
In both Norwegian and English

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Articles in this journal can now be published simultaneously in Norwegian and English. This gives authors an opportunity to reach out to readers all over the world.



Foto Einar Nilsen

Five years ago, an original article in this journal was first translated into English. Initially this was a trial project that included only original articles, but from 2008 it was expanded to comprise all articles with an English summary. During the first two years approximately 30 articles were translated (1). Starting from October 2010, however, this arrangement has soared in popularity. Since then, in the course of a year and a half, approximately 150 articles have been published *simultaneously* in Norwegian and English, and have thus been indexed as bilingual in PubMed. This is a win-win situation: The authors reach their domestic audience, just as they have done since this journal was launched in 1881, but in addition, the articles are made searchable and freely available in full-text versions for everybody.

The idea is a simple one. We realised that it was wasteful to make good-quality scientific articles and other medical writing available only to the small group of people who can read Norwegian. Even though the journal of course has, and should have, Norwegian doctors as its primary target group, much of the material that we publish may also be of interest outside Norway (2). Have I not many times been irked by hits in PubMed that remain meaningless to me. Even though the title and perhaps the abstract appear to be relevant, the content is inaccessible because I cannot read the language.

All types of articles in this journal can now be translated. The article is published in both Norwegian and English on www.tidsskriftet.no on the day of publication (3). PubMed will establish links to both versions. The translation is done in parallel with the production of the Norwegian version. This is so because the Norwegian version must be fully completed before translation can start. Since this is done immediately prior to publication, the authors have only a limited time to proofread the English version. The job is done by professional translators, and we have chosen British English as our standard language. The price for translation of a 3 000-word article is approximately NOK 8 500. Our journal arranges for this service at cost.

The National Library of Medicine, which is the administrator of PubMed, has established the requirement that the Norwegian and English versions must be identical. This implies that the text is indexed as one single article. To comply with this requirement, the articles have hitherto been translated on a word-by-word basis. Some authors feel that this may occasionally appear stilted and that it leaves a somewhat «Norglish» impression. We wish to explore the degrees of freedom available, but the source text must be rendered correctly and in full. The artful translation of fiction is a far cry from the rigorous translation of scientific texts (4). Merete Alfsen, who is an award-winning translator of fiction, describes her work thus: «I usually say that translating is equal to rewriting the book in Norwegian. One produces something which is not identical to, but which creates the same effect as the original. As long as one stays loyal to the spirit of the original, one can have free rein (...)» (5).

Some authors claim that they write better in English than in Norwegian. In a certain sense this may be correct, considering that nearly all the medical literature is in English. Many of them have spent shorter or longer periods in English-speaking countries, and have established contact with colleagues abroad. For most of us, however, our mother tongue is the language of which we have the best command. For example, many of us feel that we lose part of the richness of nuances when communicating in another language.

Of the foreign languages that are most relevant for Norwegians, English is most replete with idioms, i.e. set phrases and figures of speech. Idiomatic expressions often have a meaning beyond the words themselves. Although many Norwegians speak and pronounce English well, this may be the reason why we will reveal ourselves to a native speaker in the way we use idioms and prepositions (6) – not to mention synonyms and near-identical concepts. For example, what is the difference between fatal, fateful, deadly, mortal and lethal? Or between academic and scholarly, wound and injure, thesis and dissertation, talks and discussion (6) – (11)? In the same way that numerous researchers are good at statistics, many are also competent in English. However, in statistics and languages we remain guests in other people's disciplines. Don't you agree? Then I must quote the man who wished to convince an English visitor who was sceptical of something he had just been told: «You can take all this for good fish» (12). (This hapless conversationalist here makes an unsuccessful attempt to translate a common Norwegian figure of speech with the meaning «to accept as valid without further evidence», and thus illustrates the pitfalls involved in idiomatic usage)

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