vulnerable the interpreter occupation is, because most practicing interpreters are freelancers, according to the IMDi report.

Interpreters in Norway have been through a tough time, Solaas tells the Nordic Labour Journal.

"Sign language interpreters are freelancers, and language interpreters have to be freelancers because if you are hired by someone you risk ending up having a conflict of interest. Freelancers had almost no jobs during the pandemic. When we tried to apply for compensation from the welfare administration, it seemed like they did not understand how interpreters work. The way we have been treated has been frustrating, to put it mildly."



Small languages need big language's help to reach IT giants

Languages that are not used in the digital world will not survive. That is the brutal message which formed the basis for the Nordic language meeting – a two days long conference on the latest development in language technology.

THEME

13.10.2021

TEXT AND PHOTO: BJÖRN LINDAHL

Earlier this year, Iceland's Minister of Culture Lilja D. Alfreðsdóttir wrote to Tim Cook, CEO of tech giant Apple, asking him to help maintain Icelandic as a language by including it in the voice, text and language collection in their operative systems.

"Few countries in the world can beat Icelanders when it comes to internet cover or how many gadgets they own," she pointed out.

But the problem is that these gadgets do not speak Icelandic.

"So we worry about what will happen to our language. It has remained nearly unchanged for a thousand years and is at the

core of our nation's culture and identity," she wrote to Tim Cook.



Lilja D. Alfreðsdóttir is one of the most popular ministers in the Icelandic government. She has earlier criticised Disney when they launched a TV channel in Iceland because there were too few films and programmes that had subtitles or were dubbed in Icelandic.

Icelandic authorities have asked researchers, entrepreneurs and private companies to cooperate in various projects to try to develop language technology that can be used in smart-phones and other tools so that these can also use Icelandic.

This goes beyond being able to ask questions in Icelandic to digital assistants like Siri and Alexa. We already use a range of different language technology without a second thought:

- Spellcheck programs
- Translation programs from speech to text and the other way around
- Simultaneous translation programs for both speech and text, useful for conferences and more

Icelandic is a large language compared to Sami or Greenlandic, and it has a rich literature.

If you want to get an idea of how small Greenlandic is in the digital world, one can compare the English and Greenlandic versions of Wikipedia. The English Wikipedia has more than 54 million pages, while the Greenlandic consist of 8 222.

Microsoft Word does support Kalaallisut – the Greenlandic word for the language – in its basic spellcheck, but it is not supported as a screen language, in text to language, speech recognition or handwriting.

On my iPhone, I can't find Greenlandic as a language at all.



Beatrine Heilmann became the leader of the language secretariat of Greenland, Oqaasileriffik in July. Photo: Naalakkersuisut

Beatrine Heilmann, leader of The language secretariat Oqaasileriffik, describes Greenlandic as “a super-vital minority language” in the world.

She is the first-ever Greenlandic language technologist and is in charge of the development of a computer program that can translate Greenlandic to Danish and English.

The work with Greenlandic language technology in Oqaasileriffik began in 2005 and the first Greenlandic spellcheck was launched one year later. This was done in close cooperation with The University of Tromsø in Norway.

“This did not include all the words, but it showed that it was possible to develop language technology tools also for a polysynthetic language like Greenlandic,” she says.

Simply put, in a polysynthetic language words change shape according to the grammatical context. Where other languages use an entire sentence, these languages bake everything into one long word.

Fifteen years later, many things have been created; a corpus of Greenlandic texts and words, terminology databases, programs for converting written text to speech and a Greenlandic-Danish-Greenlandic translation program.

“15 to 20 years ago, very few Greenlanders had internet access. Today most do, but in other languages from Greenlandic,” says Beatrine Heilmann.

Greenlanders have gone from being very isolated to be able to access all the world's news and entertainment via the internet. But this has also made their language more vulnerable. Just like in Iceland, there is very little children's programming in Greenlandic for instance.

“The most important thing we can do is to adapt Greenlandic to the digital world.”

Three challenges

There are three main challenges to this, says Heilmann:

- The language situation in Greenland
- A lack of open-source data
- Access to the big IT companies

Greenland's language situation is in need of improvement. Many Greenlandic texts contain many errors, – both spelling errors, but also grammatical errors – which offer a lot of challenges for working with them in the field of language technology.

In order to be able to handle the areas that require the production and development of technological resources based on the Greenlandic language, the children in primary and lower secondary school and the young people in the educational institutions must be prepared to be robust enough in the Greenlandic language and technology. Action is needed across society to remedy this – in education, professional life and in the media. It is also difficult to develop digital language tools because few text collections are open source.

“The licenses are too expensive for us to be able to afford them. We can dream about publishing the Greenlandic-English dictionary containing 100,000 words, but it would cost too much,” says Beatrine Heilmann.

A lot of the language technology work that is being done is wasted when it cannot be used in word-processing programs like Microsoft Office.

“We fought for two years to try to get a spellcheck included in Office, but we did not have enough competence and were not given access to the necessary source code. When we write to the big IT companies we either get no response or we get a standard answer which simply proves that nobody can be bothered to understand what we are actually asking.

“We therefore hope that both the large and small Nordic languages can come together and demand the opportunity to use our languages in the digital tools that we all use,” says Beatrine Heilmann.



A death blow for the social dialogue as a constitutional mechanism in the EU?

The European Public Service Union EPSU lost on all points, while EU Commission's claim was upheld – arguing it was not obliged to execute or carry forward new agreements that have been added to the social dialogue for decisions in the Council of Ministers, writes the latest issue of EU & Arbetsrätt.

NEWS

04.10.2021

TEXT: BJÖRN LINDAHL, PHOTO: EPSU

In an article in the newsletter, labour law expert Niklas Brun lists all the consequences of the ruling in the so-called EPSU case at the EU Court of Justice.

EPSU is an umbrella organisation for more than 200 trade unions representing more than eight million workers in the public service sector. It is the largest federation within the European Trade Union Confederation ETUC.

In 2015, EPSU entered into an agreement within the framework of the European social dialogue with its counterpart,

the employers' organisation EUPAE. This covered employees' and trade unions' right to be consulted and informed during times of company cuts and restructuring.

The social pillar

They expected that the agreement would lead to the EU Commission proposing a directive, as stipulated in Principle 8 of the EU Pillar of Social Rights which was agreed at the 2017 Gothenburg EU summit.

It is true that the declaration cannot be interpreted as European law, but rather as non-binding political declarations where member states and the union's institutions describe which measures they support politically. But the expectation is that some of these declarations at a later stage should be made into directives by the EU Commission.

The Commission has, however, refused to address the agreement between EPSU and EUPAE. EPSU, therefore, took the Commission to court for breach of the Treaties.

“The lowest court, the Tribunal, showed some sympathy for EPSU when treating the case. It did not feel the way the Commission had proceeded had been completely correct and ruled the Commission had to pay its own legal expenses,” writes Niklas Bruun.

EPSU's appeal rejected

But in the EU Court's final ruling, all of the EPSU's arguments were rejected. Questions that might have been crucial to the Commission were not addressed at all, point out Niklas Bruun.

“The ruling seems to mirror the new legal activism which I seem to detect in the EU Court's praxis. Here it seems it is doing its utmost to strengthen the Commission's and the Court's powers within the EU system, and to expand their authority.

“This has been visible in several rulings. In the Court's case, not least in how it approaches cooperation with the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg,” he writes, and ends his article with a comment:

“There is every reason to ask oneself how well these policy directions will serve the European project in the long term.”