

Foreword to
Coherence and Fragmentation:
The Languages of the Nordic Countries and their Interrelations Today

This special section of *Studi Finno-Ugrici* gathers selected articles from the international conference Coherence and Fragmentation: The Languages of the Nordic Countries and their Interrelations Today, held from 14 to 16 November 2024 at the University of Florence. The conference aimed to bring together scholars to explore the dynamic and multifaceted nature of interrelations between the Nordic region languages and was supported by *Samarbejdsnævnet for Nordenundervisning i Udlandet* (SNU, The Coordinating Committee for Nordic Studies Abroad). The programme covered a wide range of topics, mirroring the region's linguistic diversity, from majority and minority languages to lesser-used and signed languages such as Finnish-Swedish Sign Language, resulting in a total of sixteen papers of which eleven are included in this section. The other remaining five papers have been published in a special issue of *LEA. Lingue e letteratura d'Oriente e d'Occidente*.

While the Nordic region is relatively small in terms of population (approximately 27.8 million people), it presents a linguistically rich landscape shaped by the common origins of its languages – three linguistic families are found in the region – and historical, social, and political factors. This complexity provided a compelling backdrop for the conference's discussion of coherence, fragmentation, and the interrelations among languages and countries. The articles collectively interrogate the notion of the 'North' as a common linguistic, literary, and cultural space formed by these countries' geographical proximity and political interconnectedness; they also delve into the area's internal differentiation, stemming from intrinsic pressures such as the coexistence of multiple national and local languages but also



the increasing number of other languages brought in by migration and the long-term and constant spread of English.

The Nordic region is widely recognised as linguistically diverse, a fact explicitly acknowledged in the *Declaration on Nordic Language Policy* adopted in 2024 by the Nordic Council of Ministers. The *Declaration* provides a comprehensive outline of the languages spoken in the Nordic countries, emphasising multilingualism at the regional level, within individual states and, ultimately, among individuals.

Rather than treating coherence and fragmentation as mutually exclusive conditions, the papers presented at the conference approached them as interlaced processes operating in both historical and contemporary Nordic linguistic contexts. The conference focused on three main aspects of multilingualism (broadly defined as «the multiplicity of languages and their coexistence»): societal multilingualism, receptive multilingualism, and literary multilingualism, with the last being the focus most represented in this section.

The Nordic region is often portrayed as a model of linguistic stability and coherence, supported by strong national language institutions, high levels of literacy, and relatively transparent relationships between language and identity. On the other hand, the region has also been characterised by dense networks of contact across language families, including the Scandinavian continuum of mutually intelligible varieties, the presence of Uralic languages such as Finnish, Sámi, and Meänkieli, and centuries of mobility across borders. Contemporary developments such as intensified migration, digitalisation, globalisation, and renewed attention to minority and indigenous rights have brought these latent complexities to the foreground. In this context, the region's post-monolingual condition (Yildiz 2012) has become increasingly visible: national languages remain central, yet language choice in everyday communication as well as in literary and artistic (e.g. musical, theatrical) production is marked by hybridity and code-switching. Indeed, many of the papers published here engage explicitly with Yasemin Yildiz's fundamental theorisations of post-monolingualism. The overall picture they provide of the Nordic literary linguascape resonates with Yildiz's central argument that, in the post-monolingual condition,

Multiple origins, relations, and emotional investments are possible and occur daily [...]. This means that we need to reimagine subjects as open to crisscrossing linguistic identifications, if not woven from the fabric of numerous linguistic sources. Such multiplicity breaks with the monolingual premise so often hidden in the notion that language correlates to identity. (Ivi, 2015)

This recognition is reflected in various articles of this section, several of which examine multilingualism as a defining feature of post-migrant societies in Scandinavia. Literary, theatrical, musical, and audiovisual works are analysed as arenas where multilingual practices both reflect and shape new social realities. Alessandro Bassini's study devoted to Alejandro Leiva Wenger, Davide Finco's article on Jonas Hassen Khemiri, and Luca Gendolavigna's investigation of Marjaneh Bakhtiari explore how multilingual narration, code-switching, sociolectal variation, and invented registers challenge normative conceptions of standard language and authenticity. These articles foreground the performative dimension of language, showcasing identity as a negotiated and often contested construct. Comparable issues surface in the analysis of multilingual suburban speech in contemporary television drama, as shown by Emilio Calvani's article on the suburban multilingualism of the Swedish series *Snabba Cash* and the way its hybridised linguistic forms sometimes reproduce ethnicised stereotypes. As Calvani reveals, popular media may play an ambiguous role in constructing social categories.

Multilingual creativity is also central to diasporic popular music. The artistic production of the Norwegian duo Karpe, as examined by Edoardo Checucci, demonstrates how multilingual linguistic practices can serve as a site for interpreting experiences of belonging that go beyond the nation-state. Here, the blending of Norwegian with other languages and multiethnolectal forms does not merely illustrate cultural diversity; it also destabilises monolingual ideologies and exposes the limits of traditional narratives of 'Norwegianness'. Across these articles, multilingualism is shown as a disruptive yet productive force with the power to generate new expressive possibilities while simultaneously revealing entrenched hierarchies of language, race, and class.

A second thematic group concerns multilingualism in relation to minority, borderland, and indigenous contexts where questions of power, memory,

and local belonging are particularly evident. The analyses of Sámi-Swedish literary works by Ann-Hélen Laestadius and Elin Anna Labba explored in Sara Culeddu's article show how untranslated Sámi words and phrases can be used not only as expressions of linguistic and literary freedom, but also as a form of resistance that challenges the assimilatory logic of dominant languages and cultures. From a decolonial perspective, such practices reject the expectation of full accessibility to instead foreground asymmetries in knowledge and linguistic competence. Similarly, the examination of Tornedalian literature in Mikael Niemi's work in Giovanni Za's article underscores the way multilingual border spaces complicate 'cohesive' national narratives by revealing histories of suppression, linguistic shift, and cultural negotiation. In these contexts, fragmentation is not merely a sign of disintegration but a fertile ground for generating alternative identities and spatial imaginaries.

Other articles situate multilingualism within longer-term literary and cultural trajectories, demonstrating that linguistic heterogeneity in the North is not solely a product of recent migration. The bilingual dynamics of Scandinavian receptive multilingualism, exemplified in the work of Cora Sandel and discussed in Massimo Ciaravolo's article, shows how cross-linguistic interaction has historically shaped narrative voice, characterisation, and the representation of social space. Andrea Romanzi's article presents the polyglot poetics of Øyvind Rimbereid, particularly in his imaginary world set in a petro-industrial future where linguistic experimentation can be used to register large-scale ecological and economic transformations.

In addition to these literary analyses, this section also features research grounded in empirical linguistics and translation studies, thus broadening the scope of inquiry from representation to language use and mediation. Valentina Dani's article presenting a corpus-based investigation of Finnish as a foreign language among Russian L1 speakers provides insights into cross-linguistic influence and learner variation as well as exploring how Finnish is used beyond its primary speech community. Finally, Lena Dal Pozzo and Anna Wegener's article sheds light on the institutional relations and infrastructures that enable inter-Nordic literary exchange through a survey of Finnish-to-Danish literary translators. The fact that Finnish studies at the University of Copenhagen have been shut down despite Denmark's

significant role in publishing Finnish literature in translation points to a paradoxical form of fragmentation within a region often celebrated for its cultural cooperation and cohesion.

Taken together, these articles portray the languages of the Nordic region as dynamic assemblages shaped by contact, mobility, policy, and creative practices. Coherence persists through shared communicative norms, institutional frameworks, and traditions of mutual intelligibility even as processes of diversification continue at individual and societal levels. Fragmentation in this sense speaks not to the breakdown of a once unified system but rather the proliferation of voices and perspectives within an increasingly complex linguistic landscape.

Technical and editorial notes

At the request of the editorial board of the journal, the authors of the section were free to use either British or American English in their articles. The linguistic accuracy of each article remains the responsibility of the author.

Lena Dal Pozzo and Anna Wegener

Works cited

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