News & Tips

from

English support

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Dear friends

Wow! This year has certainly had a flying start. As I write, the first quarter looks as if it is going to be our third best ever, only exceeded by the fourth quarters of the last two years. Since the first quarter is now usually our weakest in the year, that is very promising indeed. It is already clear that turnover will be more than double any previous first quarter. At a time when, as in many other countries, the Danish economy as a whole is shrinking, our continued growth signals real strength.

Freelancers – would you like to come and join us?

Growth means that we are going to need more space, so we are on the look-out for new offices. And there are a lot to choose between right now. The question that arises is: *How big should we think?* ☺

This is the idea. We rent some really nice office space (*not* open-plan), but more than we need, and invite translators, proofreaders and language teachers to come and rent a desk with us. We aim at a good mix of skills and languages, so that we all get the maximum out of the arrangement.

For just 2500 kr. a month, you get to work in the heart of Roskilde within easy walking distance of the station and in a beautiful building with excellent facilities, including a large ergonomic desk, fast internet connection, full-size and well-equipped kitchen, two rooms for teaching, and much more. And if you only want a desk *one* day in every week, you can rent it for 700 kr. a month.

You also get to work alongside people in the same business and we get colleagues just down the corridor we can give work to as we expand our business. It should be a *win-win* situation.

So we are looking for some 20 freelance partners who would like to work a little closer with us! Perhaps you are already a freelancer and would like to be able to continue with your own business, but under a larger marketing "umbrella". If you can also teach, that's a big plus. We are looking for native-speakers of major languages, who speak at least one other language and are prepared to deliver top quality work. We will not tie you down, but will try to tempt you to stay with us!

We pay better than the average bureau, because we are *not* a bureau, and if there are enough good people who want it, we can offer *really* good working conditions for your business and ours. Interested? Get in touch as soon as possible!

Grand Business Day in Roskilde – Tuesday 28th April 2009

Every year, Zealand Business Development and Roskilde Business Forum organise a free get-together for local business: *Store Erhvervsdag* or Grand Business Day. It's a B2B day with lots to see and hear: stands, workshops, talks, prize-giving for the year's best new businesses, and of course a lot of networking!

Let's meet at Roskilde's Grand Business Day!

English support will be there as usual with a stand. We will also be holding a workshop (also free) on how to double your website's Google-visibility with foreign languages. You might find that interesting! And there's a **10% discount offer** on your next job. Find out more on pages 3 and 5

Please turn over!

Just my own view...

Three languages for everyone?

Last month I argued against the idea of a law to "protect" Danish against the advance of English. Recently, both *Dansk Sprognævn* and DSSF (*Dansk Selskab for Fagsprog og Fagkommunikation*) promoted the use of some kind of law on language. And in both cases, the target was English.

As I argued last month, if any language is under threat from use of English as a *lingua franca*, it is English. After all, the most widely spoken language in the world is *bad English*.

So how about a law to protect Danish schoolchildren from English schoolbooks full of "danglish"? Or a law to force people who publish in English to use a native-speaker proofreader?

But no! Instead, we have people like Lone Dybkjær arguing for a scaled-down form of English for international use – *without all the culture*, as she put it! (Cf. *News & Tips* no. 48).

When I try to stop appalling abominations like *"professional bachelors"* or *"state-authorised translators"*, I am often told (usually by highly educated Danes, who ought to know better) that I must accept that *this is how we speak English here!*

So when people start talking about how *everyone* should learn *two* foreign languages, i.e. *"not just English"*, as Niels Davidsen-Nielsen, chairman of *Dansk Sprognævn*, puts it, I start feeling sorry for my German, Spanish and French colleagues… ☺

The European Union and multilingualism

Writing in the DSSF journal, "LSP & Professional Communication" (Vol. 8, No. 2), EU Commissioner **Leonard Orban** argues strongly for three languages for everyone:

"Young Europeans ought to have the option of being taught a large palette of languages and not just one lingua franca that creates as many problems as it solves".

This one sentence touches on all the elements of what is good and bad about the current debate on this subject!

1. The European Union is a political entity uniting European countries. But like them, it contains not *only* "Europeans". The EU has people *from all over the world*.

2. Yes, young people should have *"the **option** of learning a large palette of languages"*. I agree 100%! No obligation and no limits.

3. But then comes the sting in the tail: *"not **just** one lingua franca that creates as many problems as it solves"*.

Let's take them from the back: English does *not* "create problems"! The fact that English is understood and spoken by so many *solves* problems. What the Commissioner is thinking of are the problems of national pride, which, being unmentionable, remain unmentioned. ☺

The big plus is that – *unlike the editor of the journal he is writing in* – the Commissioner does *not* go down the road of compulsion. Excellent! And he sets no limits on the choice of languages. Excellent again! Bravo!

The plus side of globalisation

And this brings me to the use of the word "Europeans". The current slogan of the EU is *"Unity in diversity"*, but this is generally understood in terms of the cultures of the EU countries. Even universal values, like human rights and democracy, are often spoken of as *European* values.

To me, this is like shooting yourself in the foot! Globalisation is bringing more and more diversity to the melting pot of the EU, which needs to redefine itself along more universal lines. The last thing we need is some kind of *European* "nationalism".

One greatly positive thing about globalisation is the way it brings people with different cultures and languages together. This means that native speakers of all the major languages of the world are already present in all the countries of the European Union.

This is a resource these countries could use in business, science and education, but which is currently *chronically* underused – not least here in Denmark.

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Danes (and other people)

When the figures are given for how many people die on the roads in Denmark, have you noticed how, they are almost always given as the number of *Danes* who died? It's the same with all the statistics: the number of *Danes* out of work, the number of *Danes* with cervical cancer, and so on.

I have never heard of any reasonable excuse for this strange national habit, and I think it should be dropped – especially since the one place it is *not* used is in crime reporting. There, the national origin of the people in the statistics is almost always mentioned – even if they have been Danish citizens for two generations!

So whenever I see the misuse of *Dane* or *Danish* in this way, my red pen comes out! The usage might go unnoticed in Danish, but not when you write in English.

Don't get me wrong. It's perfectly OK to refer to the *Danish climate*, *Danish citizens*, the *Danish economy*, the *Danish tax system* or *Danish taxes*, for instance, because here *Danish* refers to Denmark as a political or geographical entity. But I actually don't like the use of the term *Danish taxpayers* because I pay taxes in Denmark too – and so do tens of thousands of other foreign citizens living and working in Denmark. We do not wish to be "disappeared" in this way! ☺

Here are some other examples (all taken from academic papers) of what I consider misuse:

The Danish population	Danish infants in day-care
The Danish labour force	Danish gynaecological cancer patients
Danish consumers	Danish energy consumption
Danish adolescents	The total Danish emission of GHGs

In each case, the writer was neither referring specifically to Danes, nor carefully excluding foreign citizens living in Denmark. *Tip:* Whenever you feel like writing *Danish* or *Dane*, ask yourself:

1) Is it really necessary or is it obvious from the context you are talking about Denmark?
2) Is it really true that you are referring to the political or geographical entity of Denmark?
3) Do you really mean to exclude people who are not Danish citizens?

Once it's brought to their notice, Danes are often astonished to realise how often they use these words. But then they sometimes ask: What is the alternative? Well, it's very easy: you write *"the total emission of GHGs in Denmark"*, *"people killed on the roads in Denmark"*, etc.

Please turn over!

From the workshop...

Bacteria, cafeteria and criteria

Did you spot the mistake in last month's newsletter? No one has actually mentioned it, but there is a howler I call the *bacteria-cafeteria-criteria mistake*!

Unlike the word *cafeteria*, which is singular, the word *bacteria* is a (Latin) plural. The singular form is *bacterium*. So the sentence, *"A disease is a particular type of illness caused by a bacteria or a virus"*, is a bit of a mess. Either the "a" should not be there or *bacteria* should be *bacterium*. (By the way, this is not the only problem with this sentence – see the correspondence on page 5).

Now it is true that probably half the English-speaking world wouldn't notice this mistake, because the singular form *bacterium* is hardly ever seen outside of scientific texts, but my toes curl when I think of how many times in my teaching I have warned researchers against making this blunder!

Note that the plural form for *virus* would be *vira*, which again is rare outside of scientific texts.

The word *criteria* is also a (Greek) plural in English and the singular form is *criterion*. So, *"two bacteria met in a cafeteria to discuss the various criteria for a really good infection"*. ☺

Did you know?

English support has **native-speaker** experts in translation and proofreading for legal, medical and other technical texts, including scientific papers (in English, Danish, Russian and Czech). We can translate or proofread legal contracts, pharmaceutical catalogues, medical records, engineering proposals, architectural descriptions – in short virtually any kind of text. And our capacity is enormous.

Nordic and Scandinavian

A great many Danish writers use the word *Nordic* where English would prefer *Scandinavian*.

In English, the word *Nordic* is a rather vague word used to describe the (blue-eyed, blond and long-headed) people traditionally supposed to inhabit northern Europe, from north-western Russia down to Holland and even beyond. It is not usually applied to modern nations or countries or geographical areas.

The Danish word, *nordisk* is commonly applied only to the countries of Scandinavia (including Finland) plus Iceland and the Faeroes. Sometimes Greenland is also included, although it is really part of the North American continent.

This usage corresponds most closely to that of the English word *Scandinavian*.

Town and City

Danish has one word here, and it is usually translated as *city*. This can give rise to smiles when tourists arrive in the "city" of Farum or Lejre.

In the British Isles, a *city* is traditionally a town with a royal charter, and usually a cathedral. So Roskilde and Ribe can legitimately call themselves *cities* in British English.

In the wider world, a city is a large town with *millions* rather than thousands of inhabitants.

So normally, with a few fairly obvious exceptions, the best word to use in Denmark is *town*.

Did you know?

English support can offer you **native-speaker** translation and proofreading help with not only *English*, but also *Bangla*, *Bulgarian, Chinese, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Farsi, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hindi, Hungarian, Icelandic, Italian, Japanese, Kurdish, Malay, Nepali, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Rumanian, Russian, Serbo-Croat, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish, Ukrainian* and *Urdu*.

And if YOU can translate from at least one foreign language, speak English or Danish, and are a native speaker of Arabic, Greek, Greenlandic, Swahili, Welsh, etc., we'd like to hear from you!

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Disease and *illness*

> *Dear Lawrence,*
>
> *I would like to comment on one of your sentences in News & Tips No. 51:*
> A *disease* is a particular type of *illness*, caused by a bacteria or a virus.
>
> *I fully agree that a disease is a particular type of illness, but it is not necessarily caused by infection. Let me share some examples with you to support my opinion:*
> > *cardiovascular disease*
> > *a heart attack is a disease*
>
> *Wikipedia is not always a good reference, but I prefer the definition I found there:*
> The term **disease** broadly refers to any abnormal condition that impairs normal function. Commonly, this term is used to refer specifically to **infectious diseases**, which are clinically evident diseases that result from the presence of pathogenic microbial agents … An infection that does not produce clinically evident impairment of normal functioning is not considered a disease. **Non-infectious diseases** are all other diseases, including most forms of cancer, heart disease, and genetic disease.
>
> *I feel that "illness" has a focus on the condition of being ill, while "disease" has a meaning that refers to medical phenomena as such (causes, aetiology, symptoms, etc.). "Disease" is more impersonal and objective, "illness" implies sympathy. Therefore, in medicine we prefer to use the term "disease".*
>
> *I would appreciate your comments on these arguments.*

You are quite right. My "definition" is not accurate enough. It also contains a grammatical mistake you were delicate enough not to mention! ☺ [*Bacteria* is the plural of a *bacterium*.]

In the field of medicine, it is clear that "disease" is used in most of the ways you mention (though not for a heart attack, I think) – and even in ordinary language, as with *cancer* and *heart disease*. *Genetic disease* is of course different, because there is no such thing as genetic disease (= disease in your genes), but there are diseases (of various kinds, e.g. heart disease, cancer) which may have a genetic cause.

I liked the distinction you drew between *illness* and *disease*: that *illness* focuses on the suffering patient and invites sympathy, while *disease* focuses on the medical condition (and perhaps how frightening it is for others around). I don't like the argument that *disease* sounds more impersonal and objective and is *therefore* to be preferred in medicine! *Scientific objectivity is not based on language and how you sound, but on the reproducibility of your results!* In that sense, pain and suffering are as *objective* as anything else in the world of human experience and knowledge, and sympathy is the basis for all human medicine.

But the Wikipedia definition, *"The term **disease** broadly refers to any abnormal condition that impairs normal function"*, simply won't do. A broken leg is such a condition, but it is neither a disease nor an illness. So it's not that easy!

Towards a better definition:

I think one thing is that both illnesses and diseases have to be distinguished from *injuries*, which are sudden events, usually followed by either a natural healing process or death.

Secondly, there is the *sympathy vs. threat* distinction my reader made. If I say I have an *illness*, most people will probably react with sympathy, whereas if I announce I have a *disease*, the first reaction of people around me might be to take a step back.

But there is another aspect. The word *illness* makes the problem sound temporary (I am either likely to recover even without major medical intervention, or any medical intervention has become irrelevant and my illness is *terminal*), whereas a *disease* is something which will not go away without medical treatment.

Maybe *that* is why doctors tend to make more use of the word *disease* than *illness*!

Please turn over!

From the workshop...

Municipality and *local authority*

The Danish word *kommune* is often translated as *municipality*. Again, this is directly comparable to the overuse of the word *city* (see page 4). A *municipality* is the local authority of a city or town. The Danish word, however, is used for country districts as well. So using the word *municipality* for *kommune* makes Denmark sound as if it is completely covered with urban areas!

In the English-speaking world there are many different words for the equivalent authorities, but there is one term that pretty much covers them all, and that is *local authority*. I recommend it as the general term.

You can, of course, talk in more specific terms about a town or city council where appropriate.

Lord Mayors and other British oddities

I realise that everything I have written about words like *Nordic*, *city*, *municipality* and so on is probably pretty much anathema to the established *that-is-how-we-speak-English-here* brigade, but there is more.

As I argued in *News & Tips* No. 50, you can't just take some special term that is used in Britain (or the US) and apply it to a similar institution in another country. My favourite is the *Chancellor of the Exchequer*, but so far as I know *no one* has ever applied that to a finance minister in another country! Nor would the Danish foreign minister ever be referred to in English as Denmark's *Secretary of State* (the US equivalent).

But Ritt Bjerregaard calls herself the "Lord Mayor of Copenhagen" in English. I have to say that this sounds very odd – an anatopism (the spatial equivalent of an anachronism). The *Lord Mayor of London* and the *Lord Mayor of Dublin* are titles with a peculiarly *British* history. I suggest she switches to *City Mayor*, which is in much more widespread usage.

Did you know?

Did you know that by far the cheapest, most effective and simplest way of *doubling your visibility on the Internet* is to have your website translated to English and/or other languages? *English support* is holding a workshop on this subject at **Roskilde's *Store Erhvervsdag* on 28th April 2009**, where we will tell you why it works and how to do it. Information on this business event at http://www.storeerhvervsdag.dk/dk.

Don't forget Grand Business Day in Roskilde!

One last word on the **Grand Business Day** in Roskilde on 28th April. I very much hope that many of you will come, especially those of you who live in and around the Greater Copenhagen area. You can find out more about it at http://www.storeerhvervsdag.dk/dk.

The guest speaker this year is **Sepp Piontek**, who will be talking about management, and there are lots of stands to visit and workshops to attend.

If you would like to come to the *English support* workshop, **please register for it** by sending us an e-mail. You can also use the website for this. It does not cost anything to register and you can just turn up on the day, but I need to be able to show that people *will* be coming. ☺

More exciting news and tips next month!

Best wishes

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