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Nordic Panel discussion

Representatives of the Nordic countries were invited to share their views on linguistic prejudices and stereotypes, and especially to reflect on prejudices and stereotypes about each other's languages and countries. The major questions discussed were as follows.

- 1) You have all read about the prejudices and stereotypes held by the Nordic countries about each other. Since you are all neighbouring countries and belong to the same region, it would be interesting to know how you react to the prejudices and stereotypes regarding your own country. Were these things familiar to you, were you surprised, and do you agree or disagree?

The panelists stated that most of the expressions used about each other's languages and people were well known and not considered as deeply offensive, but rather as humorous. Similar expressions and jokes about each other are sometimes coined just by substituting one language or nationality for another. Friendly joking about each other's peculiarities is something that binds people together in the Nordic countries.

- 2) Do you see any patterns in the way that prejudices and stereotypes are expressed in the Nordic region compared to other regions?

There are some jokes about the landscape; Norwegians are called mountain apes by the Danes, and Danes are in turn called flatlanders, and there is probably a bit of envy on both sides. All the other Nordic countries have jokes about the Danish language due to its non-distinct pronunciation, and some have jokes about Finns and alcohol, or mock the Swedes for their excessive political correctness. On the other hand, Swedes are acknowledged for their work ethics, Finns for their design, and Danes are known for enjoying themselves and for coining the word *hygge*. The patterns seem the same as the ones we see elsewhere.

But most expressions are understood in the tradition of friendly competition and cooperation between the countries in the Nordic region, for instance facilitated by the Nordic Council of Ministers. The Nordic countries seem to have a strong sense of unity in spite of many differences, and this is reflected in the way they talk about each other.

- 3) Are there any particular measures taken against prejudices and stereotypes in your country? What is the effect?

In most Scandinavian schools, there are strong measures in place against discrimination and bullying. From the start, young people are taught to respect each other and to cherish diversity. Furthermore, there is a strong public debate about political correctness. The panelists agreed that jokes about the other Nordic countries, their language and their people have become less frequent during the last 20 years, and that this might be a result of these measures.

- 4) From your point of view: What are prejudice and stereotypes needed for? Why do they exist at all? Couldn't we just do without them?

The panel agreed that stereotypes and prejudices are fundamental human mechanisms that help us to understand the world. The strong relations that are shared in the Nordic countries help to facilitate the existence of positive stereotypes, and allow expressions that might otherwise be considered as prejudice to be interpreted from a more amicable point of view.

Bibliographical information

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