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Receptive multilingualism in the (mainland) Nordic countries

The mainland Scandinavian languages Danish, Norwegian and Swedish are closely related, and speakers of these languages are therefore typically considered to be *receptively multilingual*: they can understand the neighbouring languages to a certain extent, but usually they do not speak these languages actively. Using *receptive multilingualism* as a means of communication has a long tradition in the Nordic countries, but just as any form of communication across language borders, it does not only open up for new opportunities, but typically comes with shortcomings and pitfalls. Language-related cooperation in the Nordic countries, therefore, has been regulated in the 1962 Helsinki Treaty and in the common Language Declaration of 2006, among others. Both documents stipulate that language teaching in schools should also explicitly include other mainland Scandinavian languages. But how well do the speakers of Nordic languages actually understand the neighbouring languages? What general trends can be observed in receptive multilingualism in the Nordic countries? And can this form of communication stand up to using English as a lingua franca? Drawing on findings from phonetic and lexical studies, as well as sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic research, I will give an overview of research on receptive multilingualism in the Nordic countries conducted in the past 70 years up until today.

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