

# The History and Future of the Nordic Association for English Studies (NAES)

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During the academic year 1979-80, Stig Johansson and Bjørn Tysdahl, University of Oslo, and Arne Zettersten, University of Copenhagen, started to discuss the idea of forming a Nordic Association for English Studies. This informal organising committee agreed on the planning of biannual or triannual English conferences in the Nordic countries according to a fixed rotation order. The English Department, University of Oslo, volunteered to organise the First Conference for English Studies at Lysebu, Oslo, on 17-19 September, 1980.

The original idea of the three "founding fathers" was that the new organisation should meet every three years and that papers should be presented within the areas of language, literature and civilisation. It was made clear that NAES was meant to work parallel to the well established Nordic Association for American Studies. The overall aim would be to promote research and co-operation in the Nordic countries and to encourage research projects which could lead to broader networks in and outside the five countries. Since the idea was that membership of the association should be open to any person working in the field of English Studies in all departments of English in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, it was clear that many young scholars, not yet fully established, would be encouraged to participate and to engage in scholarly co-operation.

At the first conference in Oslo, an interim constitution was agreed on. It was decided that five members of an executive committee should be elected for a period of three years, one from each country. The committee should consist of a President, a Vice President, a Secretary, a Treasurer and one other member of the

Association. Arne Zettersten, Copenhagen, Håkan Ringbom, Åbo, Julian D'Arcy, Reykjavik, Bjørn Tysdahl, Oslo, and Gunnel Tottie, Uppsala, were elected to the Executive Committee for a period of three years. Arne Zettersten was elected President of the Association.

The first conference of NAES at the conference centre of Lysebu outside Oslo became quite a success with about 120 scholars from all the Nordic countries. From the beginning it was made clear by the organisers that it would be important for the conferences of NAES to invite a number of well-known guest-speakers, preferably reflecting the three major research areas, language, literature and civilisation.

Over the years the NAES conferences have taken great pride in inviting prominent international scholars who have participated actively in the conferences and contributed vividly to the scholarly debate. This has led to further international co-operation at the same time as it has made the conferences even more exciting events.

As an additional help to the enhancement of co-operation in research, Arne Zettersten, Copenhagen, had prepared a study of Nordic work in progress within English Studies in all the five countries. In this study all the members of all English departments had been asked to summarise all their research projects, so that individual scholars in the Nordic countries, or elsewhere, could look up areas of research in the index of the book and get in touch with scholars working in a similar field. Prospective Ph.D.-candidates could also use the survey of research in progress in order to avoid clashes and also to exchange views on a particular topic. An appendix to the 1980 study was published in 1984.

The papers from the First Nordic Conference for English Studies were published in 1981, edited by Stig Johansson and Bjørn Tysdahl. The editors said in their preface that "The present collection of papers cannot re-capture the atmosphere of friendly and vigorous discussion which prevailed at the Lysebu Conference". This was true enough and the same atmosphere has actually been characteristic of all the subsequent NAES conferences. They have all

been of comparable size and they have continued in the same scholarly spirit.

The Second Nordic Conference for English Studies was organised at Hanasaari/Hanaholmen near Helsinki on 19-21 May, 1983. We could here notice the successful co-operation between Helsinki University and Åbo Academy in that the conference was organised by the English Department of Helsinki University, whereas the proceedings were published by the Research Institute of the Åbo Academy, edited by Håkan Ringbom, Åbo, and Matti Rissanen, Helsinki.

The Third Nordic Conference for English Studies in 1986 also showed an example of the kind of departmental co-operation that some of us had hoped for as NAES developed. Before the conference in Sweden in 1986, the English departments of Uppsala and Stockholm co-operated fruitfully, placing the conference at beautiful Hässelby Castle outside Stockholm. The proceedings from the Third Nordic Conference for English Studies were edited by Magnus Ljung, Stockholm, and Gunnel Tottie, Uppsala.

The Fourth Nordic Conference for English Studies was held at Elsinor (Helsingør), Denmark, on 11-13 May, 1989. This time no fewer than 160 scholars attended the conference, 96 of whom presented papers or research reports. The planning of this conference was carried out by a team of colleagues from the English departments of the University of Copenhagen, Handelshøjskolen and Denmark's Lærerhøjskole. The proceedings from the Fourth Nordic Conference for English Studies were edited by Graham Caie, Kirsten Hastrup, Arnt Lykke Jakobsen, Jørgen Erik Nielsen, Jørgen Sevaldsen, Henrik Specht and Arne Zettersten.

The Fifth Nordic Conference for English Studies was held at Reykjavik on 7-8 August, 1992. This time our members were also given the opportunity to attend the Nordic Association for American Studies Conference which was held on campus at the University of Iceland over the same period of time. At the General Meeting during the Conference, Arne Zettersten announced that he had decided – after 12 years as President, not to seek re-election.

Julian D'Arcy was elected President of NAES. At a later stage, at the Tromsø Conference, the Constitution was changed in accordance with the principle that a new President is always elected from the university and country organising the subsequent conference. The Proceedings of the Fifth Nordic Conference for English Studies were edited in 1993 by Julian D'Arcy.

The Sixth Nordic Conference for English Studies was held at Tromsø on 25-28 May, 1995. Members of NAES were delighted to visit the northernmost university in the world and to experience a memorable outing to Fløyfjellet with a splendid view of the midnight sun. The Proceedings of the Sixth Nordic Conference for English Studies were edited in 1997 by Gerd Bjørhovde and Gøril Rogne.

The Seventh Nordic Conference for English Studies was held in Turku/Åbo on 28-31 May, 1998. In the past our conferences had been attended primarily by members of English departments in the Nordic countries. This time the organisers could welcome participants also from the Baltic countries, Hungary, Japan and the United States. The Proceedings of the Seventh Nordic Conference for English Studies were edited in 1999 by Sanna-Kaisa Tanskanen and Brita Wårvik.

The eighth Nordic Conference for English Studies was held at Göteborg on 24-26 May, 2001. Those members of NAES who had participated in all the conferences since 1980, recognised the same pattern of organisation. There was the usual mixture of young Ph. D.-candidates, experienced professors and mid-career scholars. There was the same "atmosphere of friendly and vigorous discussion" as had characterised the first Nordic Conference at Lysebu in 1980. The Proceedings of the eighth Nordic Conference for English Studies will be edited by Karin Aijmer. The next conference will be held at Aarhus in 2004. Tim Caudery, Aarhus, was elected President for the period 2001-04.

At an early stage in the planning of NAES activities in the 1980s the Board and organisers of the conferences made a point of keeping in touch with comparable associations outside the Nordic

countries. Representatives of the German Anglicists' Association were, for example, invited several times. In the early 1990s, when the new European Society for the Study of English (ESSE) was founded, NAES participated in the planning process from the very beginning. NAES became officially a member of ESSE at the board meeting in Brussels in 1990 and has had one seat on the Board of ESSE ever since. The first ESSE conference was held at Norwich on 4-8 September, 1991, and the plan from the beginning was to hold a conference every two years.

At the beginning of the 1990s, there were 12 members on the board of ESSE, all being members of the European Community (later EU), namely Belgium, Denmark (NAES), France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain. ESSE was founded as a federation of associations within the European Community, but there was from the start a clear determination within the Board to invite all European scholars of English to all future conferences and to encourage membership from more countries in the future. Today there are 30 members on the board of ESSE.

ESSE has been publishing a newsletter since 1990, called the *European English Messenger*, with the purpose to disseminate information and views about English Studies in Europe. It is distributed free to all members of the society's constituent associations and appears twice a year. This newsletter serves as an obvious help to all members of NAES, since members are free to write informative or argumentative articles on matters concerning university affairs, and to make announcements of forthcoming conferences and other events. During the last few years a new scholarly journal has been launched, called, *The European Journal of English Studies*, which also increases the possibility for members of NAES to publish articles in a European context.

The next ESSE conference will be held on 30 August – 3 September, 2003 at the Marc Bloch University of Strasbourg. At ESSE conferences members of NAES will always have the opportunity to make proposals for seminar and panel topics as well as plenary and semi-plenary lectures and informal sessions. In fact, the role that NAES has in the organisation of ESSE makes it

possible to keep much more in touch with international developments within our respective fields of interest than before ESSE existed. With ESSE's about 8000 members, all NAES members can find experts and research colleagues much more easily through the new channels that ESSE provides.

As from the year of the NAES conference at Helsinki, 2000, Finland has formed a separate Association within NAES with a seat on the Board of ESSE for a Finnish representative. The other board member of NAES represents Scandinavia, meaning Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Sweden. So far the membership fees within ESSE (6 or 7 Euros) have been covered by block payment by the individual English departments of English in the Nordic Countries. Nearly all of the other associations base their activities on individual payment of fees. Countries like Spain, France and the United Kingdom have all more than a thousand members.

According to the latest calculations, the membership figures of ESSE appear as follows: Albania (prospective member): 5, Austria: 86, Belgium: 121, Bulgaria: 82, Croatia: 80, Cyprus: 16, Czech Republic: 57, Estonia: 4, Finland: 80, France: 1685, Germany: 538, Greece: 92, Hungary: 157, Ireland: 190, Italy 296, Latvia: 6, Lithuania: 29, Macedonia: 39, Netherlands: 121, Scandinavia: 269, Poland: 253, Portugal: 267, Romania: 271, Russia: 157, Slovakia: 17, Slovenia: 50, Spain: 1099, Switzerland: 101, Ukraine: 115, United Kingdom: 1186, Yugoslavia: 105. The total sum of NAES members of ESSE is 349, which means that NAES is the fifth largest association in ESSE.

These figures certainly indicate that there are great possibilities for NAES to continue to build up numerous research links in all member countries. One way of starting to find out more about ESSE activities for individual NAES members is to search the two home pages of ESSE: <http://www.mshs.univ-poitiers.fr/esse/esse.htm> and: <http://gean5.pfmb.uni-mb.si/esse>

These web-sites also provide information on the 2002 ESSE conference at Strasbourg. The Autumn issue of *The Messenger* has included the preliminary registration form. All these obvious

connections of NAES to ESSE make the future prospects of NAES brighter than ever. The new *Nordic Journal of English Studies* will contribute greatly to keeping Nordic scholars more closely together. There is no doubt about the fact that future co-operation between Nordic scholars of English Studies will be alleviated by the ESSE connection and the new *Nordic Journal of English Studies*. Since ESSE regularly meets every two years and NAES every three years there is ample opportunity for Nordic scholars to meet and set up research links or research projects.

It seems clear that some major changes have occurred at various stages in the history of NAES. During the first cycle of five conferences in the five Nordic countries in the period 1980-1992, the Nordic meetings were characterised by a firm conviction that there was a Nordic identity in research and teaching in respect of English studies. We could call this the first phase of the history of NAES.

The second phase started about the time when ESSE became established and NAES found its position as an important Northern unit and integral part of ESSE. This was around 1992 when ESSE consisted of twelve member countries only. Then ESSE started to grow year by year and at the turn of the millennium, the membership of ESSE had grown towards about 30 members.

The first conference in a Nordic country was held in Helsinki in 2000 and Finland had become a new separate member of ESSE, however still belonging to NAES in a Nordic context. This is where we can talk about the third phase in the history of NAES. At the beginning of this third phase, the planning of the new *Nordic Journal of English Studies* started and we may now find a fresh way of keeping our Nordic identity together in scholarly matters.

We may keep this Nordic identity in spite of the fact that our own research has a much wider, global span than it may have had about 1980. Much research in the Nordic countries is based on the funding provided by research councils and other institutions in the individual countries. In such cases research partners or project members are usually colleagues from the same Nordic countries. In

addition the Nordic Council also provides funding for a good number of Nordic projects every year. Due to the situation of the Nordic research funding we find project-oriented research just as Nordic as ever, even if the research topics are probably much more diversified and global.

It is, on the other hand, much easier for Nordic scholars to find new research associates and research links, if all opportunities produced by the ESSE networks are made use of. Quite a number of such research links may be generated through more permanent use of, for example, the ESSE database and the ESSE bibliography on CD-ROM. If all members of NAES contribute new data to the ESSE database as often as possible we shall certainly know much more about ongoing research in the future and how to get access to it. With these developments in mind, the new President of NAES, Tim Caudery of Aarhus, can only be congratulated on taking on the task of developing NAES even further.

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