

Ig Nobel prizes for linguists?

 Af [Peter Bakker](#) 17. maj 2009 • I kategorien [Sjov](#) •

 [Maskinoversættelse til dansk [her](#)]

Since 1991, a strange ceremony takes place in Massachusetts, USA. Ten Ig Nobel prizes are given out by Nobel laureates, and organized by the journal [Annals of Improbable Research](#). The prizes are awarded to scientists who studied research results that first make you laugh, and then make you think. Winners are flooded with paper airplanes from the audience. Since a couple of years, some winners of the Ig Nobel Prize present their award-winning research also occasionally outside Massachusetts.

Tuesday the 21st April 2009 an Ig Nobel event took place at the University of Aarhus, for the first time in history in the state of Denmark! I was one of the lucky 1000 people or so who were able to procure a ticket. Not only economists, biologists and physicists make people laugh, but as we will see, even linguists ...

Marc Abrahams, the inventor and organizer of the annual ceremony at Harvard University, introduced the event in Aarhus, highlighting some of the most remarkable winners. In Aarhus four Ig Nobel prize winners participated.

One winner had discovered that some types of cheese produced similar smells as human feet, and that mosquitoes could be fooled by getting them attracted to bite cheese rather than humans. The scheme of the study was to eradicate world poverty, as there is a correlation between the existence of malaria and economic disaster.

The second one was a study of homosexual necrophilia among ducks, rarely but painstakingly observed and documented by the Ig Nobel prize winner.

The third one had done a study of sword swallows (price for Medicine) and the medical intricacies and risks. He demonstrated also on the spot how to do it, but no volunteers wanted to try. He warned us: don't try this at home.

The fourth winner was a Swedish scientist working in Denmark who had been able to prove that certain underwater sounds previously thought to be associated with Russian submarines spying on the Swedes, were in reality the signals of farting herrings. This was actually something that could be tried at home: buy herrings from the fish shop, and squeeze them gently: even when dead they can make this farting sound.

It was a great event. We had a good laugh, and we learned something.

The Aarhus University newspaper *Campus* reported on the event in their [May 4 edition](#). On the preceding page we find the title of a dissertation that could easily be nominated. I had always wondered why people like to donate their body to science. On the 29th of May 2009 Anne Barklin will defend her dissertation: *Systemic inflammation in the brain-dead organ donor*.

I remembered that I somewhere had the book on my bookshelf *The Ig Nobel Prizes. The Annals of Improbable Research* (New York, Dutton, 2003), by Marc Abrahams, and decided to finally read it. Even though it is a great book – funny, well-written, amazing, sometimes worrisome –, I was disappointed that hardly any of the 120 winners celebrated in the book were from our own sacred field of linguistics. Only two of the winners in the book, published in 2003, could be said to be related to linguistics.

Vicky L. Silvers of the University of Nevada, Reno, and David S. Kreiner wrote an article on “The effects of pre-existing inappropriate highlighting on reading comprehension”, for which they won the IG Nobel Prize for Literature in 2002.

That same year three Japanese scholars won the Peace Prize “for promoting peace and harmony between the species by inventing the Bow-lingual, a computer-based automatic dog-to-human language translation device”.

Wikipedia showed the [complete list of winners](#), and linguists are apparently now getting their rightful place in the history of science. The first IG Nobel prize for linguistics has been awarded in 2007! And three linguistic studies have been awarded a prize since 2003!

Here, from Wikipedia, some more highlights of linguistic research after 2002:

- **Literature, 2007:** Glenda Browne, for her study into indexing entries that start with the word “*the*”.
- **Literature, 2007:** David Sims, for his study “You Bastard: A Narrative Exploration of the Experience of Indignation within Organizations”.

And the only one ever awarded Ig Nobel prize for *linguistics*!:

- **Linguistics, 2007:** Juan Manuel Toro, Josep B. Trobalon and Nuria Sebastian-Galles, for determining that rats sometimes can't distinguish between recordings of [Japanese](#) and [Dutch](#) played backward.

There must be more candidates. Shortly we will publish a list of nominees from the field of linguistics. Readers are urged to come up with candidates and studies.

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4. [The language of The Julekalender](#) The daily Christmas TVprogram The Julekalender, originally produced in 1991, has become tradition, and is shown again this winter. They speak a mixture of Jutish dialect and English. Such mixed...

Tagget med: [ig nobel](#), [In English](#), [konkurrencer](#), [linguistics](#), [priser](#), [Sjov](#)

1 kommentar



Astrid

17. maj 2009 • 10:25

How about Jonathan Harris and Sam Kamvar's <http://www.wefeelfine.org/> I thought it was an interesting project. I especially liked the option for comparing language usage across blogs by gender.

Svar

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december 2014	Forvo – All the Words in the World. Pronounced.
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