

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. 12 – October 2005

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Dear friends

The seminar on **8th 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”?

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, 9th 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.

Some of the things they wrote about 8th 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...”

Please turn over!

From the workshop...

'State-authorized' revisited

One subject that came up in the seminar was the use of the expression 'state-authorized' 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**

Information and booking: www.kommunikationogsprog.dk/forum2005

Look forward to seeing you there!

Best wishes

Lawrence White

LW@englishsupport.dk

Tel. (+45) 46 30 50 67

www.Englishsupport.dk

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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 (/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

Your natural language partner...

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!