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News & Tips

from

English support

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Dear friends

Quite some time has gone by since my last newsletter! In August, we were preparing to open our new *Language Support Centre* in the middle of Roskilde. And more than 100 people came to our opening party when the City Mayor came and opened the Centre on 3rd September. But the small band of enthusiastic freelancers that took up the challenge was far too small, and it soon became clear that the Centre would not survive. It will finally close on 31st December.

So what went wrong?

The **LANGUAGE SUPPORT CENTRE** in Roskilde (anno 2009)   A detail over the entrance

The premises were beautiful, the location fantastic, the facilities good, and the price for sharing them extremely reasonable. Yet what seemed like the beginnings of a lot of interest *before* the summer had petered out to very little by the time we opened. Everybody thought the idea of a Centre for language freelancers was good (brilliant even), but only *five* people actually signed up.

We spent August getting everything ready to open in September – getting the furniture delivered and assembled, the internet and telephone system connected, and the alarm system installed – and the opening party was a big success. But with so few freelancers renting space, the financial problems were mounting up, and the dream was fast turning into a nightmare.

At this point, I went down with stress. Now, I don't know how many of you have experienced serious stress, but amongst other things you find you cannot focus, you cannot sleep, and you cannot work. You can also spend enormous amounts of time completely paralysed and shaking. I had to cancel my extensive schedule of teaching, and I could neither translate nor proofread. This obviously deepened our liquidity crisis considerably.

I cannot and do not blame the worldwide financial crisis; the situation was entirely due to my own miscalculation. But obviously the economic conjuncture was not one favourable for borrowing more money, and my wife and I had already put all our available cash into the project.

So we were going to have to close down the *Language Support Centre* just as it had got started…

Please turn over!

Closure – and rebirth

Were there any other options to closure?

In retrospect, there are a number of things we could have done differently, but calculations show that any improved cash flow that we might have achieved with the benefit of hindsight would still have been massively outweighed by our failure to attract enough freelancers to rent space.

The target was about 20, but ten would have been enough to keep me sane in the crucial start-up period. As it was, there were just five of us, plus one who opted for one day a week. And when I went down with stress, there was no income to speak of from *English support* to tide us over.

Language support ApS had taken out a loan of DKK 500,000 to cover start-up costs. If we had borrowed a million from the beginning, we might have survived while we got up to target – but, on the other hand, we might not. And then the hole in my pocket would have been even bigger!

The real miscalculation took place much earlier. I was so convinced that the project would create an ideal framework for language freelancers, that I didn't wait until I had at least ten signatures on paper before signing the long-term lease. This was what is sometimes called a "calculated risk" – there seemed such a lot of interest in the project – but it proved a very expensive *mis*calculation.

The other miscalculation was more excusable: I hadn't reckoned on being knocked out by stress.

So what now?

Well, we lost a lot of money. It's expensive to get out of a long-term lease before time. But the fact that we reacted so quickly means the company will survive. And our creditors will be paid.

The fast reaction was in no small measure due to help from *Early Warning*, a government-backed voluntary organisation that helps companies find a way through problems like ours. Once I could see a way forward, my health recovered reasonably quickly.

Link:
www.earlywarning.dk

In fact, I've almost entirely stopped shaking now!

So the next thing is to get back on track. I don't want to ditch the idea of the *Language Support Centre*, but "Version 2.0" will be constructed in cyberspace, where the rents are lower. ☺

Your ideas welcome!

One of the central aims of the *Language Support Centre* project was to make our considerable network of native-speaker freelance partners more visible. *Native speakers of foreign languages are an under-used resource in Denmark!*

Of course, it is not enough to be a native speaker. But the process of self-selection means that the percentage of foreigners living in Denmark with good language skills is much higher than for the native population. People who are prepared to move to live and work in a foreign country are often people who are also good at languages.

But we need top-quality people. We have a system of product quality assurance, and our aim is quality that is *second to none* in all the (currently 35) languages we offer. And we need people with all sorts of skills connected with language and communication, including teachers and interpreters as well as translators, editors and specialist technical writers of all kinds.
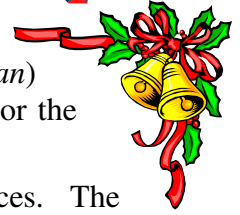
So if you have ideas or want to become one of our freelance partners, get in touch! Further information at: www.englishsupport.dk.

(2)

Proofreading • Copy editing • Translation • Teaching

A or *an* and *one*

Quite a lot of European languages use the same word for the indefinite article (*a* or *an*) as for the number *one*. English does not. So how can you tell when to use one or the other?

The trick is to listen to the stress in the spoken language. All European languages use stress, and numbers are always stressed in a spoken sentence, while the indefinite article is not.

If your native language does not have an indefinite article, you will automatically use the number in the right place – though you might have problems with the indefinite article in English.

Here is a pair of contrasting sentences. The first one is a case where English uses an indefinite article and most other European languages do not:

> *She is a professor*
> *She is just one professor out of many in her field*

And here is a sentence where the difference might not be so clear:

> *One argument for the point I want to make is …*

If I write *an* here, it sounds weak because the word would not be stressed. So *a* or *an* is not = *one*.

Too meaning *also*

The word *too* is an adverb which is used in two ways in English: it can mean the same as *also* (as in: *"I want one, too!"*), and it can be an intensifier (as in: *"The box was **too** heavy"*). In both cases it has some rather unusual aspects.

When *too* means *also*, its position in a sentence is unusual. While *also* is one of a small group of adverbs that always go in the middle of the sentence, *too* usually goes at the end of the sentence:

> *Mary also caught the train.*
> *Mary caught the train, too.*

Both these sentences are strictly speaking ambiguous. Did Mary catch something else (e.g. the plane) as well as the train, or was there someone else who caught to train (e.g. John) as well as Mary? Usually the meaning is clear from the context, because either the plane or John would have been mentioned just before this sentence. But where the meaning would still be unclear, we can place *too* immediately *after* the word, phrase or clause it applies to:

> *Mary, too, caught the train.*
> *The train, too, was caught by Mary.*
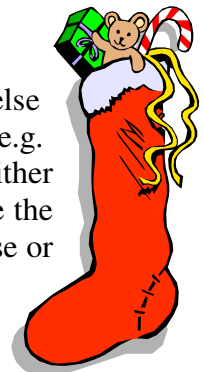
This is admittedly a little awkward, but it can be done. Note that US English sometimes uses *also* where British English always uses *too*.

Too as an intensifier

Intensifiers go immediately *in front of* the word they intensify: **too** fast, **very** well, **most** kind, and so on. But while *"a **very** fast car"* or *"a **most** kind thought"* are complete ideas, if a box is *"**too** heavy"*, it is too heavy *for someone or something to do something with it*: e.g. *"too heavy **to lift**"*.

So something odd happens when we use articles with *too* + an adjective. We cannot say *"a too heavy box"* or *"the too heavy box"*. Instead, we must complete the meaning by adding what it was too heavy *for*: *"a box too heavy (to lift)"*. The change in word order is due to the implied relative clause: *"a box (which was) too heavy to lift"*. With the definite article, this relative clause (or at least a verb) is almost always required: *"the box (which) was too heavy to lift"*.

Did you know?

English support has special expertise in medical, juridical, financial and many other areas of technical writing, from architecture to nanotechnology and aircraft engineering

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Please turn over!

From the workshop...

Assure, ensure and secure

To be fair, there is often a certain amount of overlap in modern usage between these words. But non-native speakers should probably take care to use them on the basis of their basic meanings.

The verb *assure* always has a *person* as its object. Its most common usage is to try to convince someone of something or to guarantee that something is or was or will be the case. So I might assure the police that I was not driving too fast. Note that using the verb *assure* does not imply that they were convinced.

In British English, the verb *assure* and the noun *assurance* are also often used in connection with personal life insurance – again, the object is a person.

The verb *ensure* means the same as to *make sure*. So if I *ensure* that things will be ready on time, I *make sure* they are. Note that in US English, this meaning is often written *insure*, which in British English is only used in connection with insurance policies.

The verb *secure* means to take or maintain possession of something (or someone) and/or make it free from danger or criminal damage. Cf. the contrast and overlap between *security* and *safety* examined in *News & Tips* no. 47.

Back-up you don't have to think about

Give yourself a treat!

One thing everybody who uses a computer has to worry about is what happens if (when) the thing stops working.

You know, one day the screen is just black and you can't recover your hard disk. So you need to take back-ups, right? *But do you?* And if you do, how often? *And is it enough?*

The scope for sleepless nights is enormous, especially if you are self-employed and all your data is on one machine. *So take back-ups!*

And the neat way to do it is over the Internet.

There are several such systems. I use one called **Carbonite**. It starts automatically and works quietly and continuously in the background, backing up your changed data. Everything is encrypted before it leaves your machine and is therefore safe in more than one way.

And, no, the system does not slow down your computer or your internet connection. Nor does it cost the earth …

How to write a scientific paper

Lawrence White
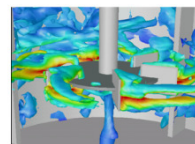
Figure 1: Stirred tank simulation of ingredients for this paper existing in author's brain

A brief practical guide to writing scientific papers in English, written for people who do not have English as their mother tongue

You can try it out here! If you use this link to download a free 15-day trial subscription, and you get an extra free month of service when you buy:
http://www.carbonite.com/raf/signup.aspx?RAFUserUID=213288&a=0

We will hit the ground running next month!

To conclude this very late issue, let me just say that, despite the catastrophe of the last six months, we are <u>back</u> and will soon be up to full steam again!

*Best wishes to all our readers
for Christmas and the New Year!*

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