News & Tips

from

English support

No. 45 – July 2008

Dear friends

We live in exciting times! Last month we received no less than 14 new subscriptions for *News & Tips* from one company alone. That must be practically everyone involved with translation work in that firm. Last quarter saw the second highest turnover we have ever had, more than doubling up on the previous quarter. And although we are well into the summer months, the work keeps on coming in. At this rate we will have outgrown our new offices by this time next year!

The times they are a-changing!

As reported in *News & Tips* no. 41, Copenhagen Business School is no longer going to be running the courses that lead to authorised translators and interpreters in other languages than English. This is due to the lack of applications for these courses. In fact, all over Europe, students are turning away from taking courses specialising in foreign languages.

This trend is causing an enormous amount of concern among language professionals and their organisations. Where are tomorrow's language teachers and translators going to come from? Lots of reports have been written bemoaning the situation and calling for action, but little or nothing has been done.

The reason for the lack of government action is because there is little any democratic government can do to make people take courses they don't want to. And the reason people don't want to specialise in foreign languages is obvious. It is only a matter of time, and probably not much time, before computer translation becomes a realistic option and we can all enjoy the simultaneous translation of our words as we speak over our mobiles to China. Perhaps as little as five years, but probably ten at the most, and at least within the working life of people deciding their studies now.

So language students sensibly opt for combined courses (a foreign language + some other subject) so they have another leg to stand on. And those who really want to work with languages in the future would be well-advised to choose computer science as the other subject.

What does this mean for language professionals? Well, it means more and more focus on *nuance*, on the things that language software will not be able to do well for a long time, and on finding mistakes. *Editing and language revision*. There will always be a need for people who understand how language works, including foreign languages, but when computerisation hits the language business for real, there will suddenly no longer be the same need for thousands of *translation* specialists. And globalisation is forcing the computerisation of translation – human translation is already simply too expensive in resources. You only have to think of the EU!

So why shouldn't this worry us? Well, for one thing, there is never any point in worrying about what you can't do anything about. ☺ But, for another, things take time. By focusing on *quality*, we can survive well into the age of computer translation. And we must be prepared to transform *ourselves* to meet the challenge, instead of asking the government to stop the *world* changing.

We must turn into language experts in ways that no software can match – in our lifetimes at least!

Please turn over!

From the workshop...

Branch, industry, sector

A *branch* in English is a local part of an organisation. For instance, I have an account at a branch of *Danske Bank* in Roskilde, and *English support* belongs to the local branch of *ProNetwork*.

The word *industry* is often used to describe a whole category of business: e.g. the motor industry, the shipping industry, the transport industry, the entertainment industry, the advertising industry, etc. Note how the categories concerned do not necessarily have to be "industrial" in the normal sense of working with heavy machinery, etc.

The word *sector* is increasingly being used instead of *industry* in the above sense, and is probably to be preferred where its meaning is clear. But it is a space metaphor (like *area*), so make sure the meaning is clear in the context.

Consequent and consistent

These two words cause problems for many foreigners because several languages (for instance: Danish, Dutch, French, German) have a word which sounds like the first but means the second.

Consequent in English means something resulting from something else: e.g. *"the accident and the* **consequent** *trauma"* or *"the fire and the* **consequent** *damage"*. It is also possible to reverse this construction and say *"the trauma* **consequent to** *the accident"* or *"the damage* **consequent upon** *the fire"*. Note that both *consequent* and its adverbial form *consequently* strongly imply a causal or logical linkage. If you merely want to say that one thing happened after the other, you can use *subsequent* and *subsequently*.

Consistent, however, means that two things fit *logically* together or at least do not contradict each other: e.g. *"Her evidence was* **consistent with** *his guilt"*. This means, of course, that an effect can be *consistent with* a cause: e.g. *"the damage was* **consistent with** *there having been a fire"*. Two different stories about an event can be consistent (i.e. not contradict each other). And things can also be consistent with themselves: e.g. *"He told a* **consistent** *story"* – i.e. one that did not contradict itself.

Finally a thing (usually physical) can be *consistent*, meaning it has the same quality throughout: e.g. *"the mixture was consistent"* means it had the same properties throughout.

Please note this date in your diary …

KOMMUNIKATIONS- OG SPROGFORUM 2008

Thursday, 25 September, in "Ovnhallen", CBS **Copenhagen**

Information and booking:
http://www.kommunikationogsprog.dk/Forum/
Tel. 33 91 98 00 or e-mail:
forum2008@kommunikationogsprog.dk

See you there!

Comprise and consist of/in

In modern English the verb *consist* is usually followed by *in* when talking about uncountables and *of* when talking about countable things: e.g. *"Well-being* **consists in** *not being unwell"* and *"His performance* **consists of** *a series of anecdotes"* (= the passive, *"is made up of"*).

The verb *comprise* is more tricky. In older texts it is often seen playing the same role as *consist of*, while in modern English it is more usually used in the reverse sense, i.e. moving from the parts to the whole: e.g. *"A series of anecdotes* **comprise** *his performance"* (= the active, *"make up"*).

Tip: if you want to use *comprise*, use it in this modern sense: e.g. *"Women comprise 30% of the workforce"*.

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Each and every

These two words do not mean exactly the same. For one thing, *each* can be a pronoun, while *every* cannot: e.g. *"She gave **every** child some food. **Each** (of them) received a bowl of soup and a bread roll"*. Either word could have played the role of the adjective in the first sentence, but only *each* could be used in the second sentence, where it is a pronoun. The equivalent with *every* would have to be **every one** (two words). Note how the construction *"each of"* is used in front of plural nouns and pronouns; the equivalent construction with *every* would be *"**every one** of"*.

Secondly, both *each* and *every* imply groups of more than one, but to use *each*, the "group" need only be *two*, whereas to use *every*, the group must be *at least three*, otherwise we would say *both* (+ a plural noun) instead: e.g. *"She gave **both children** some food. **Each** (of them) received…"*.

The other difference is more subtle – a matter of focus. Usually, subject to the above provisos, wherever we use *each*, we could replace it with *every*. But the reverse is not the case. The focus with *each* is always on the individual, whereas the focus with *every* is on the group. Here is an example in which *every* cannot be replaced by *each*: *"The town has been flooded **every** year since 2004"*. In this sentence, the focus is clearly on the whole series of years, not the individual years.

One way of remembering this difference is to think of the words **everyone** (in one word) and **everything** (also in one word), which, despite their singular form, both have the sense of **all**.

More on *of*

Last month we looked at numbers and *of*, but the little word *of* can also be preceded but a word or figure indicating the *proportion* of something. Many non-native speakers (and, it must be said, Microsoft Word's spelling and grammar checker) find it difficult to work out what the real subject of the verb is in these cases, so let's look at the pattern.

Here are three sentences:

1. *All / Two thirds / Half / 30% / Some* of the **information was** destroyed.
2. *All / Two thirds / Half / 30% / Some* of the **city was** destroyed.
3. *All / Two thirds / Half / 30% / Some* of the **buildings were** destroyed.

The first sentence indicates the proportion of an uncountable noun, *information*, so the verb is singular. The second sentence indicates the proportion of a singular countable noun, *city*, so the verb is singular. The third sentence indicates the proportion of a plural noun, *buildings*, so the verb is plural.

Note that whether we have *one* third or *two* as the proportion makes no difference whatsoever. And the third sentence would take a plural in exactly the same way if the sentence started with *"A number / A few / A majority / A minority of the…"*, because the real subject is *"**buildings**"*.
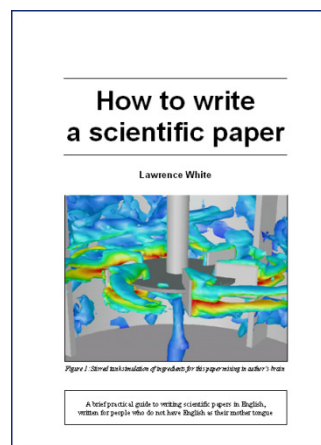
Do you write scientific papers?

"How to write a scientific paper" is an excellent guide – even for the experienced author of scientific articles and reports. It is easy to read and gives good advice about the structure of such papers, the writing process, and a number of the many linguistic traps that authors who do not have English as their mother tongue tend to fall into.

Kurt Lauridsen, MSc, PhD
Danish Decommissioning, Risø

Published by *English support*. Order it now from your local bookshop or direct from *www.englishsupport.dk*

Please turn over!

Questions & Answers

(Edited)

Etc., etc., etc.

> *Dear Lawrence*
>
> *Can you confirm that in British English there should always be a "," before etc.?*
>
> *What is the rule? - Thanks!*

Well, opinions vary on this, but I would, yes. The pattern, as I see it, is that the comma should be used before "and" when listing things of more than one word, because we tend to pause to make the meaning clear, and the comma marks that pause in speech.

Contrast: *I want visit Spain, Italy, Switzerland and Austria.*
 I spent yesterday playing golf, drinking beer, and thinking about the meaning of life.

The Latin abbreviation "etc." is short for "et cetera" ("and the rest"), and is always pronounced in full (two words), so the comma seems appropriate.

Note: US English tends to use more commas than British English, so many Americans would put a comma before "and" in my first sentence, too.

See *News & Tips* No. 8 for the basic patterns and remember that punctuation in English is to show how you should *read* the sentence. It has nothing to do with the grammatical structure of the sentence.
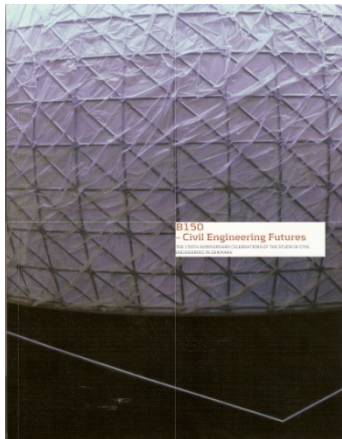
150 years of the study of Civil Engineering in Denmark

To celebrate their 150th anniversary, the Technical University of Denmark's Civil Engineering Department (DTU Byg) has published a truly beautiful illustrated book of interviews, articles and projects presented in English, the entire text of which we had the privilege of proofreading.

The book is called *B150 – Civil Engineering Futures*, and the editor tells that she did not receive even one single complaint from the many famous architects, engineers and other contributors about our corrections to their English…

I think we were both rather happy about that! ☺

Follow the *Sea Stallion* as it comes home…

We continue to translate all the news and other articles that are coming in as the Viking reconstruction makes its way home from Dublin to Roskilde in Denmark. In the picture below, you can see the ship in the Celtic Sea, south of Ireland on 7th July, when the going got really tough. The sail already has two reefs taken in…

Follow the news of this fantastic scientific voyage in English as it happens on the internet at www.havhingsten.dk.

More next month!

Best wishes
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Your natural language partner

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