

Producing talking books in Arabic – a Nordic cooperation

Kristina Passad

The Swedish Agency for Accessible Media, Sweden

E-mail address: kristina.passad@mtm.se



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Abstract:

In Sweden, and the other Nordic countries, the need for talking books in other languages than European languages has increased during the last few years. Due to the amount of refugees coming to the Nordic countries, a cooperation concerning production of talking books in Arabic started in 2015. The libraries involved are: Celia in Finland, Nota in Denmark, NLB (Norsk lyd- og blindeskriftbibliotek) in Norway, Hljodbokasafn in Iceland and MTM in Sweden. 25 talking books in Arabic will be produced in this project by spring 2017. The great advantage of this project, besides to satisfy the users' needs of these titles, is that each library bears the cost of production for 5 titles but gains 25.

Keywords: cooperation, talking books, Arabic

Introduction and background

According to the Statistics Sweden there were 1,7 million persons in Sweden who were foreign-born, which means that they are born abroad or born in Sweden with two parents born abroad¹. This means that nearly 20% of the Swedish population have a foreign background. We usually say that about 6 % of the population have some kind of reading impairment. This would then mean that about 100 000 persons from this group need accessible media. Statistics Sweden also tells us that 2015 was a record for immigration to Sweden with more than 130 000 persons coming to Sweden².

More than 30 000 of these the persons who came to Sweden in 2015 have Arabic as their native language. According to information published by The language Council of Sweden

there are about 155 000 speakers of Arabic in Sweden³- but that was before 2015 became a record year of immigration.

Legislation in Sweden tells us that libraries must pay special attention to persons with another language than Swedish by offering literature in other languages than Swedish or any of the five minority languages in Sweden⁴. There is also the language law⁵ that says that Swedish is the main language in Sweden and that a person who does not have Swedish or any of the five minority languages as a native language has a right to use and develop his or her native language. Unesco and IFLA say in the manifest for libraries that: *The services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status.*⁶ The Discrimination Act from 1 Jan 2015 stresses the activities that for instance schools have to do to put a person with an impairment on the same level as someone without an impairment⁷

The increased need for titles in other languages than Swedish and English and the relatively few talking books in these other languages in Legimus <http://www.legimus.se/> which is MTM's web-catalogue made it clear that MTM had to find ways to increase the production of these titles. The idea to cooperate with the other Nordic libraries was discussed among the libraries and was soon decided upon.

The cooperation concerning the production of these titles was written down in MTM's strategy for many languages.

MTM's strategy for multiple languages

MTM has in its instruction from the department an obligation to have a perspective of diversity in its work. To meet this obligation MTM has a strategy for multiple languages. The current strategy lasts until the end of 2017⁸.

MTM tells the department about the results of the strategy in the annual report to the government. The current strategy has the following strategic goals:

1. A well-balanced content in Legimus which as much as possible takes the needs of the users into consideration, concerning other languages than Swedish and English
2. Preconditions for well- educated and skilled library staff to give the users correct information and good service

The strategy has 6 sub goals. Two of these concern the cooperation of the production of titles in other languages than Nordic ones. Goal 2: *A specific effort to increase the number of talking books in other non-European languages* and goal 4: *An increased cooperation with the Nordic libraries.*

MTM's organization

MTM has about 110 employees and one of them is a librarian with the special assignment to work with the talking books in other languages than Swedish. This person works in a unit

called Acquisition but is responsible for all the agency's work with these questions. The focus in the strategy is Legimus and media in other languages than Swedish.

This librarian leads a small team of four persons at the agency. They come from different parts of MTM. They meet once a month and plan the production and also how to communicate about these books. They are also responsible for information to the other parts of the agency and for reporting to the management.

MTM has three different focus groups with external library staff from the university libraries, the public libraries and the school libraries. The librarian with many languages contributes to these meetings but is not a permanent member of the groups.

MTM has many partners and concerning the many languages there is the International Library.

Legimus

The very first goal in the strategy, says that an analysis of the content of talking books in other languages than Swedish will be done.

In Legimus there are about 120 000 titles. There are about 70 different languages but in some languages there might only be 1 talking book.

In 2015 the 12 most downloaded languages (not considering Swedish, English) were the following: Spanish, French, German, Serbocroatian, Russian, Danish, Polish, Arabic, Persian, Norwegian, Hungarian and Estonian. Based on the statistics for the downloads and considering the number of titles for each language the circulation can be estimated. A high figure for circulation means that there is a high demand for these titles. The circulation figures for these talking books showed the following:

Language	Circulation
Spanish	2,1
French	2,3
German	1,2
Serbocroatian	1,2
Russian	1,1
Danish	1,0
Polish	1,6
Arabic	4,2
Persian	3,3
Norwegian	0,8
Hungarian	1,1
Estonian	0,5

The result of the analysis showed that Arabic is the most important language to increase the number of talking books.

The start

In the spring 2015 MTM asked the other Nordic countries about their interest and ability to cooperate in the production. The idea was: produce and pay for 5 titles and get 25! Either we would produce all the titles in one country or we would each produce titles. The language should be a language spoken by many people in all Nordic countries. All the countries were interested.

When the analysis of the content in Legimus was finished, the idea was presented for the General Director in November. He then discussed the matter with the other Directors and we could continue.

The first meeting between the Nordic libraries was a skype meeting in the end of November. We then discussed what language we wanted and the production. We decided to choose Arabic as the language and MTM got the assignment to choose what titles.

To choose the titles we discussed the amount of childrens' books and decided to produce 5 titles for children and 20 for adults. We wanted a selection of fiction and modern titles. We decided to ask the International Library in Stockholm for help with the selection and they produced a list of 50 titles in Arabic.

Meeting at MTM in Stockholm in March, 2016

All the libraries participated at the meeting in Stockholm. We discussed the different possibilities for the libraries to produce talking books in Arabic. It was decided that Finland, Iceland and Norway each produce 5 titles and MTM produces 10 titles but Nota bears the cost for 5 of these titles. We would use the principles and regulations for production in each organization and of course keep to the Daisy standard.

We also discussed the choice of titles from the list from the International Library. The list had first consisted of 50 titles. A librarian from the International Library of Stockholm had compiled this list consisting of new modern fiction and some modern classics. The list consists of different genres and some titles were taken from the list of the Arabian Bookerprize. The children's books were new chapter books. MTMs librarian had then chosen 25 of these titles and these 25 were discussed at the meeting in Stockholm.

The deadline for production was set until the end of March 2017.

We also discussed to have the same sound file at the start of each talking book in Arabic which should be included in all the books in the project with information about the project and the special regulations for talking books. All the libraries except Norway will use this introduction. A special agreement with the Publishers in Norway makes it necessary to include a separate introduction.

We wanted to share the titles via TIGAR. TIGAR is an international catalogue of accessible titles in different formats. The participating libraries can download titles from the catalogue and they also contribute with titles they have produced⁹.

So the titles were sent to TIGAR to start the process of clearing of Copyright, with the ambition to have the titles ready for upload when they are produced. But this clearing process would take some time. However, the Nordic libraries have a co-operation agreement that we can share titles, the only exception being Denmark where the copyright laws make this difficult.

What have we learnt this far?

Experiences from the Nordic libraries in May:

1. What have we learnt this far?
 - Cooperation such as this must very clearly have a coordinator. In this project, MTM took the initiative. Along the way the person responsible at MTM resigned but MTM has taken the role of coordinator.
 - Mail is a perfectly fine way to communicate but a meeting face to face is invaluable.
2. Challenges?
 - Finding readers.
 - Common introduction.
 - Different legislation in the Nordic countries.
3. Surprises?
4. What should we do better next time?
 - TIGAR – if possible clear the titles even earlier.
 - Prepare an intro to the books that better considers the legislation in all the Nordic countries.

Next step

For the project the next step is of course to finish the productions. It might be a challenge to meet the deadline in March 2017. And since the need for these titles is great we have to consider the information about these titles carefully. It is a good idea to promote the titles in some kind of common information in all the libraries.

For the future we also want to produce talking books in other languages. Norway, Finland and Sweden have the Sami languages in common and here there might be a challenge of finding narrators.

For MTM a next step is to cooperate about buying or getting talking books in other languages into our collections. In order to do this, the Nordic libraries will have to discuss and decide the terms for another crossborder cooperation.

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8. MTM´ s strategy for many languages, <http://www.mtm.se/om-oss/uppdrag-och-lagar/strategier/>

9. TIGAR is a project owned by ABC, Accessible Book Consortium:
<http://www.accessiblebooksconsortium.org/tigar/en/>

