

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 **6th October**. You will find a short report on the event on the *English support* web site at www.englishsupport.dk/EN/komsprog.htm. And the *English support* seminar on **9th 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, 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! *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.

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 1st 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 you

Please turn over!

Discussion

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 per-

Discussion

form 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 be

Discussion

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]

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.

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