

Dear friends

## Vision for 2005

So here we are at the start of a new year. Time to look back; time to look forward.

In 2004 *English support* went from little more than an idea to a full-time professional service employing just one consultant. High demand in October led to advertising for freelance help from other expatriates. Capacity was raised, but demand levelled off up to the year end.

At one point it had seemed sales in the final quarter might be more than triple those of the third quarter. But in fact, some jobs failed to materialise (people doing their Xmas shopping perhaps), so the year ended with sales 'only' 2½ times up on the previous quarter. I'll get over it!

So what now? Obviously such spectacular growth cannot go on for ever, and consolidation must be the order of the day. But there seems to be a considerable need for this service, so the vision for 2005 is to try and continue to grow (albeit more modestly) and see if the basis can be laid for something more than a one-man show with freelance support.

The mission is simple: *to provide the best possible all-round help to Danish and other companies and individuals who wish to produce written material in good English.* That means promoting the proofreading service both in Denmark and abroad, but it also means extending and deepening the service itself – with teaching, the hotline service (launched this year), and translation.

The latter in particular depends on the building of *a network of collaborating partners* among translators both in Denmark and abroad. Already a score of freelancers – translators, layout specialists, and of course proofreaders, many with other specialist skills – have entered into a collaboration agreement with *English support*.

Gradually the resources are being gathered that will make it possible to offer *one-stop shopping* to companies that want to start marketing abroad: not only in English, but also other languages.

By the end of this year, the aim must be that this vision is beginning to take shape in reality, with freelance agents in several target countries, the web site in the languages of those countries and, most important of all, a broad customer base both in Denmark and abroad.

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# From the workshop...

## Are you 'state-authorised'?

Many translators, accountants, lawyers, etc. describe themselves as 'state-authorised'. This does not sound so good in English, not because there is anything wrong with the grammar, but because the state is perceived in a different way in the Anglo-Saxon world. 'State-authorised' has a ring of *political control* about it (in English).

**Recommendation:** Leave the 'state' out of it and use the more neutral sounding 'certified'.

## -ise or -ize?

Another question that always comes up is: should it be 'authorised' or 'authorized'? US English uses the older **-ize** forms, while modern British English tends (*pace* Inspector Morse!) to prefer the **-ise** endings. This is, however, a relatively modern phenomenon, so the **-ize** forms will be found in many older (or more formal) texts.

## Whom?

While we are talking about modern English, it is worth mentioning 'whom'. This is hardly ever seen nowadays, let alone heard, except immediately after a preposition:

*The people for whom he worked thought he was good at his job.*

And even this construction sounds a little stiff and formal today. Most people would say or write:

*The people [who] he worked for thought he was good at his job.*

## To whom it may concern:

It follows, of course, that the phrase 'To whom it may concern' (a favourite in Denmark) is rarely used except in very formal documents (like your last will and testament). It is not something you want to put on a modern CV – unless, of course, you want to give the impression that you might already be deceased! However, the phrase *is* more widely used in US English.

### Before ...

*Thank you for your Newsletter and inspiration to try something new in my work! I usually only translate into Danish, but I have just taken a job that I normally wouldn't – because I remembered **English support!***  
– MH

### ... and after:

*I am very, very happy with the result – and going through your proofing refreshed my memory on a lot of points, too.*  
– MH

## Next issue

One major problem area for non-native speakers (and writers) of English is getting the verb right. In the February issue of *News & Tips*, we will take a look at some tricky questions of singular and plural – an area that gives rise to some of the most common mistakes of all – even among the very best translators.

Best wishes  
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www. **English support** .dk

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Dear friends

I suppose the top news story this time must be that the web site has gone (a little bit) multilingual. Not surprisingly, the first target language was Danish. After all, Denmark is where the bulk of my customers are. Some of them are probably already poring over the Danish pages right now to find all the mistakes – which is good, because then I can put them right!

The second target language is Hungarian. This is, of course, a bit of an experiment, but small companies like *English support* must take advantage of the breaks they get. With an agent in Budapest and a translator in Denmark, we are in a position to provide a good service for both Danish and Hungarian companies who want to do business with each other.

French and German versions of the web site are next on the agenda, and after that... – well, we'll have to see. ☺

### **Key strokes and Quality**

One of the hardest things about this business is getting the price right – by which I mean finding a price that you can live on and that the customer is willing to pay. Years of competing on price have left their mark on the translation business. So while some people seem to quote 'standard rates' that are way above anything I have ever heard a customer was willing to pay, others report working for such low rates that I start to feel bad about my own proofreading rates!

But price should not be the decisive factor. After all, *what's the good of a bad translation?* With the prospect of increasing competition from translators in other countries, the time is ripe to put the focus back where it ought to have been all along – on quality. Translators and proofreaders are not bits of machinery, but creative wordsmiths. Key-stroke price quotes, high or low, simply send the wrong signal to the market.

### **Hotline service: No charge for registration**

As stated in *News & Tips* no.1, the registration fee was aimed at putting off 'time-wasters'. But it seems to have put off quite a lot of other people too! ☺ So this fee has been dropped (and credit notes have been issued to those who have already paid).

But you still have to register, because: 1) We need your invoicing details, and 2) you need an identifying code only known to you – to make sure you only get invoiced at the end of the quarter for *your* use of the hotline.

I hope this change will make the *hotline service* more attractive for everybody.

# From the workshop...

## Third person singular, present and correct!

Leaving aside the strange case of the verb 'to be', the only place in the English language where you have to worry about making the verb 'agree' with the subject is where the present tense is used. This fact may explain why even highly educated non-native speakers have such difficulty just here – they are simply focussed on other problems.

A lot of the mistakes can be quickly found by putting the text through the spelling and grammar checker in your word-processing program. But there is no substitute for your own attention to this particular piece of 'elementary' grammar.

And, of course, to make the verb 'agree' with the subject, you have first to decide whether the subject is singular or plural. With some subjects, that is not always obvious...

## Meaning versus 'grammar'!

In *News & Tips* No.1, the point was made that whether the subject is singular or plural in English is often a matter of *meaning* rather than 'grammar'. The examples given were: *A number of cases of typhus were reported* and *The number of cases was 65*. In the first sentence, the focus is on the *cases*. There were several, more than one, at any rate. In the second sentence the focus is on the (word) *number*, which is clearly singular.

But it does not matter how many people you may have in mind, *anybody*, *everybody*, *nobody* and *somebody*, and *anyone*, *everyone*, *no one* and *someone* are always singular – the rare triumph of 'grammar' over meaning! And remember that constructions like *Everyone is here* are to be preferred over *All are here* – which sounds extremely stiff in English.

## Plural, please!

Then there are cases where the noun is always plural: *Clothes*, the *police*, and *people* (used as the usual plural for *person*). And 'pair'-words like *scissors*, *binoculars*, *pliers*, *tweezers* and *trousers* are plural unless preceded by *a pair of*. Contrast these two sentences: *There is a pair of scissors on the table* and *The scissors are on the table*.

## Uncountable problems!

And the many *uncountables* in English cause no end of difficulties: *advice*, *bread*, *furniture*, *information*, *money*, *news*, *progress*, *travel*, *weather*. These are all singular nouns in English, and none of them can be preceded by the indefinite article (*a/an*) – a fact that often takes non-native speakers by surprise!

## Group nouns

A large number of nouns that refer to groups of people, like *committee*, *government*, *staff*, and *team*, can be either singular or plural, depending on whether we are thinking of the group as a single (impersonal) unit or as the people who make it up. For example: *The committee meets every Tuesday*, but *The committee have a beer after their meetings*. [Note: This latter usage is less common in US English].

*More on this subject next month!*

Best wishes

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Dear friends

Well, now the web site is in Danish, French, German and Hungarian as well as English, and that will have to do for the time being. I intend to take a short break from web site development and concentrate on expanding sales, which this quarter have not lived up to expectations. *Whatever happened to that economic upturn?! ☺*

### Getting the verb to agree with the subject!

Last month we looked at some of the more common problem areas, including nouns that are always plural, uncountables and group nouns. The problem with all these is, of course, that non-native speakers of English can easily forget which words fall in which categories, especially when the usage is different in the native tongue.

But this month we look at some other, perhaps even trickier problems...

### Keep your eye on the ball

Sometimes all that is required is to make sure you remember what the actual subject of the verb was. In a sentence like: *They were people whose sense of truth, justice, and social solidarity was very pronounced*, it is easy to lose sight of the singular subject (*sense*) of the second verb, but the rule is straightforward.

### Two favourites that cause havoc!

Singular subjects + (*together*) *with* or *as well as* remain singular: *Mavis Brown, together with her two friends, was arrested by the police*, while if we use *and* in the same sentence, the verb has to be plural: *Mavis Brown and her two friends were arrested by the police*.

### Where is the focus?

Subjects like *bed and breakfast* and *fish and chips* may be treated as singular or plural depending on where the focus is: *Fish and chips is a nourishing meal*, but *Fish and chips make a nourishing meal*. In the first sentence the focus is on the whole meal; in the second on its constituent parts.

### The nearest subject...

If the subject of the verb is one of two alternatives, one singular, the other plural, the verb agrees with the nearest subject: *Neither the soldiers nor the hurricane has destroyed your house*, and *Neither the hurricane nor the soldiers have destroyed your house*.

The same rule applies to sentences with *not only..., but also...*, e.g. *Not only his subordinates, but also the manager is involved*, and *Not only the manager, but also his subordinates are involved*.

# From the workshop...

## Plural looking, but singular in fact

The word *news* is the most prominent example of this type of noun, but all the words that end in *-ics*, like *aerobics*, *athletics*, *economics*, *mathematics*, *physics*, *politics*, etc., are uncountables and therefore singular in modern English. An exception here is *ethics*, which can also be the plural form of the countable noun *ethic*.

The names of countries and cities which are plural in origin are also always treated as singular in modern English: *Athens*, *Buenos Aires*, *Los Angeles*, the *Netherlands*, the *United States*, etc. 'These *United States*', an expression we hear on some formal occasions, is an earlier usage.

## Group nouns again

As noted last month, nouns that refer to groups of people, like *staff*, can be either singular or plural depending on whether the focus is on the group as a single impersonal unit or on the people in it: *Our staff is large* refers not to the size of the individuals, but the group as a whole. Contrast: *Our staff get a pay rise every year*.

We can also refer to the *composition* of a group noun (considered as a single impersonal unit): *the composition of our staff...*, whereas we cannot talk about the *composition of our employees...* That would begin to sound like their chemical composition!

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## Feedback

Usually this page is loosely based on various problems found in English material that has passed through the *English support* 'workshop', but this month I also received a couple of nice corrections myself from a certified translator. These I would like to pass on.

The first relates to the modern *windmill* industry, which in English always refers to its machines as *wind turbines*. A *turbine* is any machine in which the kinetic energy of a moving fluid (liquid or gas) is converted into mechanical energy by causing a bladed rotor to rotate, so the windmills of old were also 'turbines', but in practice this modern word is only used of modern machines.

The second is the use (or rather lack of it) of the word *ecological*. The word *is* used (of food, farms, construction methods and materials, etc.), but as the translator pointed out, the word *organic* is much more widespread and commonly used as a substitute for *ecological*. This may not be logical (after all, strictly speaking all food is organic, and all farms too), but language is driven by usage, not logic. So in most non-scientific texts at least, the word *organic* is probably the right choice, instead of *ecological*. The usage stems from the type of fertiliser used in farm production: organic or otherwise.

If YOU have any language points you would like discussed in this newsletter, please get in touch!

Best wishes

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Dear friends

After sailing through the doldrums of the first quarter this year, I am happy to say sales are at last beginning to pick up. However, capacity far outstrips demand, so perhaps it is time to take a leaf out of the sales rhetoric of the supermarket: *Special offer! Top quality proofreading, copy-editing and translation work. While stocks last! Rush your work to English support NOW!* ☺

### A perennial problem: simple or continuous?

Non-native speakers of English often have a lot of trouble deciding which form of the verb to use. This month we are going to take quick look at the contrasting usage of the simple and continuous (or progressive) forms of the verb: when do you say *I do* and when do you say *I am doing*?

### The basic contrast

Space only allows us to make a few basic points on this rather large topic of English grammar, but the simple forms are used for general fact statements, while the continuous forms are used for activity extended over time and taking place at a specific time (e.g. now):

Simple: ***Do you speak Danish? I do not speak Hungarian. The sun rises in the East.***

Continuous: ***I am writing my newsletter (right now). You are reading it. The sun is shining.***

Note that the use of continuous form focuses on the fact that the activity is *extended over a period of time*, something the subject can be *in the process* of doing at the particular time. It is not used where the meaning of the verb is static: ***Do you believe her? He does not know where to look.***

Where the focus is not on the *extended-in-time* nature of the activity, we usually use the simple form. Contrast a typical way of starting a letter: ***I am writing ...***, with the verbs that might be used to introduce statements in it: ***We advise, apologise, recommend, suggest***, etc.

### Three situations where the continuous form is used:

1. Activity going on at a specific point in time: ***I am writing my newsletter (right now).***
2. Activity of a temporary nature: ***I am staying at the Hilton (at the moment).***
3. Future actions which have already (now) been decided upon: ***I am teaching next week.***

Note that the same forms can be used in the past tense: ***I was writing my newsletter (right then), I was staying at the Hilton (during that period), and I was teaching next week, but now I can't.***

No one could claim that the above rules are comprehensive, but *limiting* your use of the continuous forms to these three cases will cover most situations met in business contexts.

They also have the advantage of being relatively simple to remember.

# From the workshop...

## Wordy phrases

There are a lot of words and phrases that many non-native speakers seem to like and therefore use too much: *regarding, concerning, according to, in accordance with, in order to* – to name but a few. There is nothing wrong with any of them, but in the context some shorter way of expressing the same idea often can (and should) be used.

Danish translators sometimes say that a text expands some 5%, 10%, even 15% when translated into English. Hmm! That's why you need a good native-speaker proofreader and copy-editor! Danish *is* a very compact language, but so (on a good day) is English! Texts vary, of course, but good English should not fill very much more than Danish and sometimes less. The word count will usually be higher though.

## Do you 'solve tasks'?

You cannot 'solve a task' in English. You can solve a *problem* and you can carry out a *task*. Often the phrase wanted will be one of the following, depending on the context:

*solve a problem*  
*carry out a task or some kind of work*  
*do a job (or a piece of work)*  
*do an exercise (school)*

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## Person, persons and people

The usual plural word for *person* is *people*. The plural form, *persons*, is seldom used outside of official documents, police descriptions of crimes committed by 'a person or persons unknown', and so on. So if you have more than one *person*, the best choice is usually *people*. Use *persons* only in more formal contexts.

## Youth, youths and young people

Non-native speakers of English also tend to use the words *youth* and *youths* too much. The word *youth* is used adjectivally (e.g. *youth club, youth hostel*), but very few modern English speakers would say 'He was a youth'. Instead they would say 'He was a young man'. The words *youth* and *youths* also associate more to young men than to young women. So here the recommendation is to use *young person* and *young people*. Tip: Avoid *the young ones* like the plague!

## Feedback

If YOU have any language points you would like discussed in this newsletter, please get in touch!

Best wishes

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Dear friends

*English support* will be holding a little “seminar” at Business House in Roskilde on Thursday 26 May under the title: *Do you speak “danglish”?* Those of you for whom it is not too far to come would be most welcome. The seminar is FREE for customers, associates, collaborating partners, and just about anybody else vaguely or potentially connected with *English support* (see below).

### A question of word order

Two or three translators have asked me recently for advice on word order in English. Their problem is with adverbials. EV wrote: “I think it’s very difficult to work out where to put **also** and **soon** in a sentence, especially if they are both to go in the same sentence”, while AR and KG wanted more general guidance on word order with adverbials.

This is a very complex question and there is no way I could do justice to it in half a page – not even if I limited myself to **also** and **soon**. So I have decided to prepare a short grammar sheet on this issue, which I hope to have ready soon for those who are interested.

In the meantime, a lot of mistakes could be avoided if the following three rules are followed:

1. Adverbials should never come between a verb and its object (though this can happen if the object is another clause: *He said **on Saturday** that he would come today*).
2. Longer adverbials (two or more words) should be placed either *before the subject* or *after the verb and its object (if any)*. They should *not* normally come in the middle of the *subject-verb-object* group of a clause.
3. Since English likes to get to the verb as soon as possible, starting a clause with an adverbial gives it emphasis and you should never have more than one in this position. Longer adverbials usually come at the end of the clause (i.e. after any object of the verb):  
*He met her **at the café every day***.

Only short (one-word) adverbials can go in the middle of the *subject-verb-object* group, and the word **also** is one of a small group of adverbials that *always* go in this middle position (though in US English it can also go right at the end of the sentence, like *too* in British English).

The problem, of course, is to define exactly where the “middle” of the *subject-verb-object* group is! That requires more space. As do all the exceptions and special cases, typical of English.

Most adverbials of time cannot go in the middle, but **soon** is one of a small group of exceptions to this rule. So both **soon** and **also** can be present in the middle at the same time, in which case their sequence could express a subtle difference of meaning depending on whether the **also** refers to **soon** as well as the verb (*He will **also soon** be here* – i.e. neither one of two people is here yet) or just the verb (*He will **soon also** be here* – one person is present, the other expected soon).

# From the workshop...

## Looking forward to ...

A very common mistake is to write something like: *I look forward to **hear** from you.* This is just plain wrong. The correct usage is: *I look forward to **hearing** from you.* This is because the word “to” here is a preposition and not the “to” in the infinitive form: *to hear.* Contrast: *I hope **to hear** from you soon.* After prepositions, the gerund (*ING*-form) is used: *After **hearing** this, he left.*

## Customers and costumers

These two words are often confused. *Word*'s spelling checker will not catch the mistake, and your *customers* will end up wondering why you call them *costumers*! (A *costumer* works in a theatre, supplying actors with costumes).

## The below-mentioned form

The usual way of referring to a form (or anything else) below the text is to say *the form below.* If you like, the words *this text* are understood (i.e. not stated). The word *above* can be used in the same way (e.g. *See the graph above*), but here there is another usage which is perhaps more common. It comes from business letters and takes the form of referring to *the above* (something). This is short for *the above-mentioned*, but that is very formal nowadays. So the most common usage is: *The above X* and *The X below.*

## I will revert if I need your help ...

Another phrase often seen in e-mails is the above misuse of the verb *revert.* While it is true that *to revert to* something (a topic, a religion, childhood, etc.) does mean *to get back to* in a certain sense, but that does *not* include the informal, modern expression: *I will get back to you.* That is what is meant here and should have been used. *Tip:* Keep it simple!

**English support invites you to a seminar...**

### ***Do you speak “danglish”?***

Globalisation means that more and more business is conducted in English. Not only business letters, but marketing materials, including web pages, are produced in English. But when we write in a foreign language, it is all too easy to be influenced by our mother tongue. Come and hear Lawrence White on where Danes (and others) often go wrong in English, how to do better, and where to go for help – *no prizes for guessing that one!* Lots of good tips to take home.

**Time:** 3 – 5 pm, Thursday, 26<sup>th</sup> May 2005.

**Place:** Business House, Roskilde

Please note: This seminar is FREE for all business associates of Business House, members of Roskilde Business Associations – and all you lucky people who are on the *English support* mailing list. *But space is limited, so if you want to come, please let us know.* You can register on [www.BusinessHouse.dk](http://www.BusinessHouse.dk) or contact Business House on 70 26 89 10.

Look forward to seeing you!

Best wishes

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Dear friends

As most of you will know, the little “seminar” [*Do you speak “danglish”?*] planned for 26 May had to be postponed owing to illness. The plan now is to hold it in September. So if you would like to come and you already know now that you cannot be there on some particular date(s) in weeks 35-39, please let me know as soon as possible. Final date next issue.

## Punctuation

Punctuation in English is used to show how the written word should be spoken. It is not there to show the *grammar* structure of the sentence, but its *meaning* – as expressed in slight pauses and shifts in tone when the words are read aloud. These slight pauses, please note, are not primarily to allow the speaker to breathe. Speakers tend to breathe whenever they need to, irrespective of the presence or absence of commas in a sentence. ☺

Publishing houses often have very complete sets of rules for English punctuation, but for most purposes a few simple ideas suffice. And the first rule is: *forget the rules you learned in school for your own language*. They do not apply in English.

**Commas.** We use commas to indicate short meaningful pauses or shifts in tone. The latter might apply to a word, phrase or clause which is *parenthetical* in nature, i.e. inserted to give *extra information*. Short meaningful pauses usually occur as a result of the *phrasing* of a sentence, or in *lists* of items.

So listen to the way you would *say* the sentence (in a natural way) so you can *hear* where the commas should come. If there is a short pause or shift in tone, you probably need a comma. But there is no comma in English if there is no pause or shift in tone. If in doubt, leave it out – *but try not to be in doubt all the time!* ☺

For example: never put commas round *identifying* relative clauses (e.g. *People who live in glass houses should not throw stones*), but

always put commas round relative clauses that are *parenthetical* (e.g. *My friend Mary, who lives in a glass house, might be ill-advised to start throwing stones around*).

**Semicolons and colons.** Where a meaningful pause within a sentence is of longer duration, you may need a semi-colon or even a colon. One typical use is where two main clauses are used in the same sentence without a connecting word (like *and*, *or*, *because*, etc.).

**Full stops.** Sentences end with a full stop (or a question mark or an exclamation mark). Because the pause at the end of a sentence is longer, it is often considered good practice to use *two spaces* after a full stop. Please note: this is not done where a full stop is used to mark an abbreviation (like e.g., *approx.*, and *etc.*) in the middle of a sentence. Here only one space is used before the next word.

Note: If you want two spaces after full stops on your *web* pages, you will need to add the HTML code `&nbsp;`; (followed by a space) immediately after each full stop.

# From the workshop...

## Translating numbers and money

Most countries on the continent of Europe use a full stop to separate the thousands and a comma to show where the decimals begin. But Britain, North America, and most of the rest of the world use a decimal point, with commas being used to separate the thousands. *When translating text that contains numbers, it is important to remember to 'translate' this convention, too.*

With regard to the commas, this convention follows the punctuation rules mentioned above: 7,654,321 = “seven million, six hundred and fifty-four thousand, three hundred and twenty-one”. The phrasing and pauses are very clear when the number is read aloud. Note that when stating a number, the plural forms of the words *hundred*, *thousand* or *million* are not used, e.g. *The Sun is millions of miles away. How far? It's about 93 million miles away.*

In the case of money, the decimal point is *written*, but never *said*: £1.35 = “one pound thirty-five”.

## A question from a reader

I always struggle with the Danish phrases “i videst muligt omfang” and “i stigende grad”. They always sound non-native when I translate into British English. Will you look at it? – AV

I would have thought that “as much (or far) as possible” and “more and more” (or “increasingly”) would probably cover at least a great many cases – LW

## On being timely ...

Quite a lot of web sites promise their customers “timely” delivery of the services on offer. Now “timely” certainly does have to do with time, but not in the precise sense usually meant. The word “timely” is used of events that occur opportunely: *The inheritance from Aunt Agatha was timely; I had just been made redundant.* But what most companies wish to express is not some happy coincidence like this, but that their deliveries are “punctual” or that they deliver “on time”.

### *English support invites you to a seminar...*

## *Do you speak “danglish”?*

This seminar (postponed from 26<sup>th</sup> May) will now be held in September. The date will be fixed before the end of this month. So if you want to come, but already know now that you cannot be there on some particular date(s) in weeks 35-39, please let me know before 30<sup>th</sup> June.

The actual date and time will be announced in the next issue of *News & Tips* (due 3<sup>rd</sup> July).

## Physician, heal thyself!

BA points out that the April issue contained a nice bit of “danglish” by none other than yours truly. I wrote ‘good English should not **fill** very much more than Danish’, which should have been ‘good English should not **take up** very much more **space** than Danish’. *Sorry about that!* It really is a *very* contagious infection is my only excuse ...

Best wishes

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Dear friends

We have a new date for our little “seminar” [*Do you speak “danglish”?*]. It has now been fixed for **Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> September**. My thanks to all of you who helped choose the date by telling me when you could/could not come! If there is one thing I have learned from this little exercise, it is that there are a lot of people out there who see this newsletter, but *who are not on my mailing list!*

**English support invites you to a seminar...**

### ***Do you speak “danglish”?***

Globalisation means that more and more business is conducted in English. Not only business letters, but marketing materials, including web pages, are produced in English. But when we write in a foreign language, it is all too easy to be influenced by our mother tongue. Come and hear Lawrence White on where Danes (and others) often go wrong in English, how to do better, and where to go for help – *no prizes for guessing that one!* Lots of good tips to take home.

**TIME: 3 – 5 pm, Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> September 2005. PLACE: Business House, Roskilde**

Please note: This seminar is FREE for all business associates of Business House, members of Roskilde Business Associations – and all you lucky people who are on the *English support* mailing list. Everybody else gets to pay DKK 350.00 + VAT – so you see, it really *does* pay to be on the mailing list! *But space is limited, so if you want to come, please let us know.*

You must register for the seminar on [www.BusinessHouse.dk](http://www.BusinessHouse.dk).

## **Punctuation**

Last month we looked at how punctuation in English is used to show the way the written word should be *spoken*. But there are a couple of other things that often go wrong:

**Capital letters.** Unlike most other European languages, we use capital letters for the *names* of the days of the week, months of the year, and special days and times of year (e.g. *Easter, New Year's Eve*). We also use them for *titles* (e.g. *Mr, Mrs, Sir, Buddha, Christ*) including *job titles* (e.g. *Managing Director*). And any word *derived* from a proper noun (or title) also has a capital letter (e.g. *Italian, Londoner, Marxist, Buddhist*). And, of course, so does the pronoun: *I*.

**Accents and apostrophes.** English does not have accents (except in French expressions like *à la carte*), but we do use the apostrophe rather a lot. Some non-native speakers mix them up and use the acute accent ['] where they should use the apostrophe [']. A spelling checker can help here.

**Dashes and hyphens.** Hyphens [-] are used in word division and compound words (like *X-ray*). Dashes [ – ] connect two parts of a sentence [HTML code: [&ndash;](#)] – *with spaces on both sides*.

# From the workshop...

## Ads, adverts and advertisements

The abbreviations commonly used for “advertisement” are “advert” [not in US English] or “ad”. Yet the form “**add.**” is not at all unusual on web sites written by non-native speakers. This can be an abbreviated form for words like “addendum” or “address”, but *never* for “advertisement”.

## Funny and fun

The word “fun” in English is an uncountable noun. You might go to a party and *have fun*. Afterwards you might say: *It was (a lot of) fun*.

The word “funny” is an adjective and in modern English its meaning is quite separate from the noun “fun”. If something is “funny”, it either makes you laugh or smile, or it is strange, surprising, puzzling or weird.

So using “funny” to describe the party you enjoyed would sound, well, “funny” – unless, of course, you go on to explain what it was that was so funny about it...

If you need an adjective for “fun”, use a word like “enjoyable”.

## Diaries and dairies

Last month I mentioned *customers* and *costumers*. Another pair of words that often get mixed up is *diary* and *dairy*.

Again, *Word*’s spelling checker will not catch the mistake, so take care with these two!

## Exciting and exiting ...

A simple spelling mistake can lead to strange sentences like: *There were a lot of **exiting** buildings in London*. I wonder where all those buildings were off to! ☺

## Exciting and excited

A common grammar mistake is to use the wrong adjectival form from a verb. People write things like: *I was **exciting** to see the Tower of London*, or: *It was **excited** to see the Tower of London*.

What is going wrong here is really the same as we talked about in *News & Tips* No.1 under the heading: *Are you specialised or specialising?* “Exciting” is the *active* form, while “excited” is *passive* in meaning. So it all depends on who or what is doing the “exciting” – and to whom!

Similar problems are often found with words like *interested/interesting* and *annoyed/annoying*. So quite a lot of people write about how “interesting” they are [which, of course, they may well be!], when what they really wanted to say was how *interested* they were.

## Fluent and fluid

Another pair of words that got mixed up this month was “fluent” and “fluid”. The latter can also be a noun, but when used as an adjective, it refers to *liquids with low viscosity*, while “fluent” is used of *people with high fluency* (e.g. in a language). Both words contain the basic idea of “flowing easily”, which is why other languages often have just one word for both meanings.

## Advertisement

Don’t forget to register for the seminar (Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> September) on [www.BusinessHouse.dk](http://www.BusinessHouse.dk)!

Look forward to seeing you then!

Best wishes

Lawrence White

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www. **English support** .dk

*Your natural language partner*

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**News & Tips**  
from

**English support**

No. 10 – August 2005

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Dear friends

The response so far to the seminar on **8<sup>th</sup> September** has been fantastic. In the course of July no fewer than **29** people registered for *Do you speak “danglish”?* – over half the maximum number we can accept. This suggests widespread professional interest in improving the quality of English spoken and written in Denmark. In the same period *News & Tips* received **23** new subscriptions.

**English support invites you to a seminar...**

## ***Do you speak “danglish”?***

Globalisation means that more and more business is conducted in English. Not only business letters, but marketing materials, including web pages, are produced in English. But when we write in a foreign language, it is all too easy to be influenced by our mother tongue. Come and hear Lawrence White on where Danes (and others) often go wrong in English, how to do better, and where to go for help – *no prizes for guessing that one!* Lots of good tips to take home.

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You must register for the seminar on [www.BusinessHouse.dk](http://www.BusinessHouse.dk).

### **The summer terror – a personal view**

I think George Bush probably calculated that Saddam Hussein did *not* have any ‘weapons of mass destruction’. I doubt he would have put a quarter of a million US servicemen and women within easy range of them otherwise. Such weapons normally *deter* such actions. But no government policy, even war, can possibly justify the rabid psychopaths who recruited and trained the gullible young people used as living bombs in London last month.

Their tactic of trying to lobby the powerful by murdering ordinary people at random provokes almost unanimous horror and contempt. It should also provoke calm reflection on the need to combat the incredibly simplistic ideology that makes these people believe what they do is ‘right’.

But is it just *their* ideology? Søren Kierkegaard’s many admirers might, for instance, ponder his preaching on Abraham and Isaac with its explicit endorsement of blind faith and the rightness of obeying immoral orders – if they come from the god you believe in. To ‘fight terror’ in the long term, we need not just more ‘security’, but also a lot more real *enlightenment* in our society.

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*Please turn over!*

# From the workshop...

## The summer season of AutoReplies

When you get back from your summer holiday, it might pay you to check out the English in your automatic e-mail replies. They are worth paying some attention to. Some strange English ended up in my mailbox at any rate, and probably in yours, too. Here are some examples:

<i>I am on holiday untill 17 July.</i>	Quite a lot of people spelt <i>until</i> with two l's. The word <i>till</i> has two; <i>until</i> has one.
<i>I am on my summer holidays.</i>	In modern (British) English, <i>holiday</i> , meaning (US) <i>vacation</i> , is usually used in the singular: <i>on my summer holiday</i> . See also below.
<i>I am out of office from 10 until 31 July 2005.</i>	<i>Out of office</i> is what George Bush will be after the next election! <i>Out of the office</i> was intended, and <i>from 10 – 31 July</i> would be clearer.
<i>I'll attend to your business when I am back.</i>	The rather grandiose style of the first part of this sentence conflicts with the simple <i>I am back</i> . Perhaps <i>I return</i> would fit better... ☺
<i>I will contact you as soon as I back in the Office.</i>	Here the verb <i>to be</i> has simply gone missing. The author wanted to say <i>as soon as I am back</i> .
<i>In urgent matters please call...</i>	Perhaps <i>In the case of urgent matters</i> or simply <i>If the matter is urgent</i> would be better.
<i>XYZ-company is closed for summer in July 2005.</i>	The summer is apparently going to very short this year! Better would be: <i>closed for our summer holiday in July 2005</i> .
<i>Have a nice Summer!</i>	We sometimes write the words for the seasons with capital letters, but only when the focus is on the <i>names</i> of the seasons.

## Vacation, holiday and holidays

As noted above, the word *holiday* (Br. English) is often used just like the word *vacation* (US English). It will only be used in the plural if we are talking about more than one *holiday/vacation*.

But the word comes from *holy day*, and therefore originally referred to individual special days in the Church calendar: saint's days and the like. In modern English we still speak of *the school holidays* and of individual (*Bank*) *Holidays*: New Year's Day, Easter Monday, May Day, etc.

## Enquiries and inquiries

In US English, the spelling *inquiry* is used also for individual questions, but in British English it usually refers to a large scale investigation of some kind, e.g. *a parliamentary inquiry*. If we are speaking of individual questions, the spelling *enquiry* is more common.

### Important reminder (also for those who registered for 26<sup>th</sup> May)

Don't forget to *register* for the seminar (Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> September) on [www.BusinessHouse.dk](http://www.BusinessHouse.dk)!

Look forward to seeing you then!

Best wishes

Lawrence White

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Dear friends

The seminar on **8<sup>th</sup> September** is now fully booked! In all some **50** people have now registered for *Do you speak “danglish”?* – and that’s as many as we can take. So the plan is to repeat the seminar at a later date this autumn (see below), this time in Jutland. Interest in the subject has been phenomenal. There were also **25** new subscriptions to *News & Tips* during August.

**English support invites you to another seminar...**

### ***Do you speak “danglish”?***

The seminar on 8<sup>th</sup> September is FULLY BOOKED. For those who didn’t get in, we hope to run it again in November, this time in Jutland. The date will be fixed before the end of this month. So if you want to come, but already know that you *cannot* be there on some particular date(s) in weeks 44-48, please let me know as soon as possible.

We hope to announce the actual date, time and place in *News & Tips* No.12 (due 1<sup>st</sup> October).

### **Explore the web site!**

There have been quite a few improvements in the *English support* web site over the past month, so perhaps this is a good time to say a few words about how to get the most out of it. It is meant to be reasonably intuitive, but just in case it isn’t, here are some hints...

The first thing to note is that there are a lot of **internal links**. This means that if you run your mouse around over the text, you will find short cuts you can click on to get to different parts of the site.

You can **bookmark** the very first page or the first page in any language [*Add to Favorites*]. And after the first page, you can **switch language** anywhere, though some pages are only in English.

You can go through the pages for a **particular topic** (e.g. *The Company* or *Teaching*) by clicking on the button and keeping the mouse in the same position on subsequent pages as you click through them. Alternatively you can **explore the entire site** by starting on the first page for one of the languages and simply clicking on *More...* all the way through.

And if you want to jump straight to a **particular page**, you can click on *SITE MAP* at the bottom of each page, and then on the link for the page you want.

You can now download **back issues** of *News & Tips*, for which there is also an **index**. In future, other items will be made available as *pdf*-files. And finally, there is a page of *Useful links* to lots of **other sites** you may find handy. Suggestions for more of these will be very welcome.

Have fun!

---

*Please turn over!*

# From the workshop...

## Who, which and that ...

These relative pronouns cause non-native speakers an awful lot of trouble. The first thing to get straight is that you can only use *who* of people:

*She is a lady **who** can speak seven languages.*

*She is a cat **which** enjoys catching mice.*

*She is a ship **which** has a thousand berths.*

Please note: things *made up* of people (like companies, committees, nations, football teams, etc.) do not count as people when the focus is on the *group* rather than the *members* of the group. So you cannot write: *A company **who** makes sausages...*, or *The committee **who** deals with that...*, but contrast: *The committee, **who** are all over 80, often have a beer after their meetings.*

The word *that* can be used instead of *which* or *who* in identifying relative clauses, but never in parenthetical relative clauses (for the difference, see *News & Tips* No.8 on *Commas*):

*The secretary **that** (or **who**) answered the phone said...*

*The table **that** (or **which**) we normally use has gone.*

*Please contact my secretary, **who** can be reached by e-mail.*

*Please read this manual, **which** will tell you how to do it.*

## Kinds of, kind of ...

*Kind* here is a countable noun, so whether you use *kind* or *kinds* depends on how many there are:

*The lion is the only **kind** of cat that lives in groups.*

*I get to meet all **kinds** of people in my job.*

The noun that follows must be singular, if *kind* (the singular form) is used, but after *kinds* both singular and plural are possible:

*This kind of **error** is usually caused by ...*

*These kinds of **error** are usually caused by ...*

*These kinds of **errors** are usually caused by ...*

## Try to do versus try doing

There is often a clear difference in meaning between *to try to do* something and *to try doing* something. To *try to do* something means to make an effort to do it (not necessarily successfully), whereas to *try doing* something is to experiment, to see what happens when you do something:

*He **tried sending** her flowers, but she didn't respond.*

*He **tried to send** her flowers, but the postmen went on strike.*

## KOMMUNIKATIONS- OG SPROGFORUM 2005

Thursday, 6 October, FUFU's Conference Centre, Fiolstræde 44, Copenhagen

Information and booking: [www.kommunikationogsprog.dk/forum2005](http://www.kommunikationogsprog.dk/forum2005)

Come and meet past, present and future colleagues at the **Communication and Language Forum** in Copenhagen (see box above). *English support* will have a stand at the Forum and there will be an opportunity to network with the other participants over a glass of wine in the evening.

Look forward to seeing you there!

Best wishes

Lawrence White

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Dear friends

The seminar on **8<sup>th</sup> September** was a fantastic success with nearly 50 participants despite the inevitable last minute cancellations. Of course, you cannot please everybody all the time, and in the evaluation carried out a week later one participant complained that it had been “essentially a prolonged sales pitch”, but most had much more positive things to say. See below for quotes.

**English support invites you to a seminar... in Jutland!**

### ***Do you speak “danglish”?***

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**TIME: 3 – 5 pm, Wednesday, 9<sup>th</sup> November 2005. PLACE: SDU, Kolding**

The University of Southern Denmark (SDU)’s campus in Kolding is at Engstien 1, Kolding. The seminar will be in Room 3.07 on the third floor. Please note: This seminar is going to cost you DKK 200, but all you lucky people who are on the *English support* mailing list get a 50% reduction – so you see, it really *does* pay to be on the mailing list! *But space is limited, so if you want to come, please let us know.* More information on the web site.

You must register for the seminar on [www.englishsupport.dk/EN/seminar.htm](http://www.englishsupport.dk/EN/seminar.htm).

### **Some of the things they wrote about 8<sup>th</sup> September:**

“Thank you for an enjoyable afternoon and a most successful seminar! • It was very useful for me. • Thank you for the inspiring seminar, it was fun. • I enjoyed looking at the photos too and I’m really glad it was so successful that you’re going to need to repeat it in Jutland. • Thank you for a very entertaining and professional afternoon. • A very interesting and entertaining seminar – a most successful arrangement. • Thank you for a pleasant and educative afternoon. • I enjoyed the seminar. • Thanks again for an inspiring seminar – see you at the Forum!

“Thanks very much for an interesting seminar last week. I find it very important that those companies who are not so well grounded within the English language (and other languages) should admit this to themselves – and use professionals as, for example, you.

“A very entertaining seminar – and very frightening information on the state of Danish English!! I knew it wasn’t perfect, but some of the examples given in this seminar were really outrageous! I know I am certainly going to check my daughter’s school books more carefully in the future...”

# From the workshop...

## 'State-authorised' revisited

One subject that came up in the seminar was the use of the expression 'state-authorised' or 'state-authorized' in connection with translators, lawyers, accountants, estate agents, and so on. Several people said they knew it did not sound good in English, but that their organisations used it, so they felt obliged to do so themselves.

One translator who was *not* at the seminar has written to complain about my calling this expression "danglish". Those interested will find the correspondence at the end of this newsletter.

## Translating the untranslatable

Of course, *statsautoriseret* is not the only Danish concept which is difficult to translate fully into English. What you need is something which covers the essential point (e.g. "licensed" or "certified"), and if this is not considered adequate to the purpose, the only thing to do is to add an explanation.

But what about *tosproget*? Here's a word that ought to mean 'bilingual', but all too often is used to refer to someone who is weak in both languages! Remember that the English word 'bilingual' *always* means 'able to speak two languages *well*'.

## A part of...

This often causes trouble. You can use it with an uncountable noun [e.g. *a part of the information*] or with singular countables [e.g. *a part of the ship*], but *not* with plural countables.

**Typical mistake:** *A part of the apprentices should stay on after completing their apprenticeship.* [This begins to sound as if they might leave an arm or maybe a bit of leg, behind when they have finished!] Use *some of* instead.

## Documentation that...

Danish often uses *documentation* in the sense of *evidence* and *to document* in the sense of *demonstrating that something is true*. English prefers to limit the use of these words to occasions where we are talking about the presence (or absence) of actual documents.

## And an apology

Apologies to FUHU for spelling their name wrong in the ad for the KOMSPROG Forum in last month's issue. [Not bad going for a proofreading company, eh! ☺] Here it is again (corrected):

### **KOMMUNIKATIONS- OG SPROGFORUM 2005**

**Thursday, 6 October**, FUHU's Conference Centre, Fiolstræde 44, **Copenhagen**

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Best wishes

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## An e-mail to my webmaster...

[alias me – well, it’s a *one-man company*  
with a lot of friends!]



Dear Webmaster:

I would appreciate it if you could take “state-authorized translator and interpreter” off the home page of your Web site at [www.englishsupport.dk](http://www.englishsupport.dk) (/EN/pictures.htm) [as] an example of “Danglish”. It is not.

I am a native speaker of English as well as a state-authorized Danish/English translator and interpreter, and we at the Association of Danish State-Authorized Translators and Interpreters (*Dansk Translatørforbund*) decided to use that translation in the English version of our name for certain reasons, one of them being that it signals that the system in Denmark for certification, licensing, or whatever you want to call it of translators and interpreters is different from that in the rest of the world (it is, in fact unique).

It is a perfectly legitimate tactic to use when translating into English that you pick a designation that is not the same as the one used in the UK, the US or whatever English-speaking country your audience is in, exactly for the purpose of alerting your reader to the fact that what lies behind the concept is not – indeed, may be quite different from – certification (in this case) as your reader knows it.

So, really, while I understand what you are doing with your site and your business – and completely agree with you that Danes generally have a tendency to overestimate their own ability to speak and write correct English – in this case, you shot wide of the mark, and in doing so are impugning the profession of which I am a member.

Regards,

Dee Shields

Translatør D.J. Shields, cand.interpret., MDT

Dear Dee Shields

Thank you for your e-mail. You will forgive me (or maybe not), but I’m afraid *Dansk Translatørforbund*, for all its many virtues, does *not* decide what is “signalled” by English words. As a matter of fact, it is *not even among the ranks* of those who do. Such things are decided by native English speakers the world over, based on their culture and history.

My point is that “state-authorized” is *not* a translation of *statsautoriseret*. The meaning that you say *Dansk Translatørforbund* is trying to express with it is *simply not there* in the English. So it does *not* “alert your reader” to what you say it does. As I wrote in *News & Tips* No.3 (in January), “state-authorized” has a ring of *political control* about it (in English).

So I think *Dansk Translatørforbund* would be well-advised to change this *bad* English translation for something *better*. I suggest “certified”. If you feel the unique merits of the Danish system of certification must be conveyed, then add a footnote with a paragraph explaining what they are.

*But please don’t tell me that I’m “impugning your profession” when I try to correct the mistake.* That’s absurd! “State-authorized” is just a literal translation of the *word* taking no account of its *meaning*, its *associations*. This usage (of translators, accountants, lawyers, etc.) is not found in any English-speaking country and has “made in Denmark” written all over it.

In short, it’s “danglish”.

Best wishes

Lawrence White

[www.englishsupport.dk](http://www.englishsupport.dk)

*Your natural language partner...*

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*Please turn over!*

# Discussion

Dear Mr. White:

Thank you for your e-mail. I'm afraid I disagree with you, apparently on more than one point.

I know that "state-authorized" is not a phrase commonly used in English; that is exactly the point. The direct translation of *statsautoriseret* – for I also disagree with your contention that it is *not* a translation – is already in broad usage here in Denmark, also by other professions, for precisely the reason that I attempted to explain to you.

Perhaps the issue is what English speakers do when they read something out of the ordinary. I can tell you what *I* did when I started studying at the Copenhagen Business School and ran into various British English expressions I was completely unfamiliar with: I said, "That's not English!" But I would invariably be proved wrong, often the very next day, either by the BBC or some other reliable source. In other words, I learned that while I may have a good handle on the English language, I don't have an exclusive one – which is evidently something that you have yet to learn, if I am to judge by your way of stating your opinions as if they were facts.

I suppose that's pretty much what got up my nose, along with you trying to drum up business by claiming on your Web site that my profession doesn't know what it's doing in translating its own title. I (and others) disagree with you about "state-authorized", and I told you why; and I certainly do not get the same connotations from it that you do. I believe that readers with any sense of curiosity who see the phrase "state-authorized translator and interpreter" will not necessarily jump to the conclusion of "bad English" and might even want to find out what that means, rather than rejecting it out of hand, as you do. This technique of signalling readers by using words that are not the same as what would "normally" be used is perfectly acceptable in translation, sometimes even necessary, for example in some legal translations. Also, in my experience, the use of footnotes is ill tolerated in LSP texts that are not academic in nature or source (e.g. dissertations, papers or certain types of reports).

With this technique, the idea is exactly for the reader *not* to get the "normal" connotations. The reader is *supposed* to see "not made in the UK/US/whatever" all over it. So, yes, if you are not impugning my profession, you are certainly impugning me and my ability to *practice* my profession when you simply dismiss it as "Danglish" and not even a translation, as if you have the authorization (pun intended) to speak on behalf of all the English speakers in the world. It is rather insulting, you must admit, that you imply through your categorical statements that "your" English is better than "mine". Of *course* I (and others) considered the "meaning" and the connotations of "state-authorized" before using it. You and I could both find dictionary definitions to back up our respective viewpoints, which should, really, tell you something. You may disagree with me, and I with you, but the difference is that I respect your point of view as just that, whereas you simply dismiss mine as "a mistake". So, really, get off the high horse, please.

Sincerely,

Dee Shields

Translatør D.J. Shields, cand.interpret., MDT

Dear Dee Shields

Considering you consistently write as if I have committed some kind of *lèse majesté* by daring to have an opinion that differs from yours and open the correspondence by asking me to *remove my opinion from my own web site*, I think you should check the mirror before talking about people sitting on high horses.

But to the charge that I claim to "speak on behalf of all the English speakers in the world" I plead guilty. That's exactly what I try to do. And so do you. That's what translators and proofreaders

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# Discussion

and copywriters *everywhere* try to do. So why don't we cut the crap and start discussing the point at issue, shall we? The dispute is about the translation of *a single word*.

Despite the indignant and often condescending rhetoric of your second e-mail, I look in vain for any new *arguments* or even replies to *my* arguments. You simply restate your view. So perhaps this is a good point to sum up the discussion so far and see if it is possible to see the wood for the trees. This seems particularly important if, as you strongly imply, you are claiming to be the actual original author of the phrase in question.

As far as I can see you *agree with me* on each of the following points:

1. The usage of the word "state-authorized" in connection with translators, accountants, estate agents, lawyers, etc. is something invented in Denmark for Danish purposes.
2. It is a literal syllable-for-syllable translation of the Danish *statsautoriseret*.
3. It is not a usage found in any English-speaking country anywhere in the world.

I would hazard a guess that you would also agree with me that other Danish innovations, like the usage of "make" in connection with homework, or "take" instead of "go" when speaking of "going to Copenhagen", for example, can safely be categorised as "danglish".

And I can agree with you that there are situations where the deliberate use of "danglish" may even be appropriate (e.g. some legal translations). The question is: *Is this one of them?* I don't think so.

You claim the whole thing has been carefully thought through as a "signal" – *but the signal does not work*. That is why Danish "state-authorized" translators always add a note on their web pages to explain what it means. So does *Translatørforbund*. And in those notes, what word is used to explain? – Why, surprise, surprise, the words *certify*, *certified* and *certification* are almost invariably used. You do the same in your letters. So everybody is perfectly clear that the "signal" signals nothing.

At least nothing you *intend*. You say you do not "get the same connotations" from it that I do. Yet you also state that many dictionaries support my view – despite the fact that dictionaries do not normally concern themselves with word association. So I am not entirely alone up on my "high horse". The poor creature is apparently bearing several millions...

I think you are defending the indefensible. "State-authorized translator" doesn't say what you want it to anyway and has to be explained. And it risks being misunderstood, or at least thought very odd, by the entire English-speaking world, because it is *not English usage*. I can't see any merit in it whatsoever.

But then you say "it is already in broad usage here in Denmark". Yes, it is. So whoever coined it has a heavy responsibility. Just as the publishers of Danish schoolbooks packed with "danglish" (also sadly in broad usage here in Denmark) have a heavy responsibility for the state of Danish English. This "broad usage here in Denmark" is a problem, not a justification. A mistake has been made, it has even become established as "normal", but that is no reason to go on making it.

So I hope you will stop acting like a shocked adult trying to get the child to keep quiet in Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale, "The Emperor's new clothes", and join me in the fight to *improve* the English we find in Denmark.

And I hope *Dansk Translatørforbund*, to whose leadership you have eagerly forwarded your e-mails, will soon take the lead in changing this unfortunate "translation" of *statsautoriseret* for something better.

Best wishes

Lawrence White

After reading all that, a certified translator wrote to me:  
*Keep up the good spirit. You're doing a fine job. I really appreciate all your appetisers in the Newsletters.* Thanks!

*The End!*



**NB:** If you received this newsletter by e-mail, it is (hopefully) because you have expressed a wish to do so. If this is not the case, and/or you do not wish to receive it in future – *please let us know!*

No. 13 – November 2005

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Dear friends

Some 300 people came to the KomSprog Forum on **6<sup>th</sup> October**. You will find a short report on the event on the *English support* web site at [www.englishsupport.dk/EN/komsprog.htm](http://www.englishsupport.dk/EN/komsprog.htm). And the *English support* seminar on **9<sup>th</sup> November** (see below) looks like being a success, too. There are already 21 people registered, but there is still plenty of room for more. Don't forget to register!

***English support invites you to a seminar... in Kolding!***

### ***Do you speak “danglish”?***

Globalisation means that more and more business is conducted in English. Not only business letters, but all marketing materials, including web pages, are produced in English. But when we write in a foreign language, it is all too easy to be influenced by our mother tongue. Come and hear Lawrence White on where Danes (and others) often go wrong in English, how to do better, and where to go for help – *no prizes for guessing that one!* Lots of good tips to take home.

**TIME: 3 – 5 pm, Wednesday, 9<sup>th</sup> November 2005. PLACE: SDU, Kolding**

The University of Southern Denmark (SDU)'s campus in Kolding is at Engstien 1, Kolding. The seminar will be in Room 3.07 on the third floor. Please note: This seminar is going to cost you DKK 200, but all you lucky people who are on the *English support* mailing list get a 50% reduction – so you see, it really *does* pay to be on the mailing list! *Space is limited, so if you want to come, please let us know.* More information on the web site.

You must register for the seminar on [www.englishsupport.dk/EN/seminar.htm](http://www.englishsupport.dk/EN/seminar.htm).

### **Widespread discussion on “state-authorized”**

The discussion provoked by my naming “state-authorized translator” as an example of “danglish” (*News & Tips* No.3 and the seminar picture-report on the *English support* web site) is spreading like wildfire among translators all over the country.

Opinions I have heard about seem divided roughly 50-50 on whether I have been as diplomatic as I might have been (diplomacy is perhaps not my strong point), but otherwise they heavily favour dropping ‘state-’ from the job title – for the reasons I have given.

In fact, a general consensus appears to be forming in favour of “authorised translator” – a seemingly small change that would mark a big improvement. Not only widely used in the US, it is the usage adopted in other Scandinavian countries, too, so *why not here in Denmark?*

This month Dee Shields comes with some good arguments against using “certified” in the e-mail discussion continued from last month's issue (see after this newsletter). **Warning:** This debate is at times quite sharp in tone and may be unsuitable for younger viewers... ☺

*Please turn over!*

# From the workshop...

## Translate the Latin, too!

One strange difference between Danish and English texts is that whereas in Danish the Latin phrases *pro anno* and *pro cent* are used, the English equivalents are *per annum* and *per cent*.

These phrases are often not real Latin as spoken in ancient Rome. (My classical languages correspondent tells me that in Latin percentage is expressed with the ordinal number *centesimus* in the ablative, so 2% would be *binis centesimis*). But the different forms are used in modern languages and must therefore be “translated” too.

And, of course, there is a lot of Latin in English, including common abbreviations like *e.g.*, *i.e.*, *etc.* (short for *et cetera*, but often misspelled *ect.* which might be short for *ectoplasm* ☺), and AM, PM, AD, and so on – all of which need translating into local equivalents.

## Data is, data are

While we are on the subject of Latin, the question often arises: Should we say *Data is* or *Data are*? Strictly speaking, *data* is the plural of *datum*, and in very formal texts it is usual to say *datum is* and *data are*. But in everyday life *data* means the same as *information* and is used in the same way as an uncountable noun.

## Like for an example...

This is a common mistake. Something can *be an example* and you can *give an example*. But you cannot say “for **an** example”, and the word “like” is superfluous if you say “for example”.

## How is it like?

And the word “like” should not be used with *How?* in this way. We say, *What is it like?*, but *How is it?*

## In the case that...

Another frequent mistake is *in the case that* meaning *if*, *when* or *where*. The correct form, *in case*, is used when you do something to guard against some **possibility**: *I've brought an umbrella in case it rains*.

But when we are talking about a situation where you do something in **response** to a situation, *if*, *when* or *where* are the words to use: *If the lights go out, check the fuses*. *You can use your umbrella when(ever) it rains*. *Where the road surface is poor, you should slow down*.

## Well and good

The word “well” has two main usages in English (leaving aside its use as a noun): as an *adverb* and as an *adjective*. When used as an adjective it means the opposite of “ill”, e.g. *Are you well?* When used as an adverb, it carries the same meaning as the adjective “good”. We don't say: *He played good*, but *He played well*.

So the colloquial US English, *He's doing good*, should normally be written as, *He's doing well*, in both British and American texts. But the lady who wasn't sure *how well my Danish was* did not really mean to enquire after the health of my Danish! She meant *good* instead of *well*.

Note that English differs from Danish in saying *The food smells/tastes good*. The food is not doing the smelling or tasting, so *good* here is an adjective applied to the noun *food*. It is the same pattern as *The food looks good* and *The food is good*.

Hope I will see some of you in Kolding on the 9th!

Best wishes

Lawrence White

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The following correspondence continues the debate with Dee Shields over the expression “state-authorized” (see last month’s issue)



Dear Dee Shields

I am writing to ask you formally to retract one statement in your second e-mail, where you wrote:

*“I suppose that’s pretty much what got up my nose, along with you trying to drum up business by claiming on your Web site that my profession doesn’t know what it’s doing in translating its own title.”*

Now I am fairly sure that what you *meant* to say was that calling “state-authorized translator” a piece of “danglish” *amounts (in your opinion)* to claiming that your profession doesn’t know what it’s doing in translating its own title.

Naturally I don’t agree with this view. If pointing out a mistake is the same as declaring the person(s) making it incompetent, then it’s something I do every day. *And people pay me for it.* It’s my job to point out mistakes, after all!

*But that is not the issue here.* What my lawyers point out is that you actually stated *as if it were a fact* that *I claim on my web site* that your profession doesn’t know what it’s doing, etc. and then forwarded your e-mail to *Translatorforbund*, many of whose members may not be familiar with the real content of my web site.

Needless to say, there is not, never has been, and never will be any such claim on my web site, in my newsletter or in my seminars. Such a thought has, in fact, never entered my head. So far as I know, it exists only in yours. That is to say, you have circulated a statement about my company which is obviously potentially damaging and which (no doubt in the heat of the argument) *you simply made up.* It is not true and you know it is not true.

Now neither of us has any interest in a court case over what I hope was just an unintentional slip. So I am asking you to withdraw the statement and circulate your retraction to the same people to whom you circulated the original statement. I will do likewise.

If you retract the statement clearly and unequivocally within 15 days (that is by 28th October 2005), I will for my part ensure that our correspondence does not end up in the *permanent archive of back issues* on my web site.

I will replace it with a summary of the main points of the discussion without all the rhetoric, though the actual correspondence will remain available for interested enquirers. I will be happy to send you this summary in advance of publication for your comments, corrections, suggestions, etc. provided there is time before 1<sup>st</sup> November, when the next issue is due out.

On the other hand, should you fail to withdraw the statement by the 28th October, not only will the full correspondence go in the permanent archive and remain there, but I will reserve my right to take any action I may consider appropriate to seek redress on the matter.

Best wishes

Lawrence White

[12 October 2005]

Dear Mr. White:

I had just finished composing a response to your second e-mail, when I received on October 12 an e-mail in which you seem to be threatening to sue and to keep our correspondence on permanent record at your Web site unless I formally retract the statement in my second e-mail that

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*Please turn over!*

# Discussion

you are “trying to drum up business by claiming on your Web site that my profession doesn’t know what it’s doing in translating its own title.” Although the lawyer I consulted says there is no basis for any kind of legal action in any direction, I freely acknowledge that no, you don’t claim it directly; my wording was inaccurate. However, I would like to stress that when you indicate on your Web site – and also, apparently, at your seminars – that “state-authorized translator and interpreter” is “danglish” as if it were the absolute truth and in no way indicating that it is your *opinion* or that it is even arguable, then you are in *my* opinion most certainly implying it very strongly. You say in your e-mail that such a thought has never entered your head; well, I can only look at what you write and draw my own conclusion. If you are really not trying to promote your business at the expense of my profession, and if you don’t want anyone, especially the members of my profession, believing that you are doing so, then I suggest you stop claiming categorically that “state-authorized translator and interpreter” is an example of what you call “danglish”.

But by all means keep our correspondence on permanent record on your Web site; it makes no difference to me. However, I would expect you to also publish your October 12 e-mail and this reply as well. This letter will be concluding any correspondence with you, since I will have made my point, which is all I have been interested in doing from the beginning. I’ve spent enough time on this. I will also be submitting our correspondence for publication in my professional association’s journal, since it is a matter of interest to all my colleagues. Since you already published our correspondence in your newsletter without even doing me the courtesy of telling me, I assume this is fine with you.

Another reason why the tone of my e-mails has not exactly been warm and fuzzy is that you are extremely categorical in your statements. When I disagree, you meet my perhaps inadequate attempts to explain by stating that “state-authorized” is a “mistake” and “unfortunate”, “[it] doesn’t say what you want it to”, and “[a] mistake has been made, it has even become established as ‘normal’, but that is no reason to go on making it” ... so, well, no, I don’t feel any particular compulsion to be overtly friendly in my reply. When I wrote in my second e-mail that you and I could both find support for our points of view, you claimed in your reply that I said that “many dictionaries” supported *your* view. Who’s being condescending here?

No, I am not the original coiner of “state-authorized”, nor is *Dansk Translatørforbund*. I suppose you thought I was implying authorship because I was attempting to convey the fact that I am speaking for myself rather than acting as a spokesperson for the Association, which I have no brief to do. I am forwarding my mails to the Association because they are interested colleagues, although that I am doing so “eagerly” is an assumption on your part only. When you then – without notifying me – publish our correspondence as part of your marketing efforts, your apparent objection to my forwarding it to my professional association becomes absurd.

I suppose I should have explained my reasoning in greater detail in my second e-mail to you, and I will attempt to do so now. Having read your now three e-mails and newsletter, I don’t expect you to agree or even admit that it is a valid point of view; I suppose it’s more for the record than anything else.

First an explanation of what a state-authorized translator is. A state-authorized Danish/English translator is not necessarily a native English speaker, although he or she may be (myself a case in point), but he or she *does* usually possess an expertise in English (and Danish). Simply being a native speaker of a language does not automatically convey expertise; relatively few native speakers of any given language are experts in that language. If you are Danish, getting a native English speaker to look at your English-language text may seem like the best solution, but it certainly depends very much on the native speaker.

# Discussion

A state-authorized Danish/English translator has undergone a specific program of education leading to a master's degree in Danish-English translation and interpreting. State-authorized translators specializing in English gain not only an extremely high level of expertise in both Danish and English as languages, but also a tremendously broad knowledge of (1) the culture and institutions of the country or countries in which those languages are spoken, i.e. Denmark and mainly the UK and the US; (2) different types of LSP usage, i.e. medical, technical, legal and other "forms" of Danish and English; and (3) the differences between variants of English (chiefly the US and UK variants). You do not have to apply for state authorization once you receive the master's degree, but you will not be granted state authorization without it. (In the case of languages for which no formal program of education is offered in Denmark, e.g. Farsi or Polish, an applicant must pass a battery of examinations instead.)

The title *translatør* is protected under Danish law, just as *statsautoriseret revisor* is. A simple translation of *translatør* into "translator" is not sufficient; since a translator is "merely" an *oversætter*. So "state-authorized" is often added to convey the protected status of the *translatør* title. In Danish, it is not actually necessary to use *statsautoriseret* in front of *translatør*, but most of us do it because people in Denmark are generally unfamiliar with what *translatør* means: they often think it's a fancy word for *oversætter*. If one writes *statsautoriseret translatør*, then the fact of state authorization and a specific educational background is communicated. Once you are outside Denmark, however, you have the problem of how to communicate this unique status and educational background without misleading your reader.

In translation, one must take into account not only the type of text one is translating, but also who the intended audience is. If I were translating a work of fiction by a Danish author and I did not see the need to call the readers' attention to the fact that the Danish system of state authorization of translators – or accountants – was different than the systems used in the rest of the world, then I might choose to use "licensed" or "certified", or even "state-certified" or "state-licensed", if for some reason I think it is important to draw attention to the fact that it is the state and not a professional organization that does the certifying or licensing of translators in Denmark.

However, if I am translating an LSP text (language for specific purposes text or *fagsproglig tekst*) – which is mostly what state-authorized translators do – it is often highly relevant to draw attention to the fact that the text is *not* referring to the UK or US system, and that it is also a system that is *different* from the UK and US systems. Yet it is not always necessary to explain *how* the system is different; often it is sufficient simply to indicate that it *is* different, and that is what using the words "state authorization" without a footnote or other explanation *does*. This is an accepted translation technique.

No, an English-speaking reader almost certainly does *not* understand immediately what is meant by "state-authorized", since the same system does not exist in the English-speaking countries. If the translator feels that an explanation is needed or desired (e.g. at the *Dansk Translatørforbund* Web site), then he or she might use the word "certification" in that explanation, but not simply as a definition of "state authorization". The translator will *not* just say that "state authorization is certification" and stop there, but will probably say "a type of certification" and perhaps go on to describe one or more of the differences between certification in the US/UK and state-authorization in the Danish system, depending on who will be reading the explanation. If I simply use "certification" without using "state authorization" and don't explain anything, I may lead my readers to draw the conclusion that it is certification under the UK or US system.

Yes, one could certainly argue that "certified" could be used as a definition for *statsautoriseret*, since the general definition of "certified", depending on which dictionary you use, is something along the lines of "holding appropriate documentation and officially on record as qualified to

# Discussion

perform a specified function or practice a specified skill”. However, to a member of the American Translators’ Association (ATA) and probably possibly also to others anywhere in the world who are familiar with that association, a “certified” translator is someone who has passed the certification exam of the ATA.

In the UK, certification exams are not offered (last I checked), and they don’t have “certified” translators: only “sworn” translators and translators who are members of professional organizations such as the ITI (Institute of Translation and Interpreting). A “sworn” translator is defined by the ITI as “a translator sworn before a court in a non-UK jurisdiction”, so it is not a good idea to use “sworn” as a translation for “state-authorized”, either, since that is *not* the system used in Denmark, yet especially native speakers from the UK may be led to believe so if the term “sworn translator” is used.

There *is* such a thing as “certified” translations in the UK *and* the US, but this is a self-certification, a piece of paper upon which the translator certifies that he/she did the job to the best of his/her ability. In Denmark, only state-authorized translators have the authority – are authorized – to officially certify a translation and stamp it with an official seal. Under Danish law, state-authorized translators are liable for the accuracy of their translations and generally carry professional liability insurance for that reason. Also, Danish law prescribes that the high and supreme courts use state-authorized translators/interpreters to the extent this is possible (in some languages there are none); there is no parallel to all these elements together in any English-speaking system that I know of, nor does simply using “certified” convey this special status. Neither does “licensed”, in my opinion.

In Denmark, state-authorization is not granted by a professional organization such as *Dansk Translatørforbund*, but by the Commerce and Companies Agency (*Erhvervs- og Selskabsstyrelsen*) under the Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs (*Økonomi- og Erhvervsministeriet*). Very recently, the UK introduced “chartered linguists”, which sounds like a similar system to the Danish one: the official seal of a state-authorized translator contains the name of the translator and “Interpres regius juratus” or “Interpres regia jurata”. However, it would not be a good idea to translate *statsautoriseret* with “chartered” because you risk your reader assuming that it is authorization under the UK system.

A similar explanation applies to state-authorized accountants. In the US, you have certified public accountants (CPAs) and in the UK chartered accountants. Without being any kind of expert on the subject, I would venture to say that their qualifications are similar, but they are each a product of their own system and thus do not possess exactly the same expertise. An American CPA could not work in the UK without additional training, nor could a chartered accountant do so in the US. For this reason, it would be inappropriate to call an American CPA a chartered accountant or vice-versa: it would be misrepresenting their qualifications. It would thus be equally inappropriate to call a state-authorized accountant in Denmark a “certified” or “chartered” accountant in any context in which it could be misunderstood as referring to an accountant certified under the American or UK system respectively, which would be a natural assumption for US or UK readers to make. With “state-authorized”, there is no such risk of misrepresentation or misinterpretation. No, it does not explain exactly *what* state authorization is, but there is not necessarily any need to do so. Sometimes you only need to indicate that it is *not* the UK or US system we’re talking about, even though the language used is English. For this very same reason, Danish lawyers should *not* call themselves “solicitors”, “barristers” or “attorneys-at-law”.

In addition, under the coming new EU standard for translation services, “certified” will mean certified under the standard, and will thus not have anything to do with state authorization under the Danish system. This means that in any kind of EU context or where the use of “certified” can

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# Discussion

be misconstrued to mean certified under the standard, one should definitely *not* use “certified” as a translation of *statsautoriseret*. We state-authorized translators would, in effect, be selling ourselves short if we did so, since certification under the standard will not require the educational background that state authorization does.

You argue against using “state-authorized” because it is a direct translation and is not used anywhere else in the English-speaking world. I would argue we can use it for exactly those reasons. It is not an unknown phenomenon to use a direct translation or borrow a phrase from a foreign language in English to describe a phenomenon that does not exist in the English-speaking world. The word “ombudsman[d]” did not previously exist in standard English; it’s a loan word from Swedish. A few English-speaking countries even imported the institution, they thought it was such a good idea. It’s a nice thought, but I doubt they’ll do the same thing with state authorization, at least not right away. That, however, does not mean it is “a mistake” to use those words to describe the Danish concept.

Another example is the word “Walkman”, a word coined by Japanese electronics manufacturer Sony to name one of its products. Sony put a lot of money into explaining to the rest of the world exactly what they mean by that word, and now it is a firmly established concept. In a perfect world, that’s what we state-authorized translators would do; unfortunately, lacking the funds and marketing genius of Sony, we seem to have a difficult time making the distinction known even in Denmark. That does not mean using “state authorization” is a “mistake”.

You compare using “state-authorized” to Danes saying “making homework”. No, I would not call “making homework” “danglish”; it is not even a grammatical mistake. I would call it a usage that is non-idiomatic in standard UK or US English. The reason that there is no excuse to use “making homework” is that standard UK/US English already *has* a phrase, or idiom, for it: “doing homework”. There is no standard English word or phrase that adequately explains state authorization, which I would imagine is why the term was originally coined.

I would never presume to claim to speak on behalf of all English speakers in the world. Not only are there far too many variants, dialects and idiolects of English for this to be achievable, but my point is exactly that you're certainly not speaking on *my* behalf. Grammatical errors are one thing, but usage is another, and whether or not to use “state authorization” as a translation for *statsautorisation* is not a question of “mistake” or not; it is a question of preference and opinion. In my own professional opinion as a university-educated translator with almost 20 years of experience in translation and interpreting *and* in my opinion as a native English speaker who does a great deal to maintain her English skills and is *extremely* aware of the risk of allowing Danish to “contaminate” them, “state-authorized” serves a purpose. By all means, disagree with me. However, when you simply dismiss my point of view and attempts to explain as “a mistake”, you are basically saying that you know better than me; it’s as simple as that. And you say *I’m* being condescending?

If I may take your analogy one step further, you seem to me very much like the child in the fairy tale pointing the finger at someone, but I contend that the profession you are pointing your finger at has lots of clothes on, and I hope to have explained here why this is the case.

It will be interesting to see whether you publish this e-mail in your newsletter as well.

Sincerely,

Dee Shields  
Translatør D.J. Shields, cand.interpret., MDT

[14 October 2005]

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*Please turn over!*

# Discussion

Dear Dee Shields

I had no objection to you forwarding your e-mails to your professional association. But having done so, I can't see you have any reason to complain (twice) in your letter about my circulating it to my mailing list of other language-interested people. What I objected to was you forwarding a *damaging lie* about my company. Thank you for retracting it – albeit in a somewhat mealy-mouthed way. As I wrote last time, neither of us has any interest in a court case.

But if we look at your correspondence as a whole, it *is* a consistent theme. Josef Stalin used to brand opponents as “Enemies of the People”. You seem intent on branding me as “Enemy of the Profession”. Your first letter claimed I was “impugning the profession of which (you) are a member”. You withdrew that in your second letter, but then charged me with “insulting” and “impugning” you personally as well as “claiming (on my web site) that (your) profession doesn't know what it's doing in translating its own title”. You now withdraw the latter charge, only to replace it with the notion that I am “trying to promote (my) business at the expense of your profession”. That's why I describe your retraction as “mealy-mouthed”.

I'd like you to stop doing this – also in your private e-mails and conversation with colleagues. It's extremely annoying, economically damaging, and *completely untrue*. Obviously I have no interest whatsoever in insulting my customers! Far from trying to promote my business at the expense of your profession, I am in the *same* profession (I also do translation as well as proofreading) and am trying to promote a partnership with (among others) members of your profession, many of whom are already customers. I am offering a service to your profession, and most people seem to recognise this and appreciate it. If you were to succeed in driving me out of business with your ridiculous “Enemy of the Profession” campaign, this would be a setback in the struggle to raise the standards of English in Denmark.

And now we can all see another place where you have played fast and loose with the facts. In your latest mail you admit that you are “not the original coiner of ‘state-authorized’, nor is *Dansk Translatørforbund*.” Well, I don't think anybody ever really thought you were, but it does rather give the lie to the assurance in your second mail that “Of *course* I (and others) considered the ‘meaning’ and the connotations of ‘state-authorized’ before using it”. How you could have considered connotations you didn't even “get”, I'll leave you to explain, but the real point is that “state-authorized” was *already in use before you came along*. No doubt some long-forgotten second-rank employee at the Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs, who was very proud of the English he remembered from school, was the one who coined it. And *focused as everybody was on the Danish context*, everybody accepted it. Nobody thought about how it sounds in English. But whatever happened way back then, all your detailed explanation of the weighty considerations that are supposed to have lain behind the choice of this particular translation is revealed as *post factum* justification. That does not in itself make it irrelevant, but it does make your *personal indignation* ring rather hollow.

Now what this correspondence is meant to be about is how best to translate that one single solitary word, *statsautoriseret*, from Danish into English. You don't like me calling “state-authorized translator” a piece of “danglish”. OK, but you say you would not call “making homework” “danglish” either – so maybe you just don't like the word.

I use the term “danglish” as a short and amusing abbreviation for Danish English, which (unlike the American, Australian, British, Canadian, Irish, etc. forms of English) is by definition *not* native-speaker English. It is in fact *defined* by being different from native-speaker English. In short, it is a form of *non-English*.

# Discussion

You may not like the term, but I use it as a pedagogical device to focus attention on typical mistakes that Danish speakers tend to make in English. Sometimes, of course, the mistakes are made due to ignorance, but they are also made by people who know perfectly well they are mistakes (once they are pointed out). They happen because the mother tongue trips you up when speaking or writing a foreign language. At the risk of making what you will no doubt call a “categorical statement”, I would say *everybody knows this*.

That’s why using a native-speaker professional proofreader who knows what to look for is a good idea. *Everybody makes mistakes*. Me too – and even you, Ms Shields! In your first letter you missed out a word in the first sentence (which I put in) and mixed up your tenses in the last sentence (a “dent” the *English support* “workshop” would have hammered out for you, had you been a customer). In your latest letter you have “and and” in your first sentence and “statsautoriseret” in the eighth paragraph. (When you publish our correspondence in your journal, do remember to stop the editor correcting these mistakes, won’t you – otherwise this bit of my letter won’t make sense! ☺) My point is that *you* need a proofreader just as much as anybody else – so please stop trying to whip up hostility to *English support*.

But let’s look at the arguments. As usual, we *agree* on most points. I know that *statsautoriseret* cannot be fully translated into English. That’s why an explanation has to be added where appropriate, whichever way you translate it. I can see your point about the possible inadequacy of “certified” (even though that is the preferred word in most explanatory texts). “Sworn” is terrible, because it sounds extremely odd outside of the court context it belongs in. “Chartered” would probably be misleading, as you say, and “licensed” or “approved” would still need explanation.

By the way I don’t think the import into English (by native speakers) of the word “ombudsman” is relevant to the discussion. English speakers regularly add foreign words to their language just as Danes do to theirs. The “walkman” example might be more to the point, but you can bet your bottom dollar that Sony checked with a lot of English speakers before launching it. They tried to use the connotations and associations already present in the English language to communicate their meaning, not foist their own meanings on English words. Your attitude, on the other hand, seems more akin to that of Humpty Dumpty in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice through the Looking Glass*:

“When *I* use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.”

Making up your own non-standard English usage is sometimes necessary in LSP texts where there really is no choice, but that is hardly relevant here where we are talking about a job title on things like business cards and web sites.

For what is really interesting in your long, long letter is what is *missing*. It is clearly meant to be the ultimate, all-singing-all-dancing, fit-to-publish-in-a-professional-journal, academic sledgehammer of a presentation of your views that will finally and brilliantly crush all opposition – yet it has a gaping great hole in it. You simply never even *address* my main objection to “state-authorized translator”, the *reason why* I call it an “unfortunate mistake”. Instead you keep on repeating parrot-like that I “just dismiss” it – “categorically”, even. But I don’t. I *argue* the case, and you ignore my argument.

I think it’s a mistake because, as I wrote in *News & Tips* No.3 (January), it has a ring of *political control* about it (in English). Unlike *statsautoriseret* in Danish, which is usually very positive, “state-authorized” has more negative connotations in English. My recommendation then (as now) was to leave the “state” out of it. At that time I suggested the word “certified”, but I accept your argumentation on that point.

# Discussion

However, other translators have suggested using “authorised” alone, as they do in other Scandinavian countries. This has the merit of being also a common usage in the English-speaking world (notably the US). And it would probably be psychologically easier to make the transition from “state-authorised” to just plain “authorised” than to anything else.

Now I would be happy to elaborate on the Anglo-Saxon attitude vs. the Continental and especially Hegelian attitude to the State – briefly we had Thomas Hobbes and didn’t like it – but this letter is long enough already. It should be enough to say, we use “state-authorised” very often in a rather more negative, even pejorative way, as in “state-authorised terror” or “state-authorised phone-tapping”, and I don’t think (though, of course, it’s only my opinion) that it’s *ever* going to “catch on” to speak of translators (or lawyers, estate agents or accountants) in that way in English. On the contrary, I think Danish speakers, including *Dansk Translatørforbund*, would be well advised to drop it.

And that reminds me. Right at the end of your letter, you simply couldn’t resist stuffing some more words down my throat. You claimed I was *pointing the finger at your profession* in my analogy with “The Emperor’s new clothes”. You never stop at a chance to drive a wedge in, do you? But however much you might personally identify with the poor old emperor in the story, my point was that the phrase “state-authorised” *doesn’t look too good* on business cards and web sites for translators and others. If I was you, I’d stop pretending that it does...

After all, in the story, who did the greater service to the emperor – the little boy who told the truth or the crowds of sycophantic servants?

Best wishes

Lawrence White

[17 October 2005]

## *Postscript*

Dee Shields did not reply to this last letter – or at least she had not done so as I wrote this at the end of October. Perhaps she could not think of anything to say, or perhaps she was (finally) convinced. On the other hand perhaps she is just waiting until this issue is out, because she wants to figure in *next* month’s issue too! ☺ Who knows?

Apart from all the stuff about my supposed evil motives, the only ‘point’ she really made was that she *likes* “state-authorised”. She agrees that it’s just a direct translation, and that it is not a usage found in *any* English-speaking country *anywhere* in the world – but she thinks that’s a real shame, especially when “it is already in broad usage here in Denmark”... She doesn’t “get” the connotations I do from the word and presents it as if it’s just some kind of personal problem I have. Yet at the same time she admits that even *she* can find “dictionary definitions that could back up our respective viewpoints” (i.e. mine too).

So I can’t help feeling that she *knows*, deep down she *knows*, that there is something wrong with the peculiarly Danish English expression, “state-authorised”, as a translation for *statsautoriseret*. Saying it’s a case of LSP (Language for Special Purposes) won’t cut any ice: this is something put on web sites and business cards, not a piece of special legal jargon. Nor will it do to say that it communicates the special features of the Danish system of certification – because it doesn’t, as is shown by the fact that these need to be explained anyway.

When the dust settles, I think it should be clear to everyone concerned that there really is no case for continuing to use “state-authorised” in connection with translators, lawyers, accountants, etc.

Proofreading • Copy editing • Teaching

**N B:** If you received this newsletter by e-mail, it is (hopefully) because you have expressed a wish to do so. If this is not the case, and/or you do not wish to receive it in future – *please let us know!*

No. 14 – December 2005

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Dear friends

We had 24 participants at the seminar on **9<sup>th</sup> November at SDU in Kolding**, which everybody seems to have enjoyed – “it ended too soon” was one comment. There is a short report on the web site at <http://www.englishsupport.dk/EN/seminar.htm>. The next seminar is back in Roskilde again on **30 January at Heinzes (Boghandel og Videncenter)** almost opposite the main entrance of the railway station. The seminar is from 4 – 6 PM and costs DKK 60, but is free for students.

### The growing network of collaborating partners

At the time of writing, *English support* has collaboration agreements with nearly 50 translators, proofreaders, copywriters, layout experts, and other specialists. Languages covered by native speakers include Danish, English, French, German, Hungarian, Russian, Serbo-Croat, Spanish and Swedish, with more to come. One advantage is that if your customer wants a service you can't supply (you are ill, too busy, don't speak the language, etc.), *you don't have to say No*. You can keep the customer and pass the work on to *English support*. And you get work from us too!

The expansion has been so rapid that it's hard to keep up! And our informal network is even broader, including for instance: accounting, computing, engineering and legal expertise.

The team of native English-speakers is now 10-strong, including two North Americans. All this means that there are very few conceivable jobs that are too big for us to tackle.

*If YOU would like a collaboration agreement with **English support**, please get in touch!*

### The Hotline service gets hot!

For a long time, it seemed as if the Hotline service might not catch on, but now more and more people are waking up to the possibilities it offers. Just as you may sometimes need immediate support with your computer, the *English support* Hotline service offers you immediate support with your English.

There's a word you don't know how to pronounce, or a word or expression you can't think of, and the dictionary doesn't help? You ring or e-mail us and we give you an answer straightaway (normally within 24-hours). You receive an invoice at the end of each quarter. We only charge for the total time it has taken to deal with your queries, but there is a minimum quarterly charge of 20 euros (or DKK 120).

*You must register to receive this service, but for language professionals, the benefits are obvious.*

We wish all our readers

**A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

*Please turn over!*

# From the workshop...

## Speaking of Christmas...

Did you know that the old (pre-Christian) words *Yule* and *Yuletide* still exist in English and still appear on some Xmas cards? But I'm afraid Danes can't get away with wishing their English friends "Good Yule!" – that particular expression simply does not exist.

And one other concession to Yuletide. The British are crazy about Christmas crackers, which usually contain a silly paper hat, a worthless little plastic "gift", and a piece of thin paper with something like a joke on it. These jokes can be pretty terrible. So in this month's edition of *News & Tips* there is a special "pull-out-and-cut-up" supplement for your amusement. It's a collection of "terrible two-liners" and the idea is that you cut them out and give them to your dinner guests to work out which lines go together... Teachers can try it in a class, too. ☺

## Words that often get mixed up

It may seem strange, but there are some English words that are very frequently mixed up, *where* and *were*, for example, and *whit* for *with*. The mistakes stem from insecurity over pronunciation, and the spelling checker doesn't catch them. And then there is *god* for *good*, which can look very strange in English! So these are worth keeping a special eye out for.

## Words that often get misspelled

Words that contain "th" or "ht" seem to cause particular havoc. Again it is probably the difficulty non-English speakers have in saying the English "th"-sounds that is the root cause, so watch out for *brighth* instead of *bright*, *eighth* instead of *eighth*, *weighth* instead of *weight*, *lenght* instead of *length*, and so on. In each of these cases, using the spelling checker would help...

## The subjunctive

On a heavier note, a reader wrote to ask if I hadn't made a mistake in my last letter to Dee Shields last month when I wrote, in the next to last sentence, "*If I was you, I'd stop pretending that it does...*". Shouldn't it have been "*If I were you...*"?

Now it is true that the subjunctive would be more correct here in formal writing, but in spoken English (including e-mails and other informal letters) the subjunctive is not usual. This is a fairly sure sign that it is in the process of disappearing completely from the language – though it may hang on in the still quite common "*If I were you*". Maybe I'm just a bit ahead of my time. ☺

## School book campaign

From this month we are launching a campaign to try and improve the standard of English in our children's school books. Teachers, parents and others who know of books used in schools and colleges for teaching English (and other foreign languages) are invited to let us know the name of each book, the publisher, and where it is used. We hope to check the most widely used books and approach the publishers where there are serious problems.

See the web site for how you can help.

Best wishes  
Lawrence White  
[LW@englishsupport.dk](mailto:LW@englishsupport.dk)

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# Xmas supplement

**KEY:** 1:29, 2:27, 3:7, 4:13, 5:17, 6:9, 8:30, 10:20, 11:16, 12:19, 14:23, 15:25, 18:26, 21:28, 22:24

## Terrible two-liners

[English support accepts no responsibility whatsoever for these jokes – their use is entirely at your own risk]



1. What's yellow and always points north?	16. Well, pick them up and roll them right back to her!
2. How do you take a lion's temperature?	17. No, Mummy. The boy in front of me thanked her, and Mrs Jones said, 'Don't mention it' – so I didn't.
3. Last night I had to open the door in my pyjamas.	18. If you don't stop playing those bagpipes, I'll go crazy!
4. Which hand do you use to stir cocoa with?	19. What was I wearing?
5. Jane, did you thank Mrs Jones for the lovely party?	20. Tell him, I can't possibly see him!
6. What did one eye say to the other?	21. Now we're engaged, I hope you'll give me a ring.
7. That's a funny place to have a door.	22. Jennifer, did your father help you with your homework?
8. Why did Robin Hood only steal from the rich?	23. Madam, have you ever seen a squirrel carrying an umbrella?
9. There's something between us that smells.	24. Certainly not! He did it all by himself.
10. The Invisible Man is here to see you.	25. Certainly, sir – but you'll have to wait your turn!
11. That girl over there just rolled her eyes at me.	26. Too late! – I stopped playing five minutes ago.
12. I dreamed I danced with the world's most beautiful woman.	27. Very carefully!
13. Well, personally, I always use a spoon.	28. Yes, of course. What's your number?
14. Would it be all right to wear this fur coat in the rain?	29. A magnetised banana.
15. Waiter! Do you serve nuts?	30. Well, the poor didn't have any money!

*Happy Christmas!*