

It's more than just bridges that link Scandinavia

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■ The Oresund Bridge between Sweden and Denmark.

Picture: SUBMITTED

The BBC4 TV series *The Bridge* is currently being watched by over one and a half million viewers in Britain, so it's safe to assume that there are plenty of EDP readers among the viewers.

As you'll have noticed if you watch it, the series is called *Broen* in Danish and *Bron* in Swedish. *Bro* means bridge in both languages, with the endings *-en* and *-n* representing the definite article 'the'. The Norwegian word for bridge is also *bro*: the three languages are very similar, and pretty much mutually intelligible.

When Norwegians go to Sweden, they just carry on speaking Norwegian, though maybe a little more slowly than usual and avoiding expressions they know might cause problems. This isn't too different from how English people communicate in the USA.

You can see how this intelligibility operates in *The Bridge*. The series plays out on either side of the Øresund bridge which, with its associated tunnel, is about eight miles long. Opened in 1999, it joins the cities of Copenhagen in Denmark and Malmö in Sweden.

In the series, the Swedish actors playing the parts of Swedes quite naturally speak

Swedish, and the Danes speak Danish, but unless you're familiar with Scandinavian languages you won't necessarily pick up on what is going on linguistically.

The Swedish and Danish characters in *The Bridge* understand each other perfectly well, though there are sometimes little jokes – which the subtitlers ignore because they can't cope with them – about specific words the others use or misunderstandings, much as you sometimes find in interactions between Scots and English people, or British people and Americans. A Norwegian colleague, however, tells me that he has discussed this with some of the actors, and in real life they say it's not necessarily as easy as all that.

The fact is that language change is grad-

ually taking the Scandinavian languages further apart. There are very few intelligibility problems between Swedish and Norwegian, though this does depend on whereabouts in those countries speakers come from.

But spoken Danish seems to be getting increasingly difficult for the others to understand. Norwegians can read Danish without any problem, but some of them report that they're finding younger Danish people increasingly hard to comprehend when they speak. In fact, it sometimes now happens that young Swedes travelling to Denmark speak English when they get there.

So far we haven't seen Saga and Henrik doing that.