Whisky terminology

Gisle Andersen
NHH Norwegian School of Economics, 2026

Abstract
While Norway has a long tradition for making alcoholic beverages, the production of malt whisky has a short history that spans only two decades. Many concepts in this domain derive from the Scottish whisky industry, and there is a clear tendency for Norwegians to resort to English terms when speaking and writing about concepts in this domain. This paper reports on a collaborative effort to develop a comprehensive terminology for whisky production for the Norwegian language (Bokmål and Nynorsk), with a specific focus on neology in its inventory of terms. A project group with members from the whisky industry (distillers, consultancy), the Norwegian state-owned wine monopoly *Vinmonopolet* and academia has collaborated on collecting relevant terms, editing terminology, writing definitions, etc. The whisky terminology was officially launched as part of the NeoTerm 2026 event in Bergen, Norway, on 3 September 2026.

1. Introduction

Norway has a long tradition for production of alcoholic beverages that goes back at least 3,000 years in the making of ale and mead from malted grains. From the Viking Age, the production of ale was mandatory for farmers according to the *Gulatingsloven* (earliest Norwegian law code), and from the 16th century ales were distilled into spirits such as aquavit (Hauge, 2011). A much more recent development is the production of malt whisky (Sørensen, 2025). The first independent Norwegian distillery to manufacture malt whisky was Agder Brenneri, which began producing spirits in the autumn of 2005. This occurred after the Norwegian production monopoly was repealed in the early 2000s. After several years of planning, its first malt whisky was released in 2009 (Norsk maltwhiskylag, n.d.). Since then, the number of distilleries and volume of production has surged, and at the time of writing, *Vinmonopolet* (the Norwegian state-owned wine monopoly) offers 38 different products in the category of Norwegian whisky from 14 different brands. Most distilleries are small craft distilleries with a limited range and production, with the exception of Arcus (now part of Anora Group Plc.) and Det Norske Brenneri.

The Norwegian style of malt whisky production is particularly influenced by that of Scotland, most notably Speyside and the Highlands, to a lesser degree the Islay tradition. As a consequence, many of its concepts and the terminology is strongly influenced by the terminology applied in the Scottish whisky industry. While concepts relating to traditional alcohol production such as brewing and distilling are designated by established terms in Norwegian, many concepts in this new domain originate in an English-speaking industrial culture. Not surprisingly, there is a clear tendency for the Norwegian industry to resort to English terms when speaking and writing about concepts in this domain. There is, in other words, a need for a comprehensive terminology for whisky production for the Norwegian language, including its two written varieties Bokmål and Nynorsk.

This paper describes the effort to create such a terminology, the methodology involved and status of the work. Its targeted domain covers the whole cycle of whisky production, from raw materials, via the manufacturing steps of malting, mashing, fermentation, distillation and maturation, to products, sensory expressions and operational functions and roles. Currently, the termbase titled *Whiskyterminologi* covers approx. 330 concepts and contains approx. 1,230 terms in Norwegian Bokmål, Nynorsk and English (see https://whiskyterm.no).

2. Methodology

The ambition of the project is to cover all relevant concepts in the whole production cycle in whisky production. The various steps are shown in Figure 1.

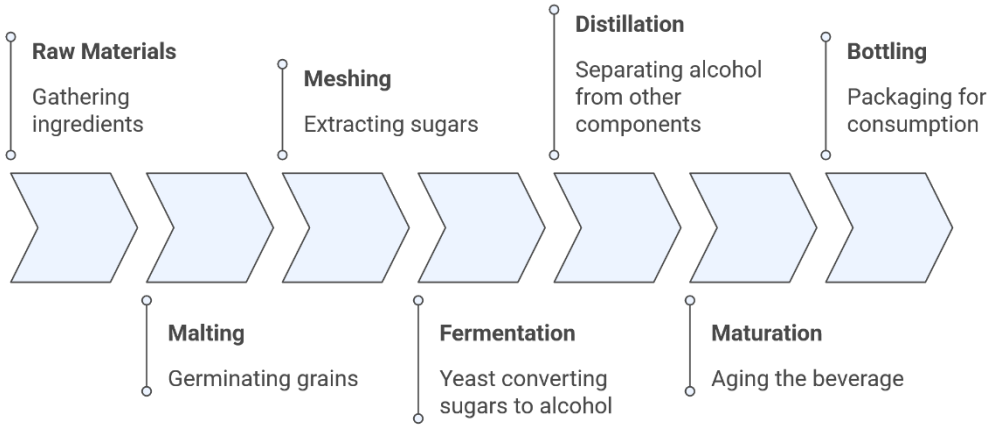


Figure 1: Whisky production process flow

To this end, a project group was formed in 2023 with members from the whisky industry, including an expert from a distillery in Western Norway and an expert consultant and whisky blogger affiliated with importing firms, a representative from *Vinmonopolet*, and a representative from academia, more specifically the Norwegian School of Economics (NHH), which also coordinates the project. While the project group is in charge of developing the content, *Termportalen* – Norway's national infrastructure for terminology, at the University of Bergen – also contributes significantly with terminological insights and by hosting the terminology base (https://www.termportalen.no/).

The systematic work of collecting terms and writing definitions started a few years earlier as a result of this author's many visits to Scottish distilleries, particularly in the Speyside region. Besides communicating directly with representatives of a range of distilleries in Scotland, many knowledge sources were consulted during the development of the terminology (see below). The methodological steps that have resulted in a comprehensive whisky terminology are as follows:

First, given that whisky production was a fledging industry in Norway, and acknowledging that a comprehensive terminology was lacking, an initial version of a terminology – consisting mainly of term candidates in Norwegian Bokmål and their English counterparts – was developed based on communication with the industry in Scotland.

Second, the initial version of the terminology was submitted to the project group for discussion and revision. Determining which terms to include is a complex process that involves investigation and deliberation. We take a bottom-up and usage-based approach that entails charting terminological usage in the domain via fieldwork and studies of existing literature and other relevant sources. This second stage therefore also included a literature study that comprised English-sourced standard works such as guides and textbooks for the industry (e.g., (Jackson, 2005; Russell, 2003)), Norwegian translations of English books on the same topic (e.g., (Jackson, 2000)) Norwegian articles on whisky production (e.g., (Lundmark, 2025; Sørensen, 2025; Steffens, 2020; Tønder Smith, 2020)) and legal documents and technical reports ("Forskrift om alkoholsterke og aromatiserte drikker mv," n.d.; Goodall, 2023).

Third, in the next stage of revision, the terminology was equipped with terms for Nynorsk, and a taxonomy for subdomains was agreed upon. All terms were subject to deliberation in the project group before they were entered into the *Whiskyterminologi* database, after which they were quality-checked with a terminologist at *Termportalen*.

Fourth, the terminology was extended to include a more comprehensive coverage, and all concepts were supplied with definitions in Norwegian Bokmål and English.

Fifth, and finally, all the information from the fourth stage was incorporated into the database.

3. Status of work

The termbase *Whiskyterminologi* contains terms related to all aspects of the industrial production of whisky. Each element of the production cycle shown in Figure 1 above is represented in the terminology base, and the process flow is conceptualised as the database's taxonomical structure of subdomains. This covers the entire production chain from grain selection and malting via distillation and maturation to products, sensory impressions and occupations/functions. As of 2026, the termbase includes approx. 330 concepts with terms and synonyms in Bokmål, Nynorsk and English, subdomain labelling and definitions and notes in both languages.

The representation of a specific concept *destilleringsøl* 'wash' is shown in Figure 2.

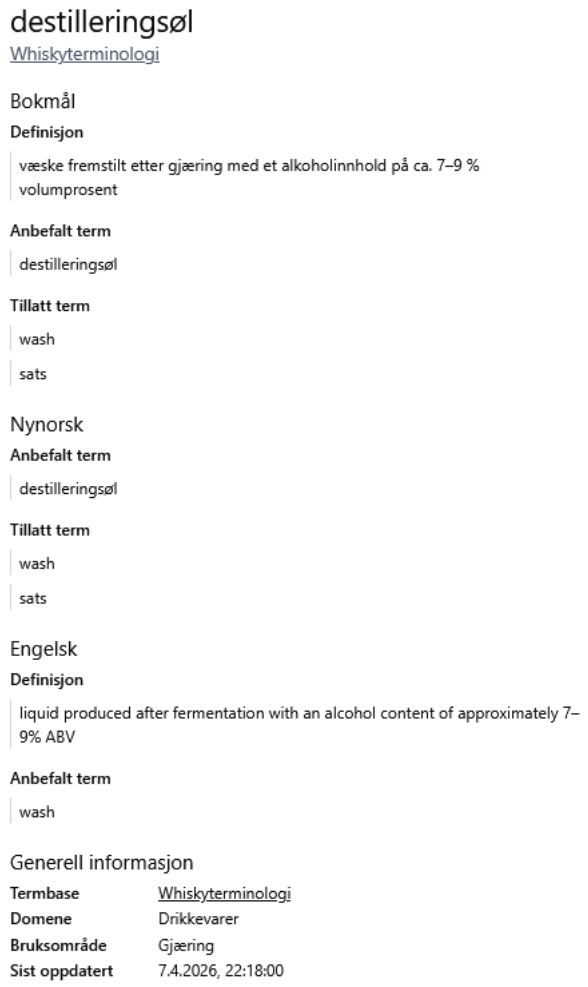


Figure 2: The concept DESTILLERINGSØL *in the* Whiskyterminology *termbase*

This concept illustrates the combined strategy for term formation and selection that has generally been applied in the project. Due to its homonymy and lack of transparency, the English term *wash* to denote this concept would normally be quite incomprehensible to Norwegian users without contextual information or expert knowledge. Our policy for term selection/formation has been a pragmatic and usage-based approach. In this particular case this entails the selection of a transparent term *destilleringsøl* (lit. 'distillation ale', i.e. ale for distillation) as the main term, combined with the traditional term *sats* as an acceptable synonym due to its well-established status in distillation terminology. In a few cases, for concepts where the English borrowing tends to be used in Norwegian, we have also chosen to include the English term, as seen from the case of *wash*.

The project's main deliverable, the resource *Whiskyterminology*, is openly accessible for public use via *Termportalen*. It was officially launched as part of the NeoTerm 2026 event in Bergen, Norway, on 3 September 2026.

The project team considers this an important contribution to strengthening Norwegian professional language within an industry that is relatively new in Norway, but with close ties to international players and where English-language terminology dominates. Our immediate plan is to augment its functionality by adding hyperlinks between related concepts. We also hope to add more languages to the termbase and have been in contact with other industrial actors in the Nordic region about this possibility.

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