

Running with Blades: How Norwegian Peace Researchers View Publishing in English

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In Norway, researchers are pressured to publish almost exclusively in English. Using an academic literacies approach, I explore how Norwegian researchers at an interdisciplinary peace research institute view writing for publication as a situated literacy practice. The research institute houses about 60 researchers from the social-sciences and humanities, with a dominance of political scientists. Most are Norwegian, but about one-fourth come from other countries and the official working language is English. Using an ethnographic approach, I focused on 19 researchers (15 Norwegians, 3 native-English speakers, and 1 other). Here I explore the extent to which Norwegian researchers feel that writing in English poses a constraint to their creativity, what kinds of strategies they use to overcome these constraints, and what impact the focus on writing in English has on their ability to also write about their subject matter in Norwegian. I find that researchers in more data-driven or quantitative research traditions are less likely to feel constrained than those in concept-driven fields, although even the most quantitatively-oriented researchers were concerned about word choice. Native speakers seem more concerned about “authorial voice” than non-native speakers, and often expressed a desire to play with language and challenge the conventions of the genre, whereas non-native speakers spoke more about “getting it right.” One respondent described writing in English as being like running with blades: difficult to get the hang of, but once you get it, it does not pose as much of a hindrance as expected. Norwegian researchers employ a variety of strategies to compensate for perceived lack of fluency, including use of literacy brokers and co-authors. The emphasis on English means that Norwegian respondents felt that they lacked the vocabulary to write, or talk, about their work in their native language.

Biodata: Lynn P. Nygaard is special advisor on project development and publications at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) in Norway. A native English speaker from the U.S., she has spent her professional career in Norway assisting researchers from a variety of disciplines with academic publishing and grant writing. She edits, translates, and gives feedback on text, in addition to running workshops, retreats, and groups. The research presented here builds on her doctoral work at the Institute of Education, University College London. Nygaard is author of *Writing for Scholars: A Practical Guide to Making Sense and Being Heard* (London: Sage, 2nd edition 2015).