

English support
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News & Tips
from

English support

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. 21 – July 2006

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Dear friends

Those of you who are reading this newsletter for the first time should not be deceived. This is not a typical example. But we are in the middle of a “discussion”, for want of a better word, with the leadership of *Dansk Translatørforbund*. The subject is meant to be the term “state-authorized” as applied (in Denmark) to translators, accountants, lawyers, estate agents, and so on. But the other side in the discussion seem unable to keep their eyes on the ball ...

The story so far

In September last year, I held a seminar at Business House in Roskilde entitled *Do you speak “danglish”?* It was a considerable success. There were nearly 50 language-interested people present, many of them translators, including members of both *Translatørforeningen* and *Dansk Translatørforbund*. Everybody enjoyed themselves. No one got upset.

Subsequently, the English support website showed pictures from the seminar including some of the slides. One of the slides referred to “State-authorized translator” as an example of “danglish”. “*It is not*”, wrote Dee Shields, who was completely unknown to me at that time, but turns out to be a leading member of *Dansk Translatørforbund*. She wanted my webmaster (me) to take the example off my website. She quoted herself and *Dansk Translatørforbund* as authorities on the question and accused me of “impugning the profession” of which she is a member.

And so the scene was set. The full correspondence can be read in *News & Tips* Nos. 12 and 13.

Yet Dee Shields *agrees* 1) that “state-authorized” as applied to translators, accountants, lawyers, estate agents, etc. is not normal English, 2) that it is not found in *any* English-speaking country, 3) that is something designed in Denmark for purely Danish purposes, 4) and that it does not communicate those Danish purposes to English-speakers (the usage has to be explained anyway).

So what’s her “beef”, as they say? Well, she doesn’t like me calling attention to all these facts by describing the usage as “danglish” (Danish English). And she doesn’t like me telling people that “state-authorized” has negative connotations in English. (*She doesn’t think it does, you see*). *So she decided to try to shoot the messenger*. She claimed that on my website I was impugning the profession, insulting her personally (!?), telling people that *Dansk Translatørforbund* can’t even translate their own name, and being really quite wicked in general.

Finally she published our correspondence, wrapped in another 4400 words packed to the brim with *real* insults, as the main feature in *MDTnyt* (3/05), *Dansk Translatørforbund*’s magazine. I am not a regular reader of *MDTnyt*, so it was not until May this year, while preparing an open letter to *Dansk Translatørforbund* on the subject, that I discovered this completely scurrilous attack. The leadership of *Dansk Translatørforbund* did not reply to my open letter (*News & Tips* No. 19), so I sent a letter (*News & Tips* No. 20) to each of their 96 members. Suddenly, the DT leadership went into action – *to block further discussion!* Their reply is on the next page.

Please turn over!

E-mail exchange with leadership of Dansk Translatørforbund

13 July 2006

Dear Mr White

This is to let you know that the board of Dansk Translatørforbund and the editor of our magazine have decided not to offer you space in the magazine. We are not interested in continuing this discussion but have of course noted your comments on the use of 'state-authorised'.

I assume you conduct a similar crusade against the widespread use of 'state-registered' on UK websites (140,000 hits on Google)? It must be a massive job and I wish you the best of luck.

Yours sincerely
DANSK TRANSLATØRFORBUND

Mette Aarslew
Chair

14 July 2006

Dear Madam

Your e-mail has two parts, one formal, the other foolish.

In the formal part you tell me that your board and your editor have decided not to offer me space in your magazine. This is utterly unworthy. A member of your organisation writes an 11,000-word attack on my person, my company and my work, yet you concede no right of reply. I wonder how you would react if such an attack were made on you and your organisation. Would you not expect the right of reply in the same magazine or newspaper?

The second part of your letter is just foolish. While "state-registered" is normal English, "state-authorised" (applied to translators, accountants, lawyers, etc.) is not. Your attempt at wit here is therefore totally misguided and serves only to underline the fact that you have chosen to hitch your wagon to that of Dee *This-is-my-column-so-I-get-to-do-what-I-want* Shields – a case of really poor judgement.

Frankly, neither part casts very much dignity over you as the leader of Denmark's second largest organisation of translators. Of you, Mette Aarslew, I had expected better.

Yours faithfully
Lawrence White
English support

The above exchange is the entire correspondence on this matter between the official leadership of *Dansk Translatørforbund* and *English support*. Interested readers can find Dee Shields' abusive article at <http://www.onlineart.dk/mdtnyt03-05.pdf>, and my reply is on the next two pages.

Discussion

If you received this newsletter in the post, you will need to subscribe if you want it again. See website for how.

A reply to:

Dee's corner goes **ballistic** to the bathroom

Sounds really cosy, doesn't it? Dee's corner. Her very own little room where she can do exactly as she pleases: *This is my column, so I get to do what I want.*

But the fact of the matter is that this 11,000-word article is an utter disgrace, both to her and the organisation in whose magazine it is published. It has absolutely zero academic value, evades every argument, and is just Dee Shields letting off steam (to put it politely).

Worse, it is also a huge piece of negative marketing aimed at rubbishing one company and one person. She used the pages of *Dansk Translatørforbund's* magazine not to argue a case for using "state-authorised" in connection with translators, but in order to mock and deride another professional, so people wouldn't listen to his arguments *against* using "state-authorised". Well, it won't work.

It won't work because Dee Shields has already conceded *all* the essential points:

1. The usage is not found in any English-speaking country.
2. It was invented in Denmark by the process of literal word-for-word translation.
3. It was invented for purely Danish purposes.
4. These purposes are not communicated by the usage and need to be explained anyway.

In other words, "state-authorised" in this context has no useful communicative function at all. At best, it is just *noise on the line*.

Dee Shields does not agree with me that "state-authorised" also has *negative* connotations in English, but that is a secondary matter.

It is also an *empirical* question, which anybody and everybody can answer for themselves by asking the first 10 native speakers they meet in an English-speaking country what they associate with the word "state-authorised".

What Dee Shields does not like is that I actually *say* these things. Worse, that I say them without having her (Danish-state) "authority" for having an opinion on them at all. In short, she sees me as a trouble-maker.

So she goes on the attack by deciding that I say these things in order to insult. Here is the real core of her argument:

I truly believe he selected the example of "state-authorized translator and interpreter" and called it a mixture of English and Danish in order to point the finger at us and say, "See, even the professionals do it wrong when they translate their own title!" with the understood message, "Use me! As a native speaker, I won't do that!" I find that insulting, to me and to all of us. This is my opinion, and I stand by it. As always, you readers are free to draw your own conclusion.

It is, of course, very gracious of her to allow us to draw our own conclusions. Here are mine: Dee Shields is a True Believer (she "truly believes"). True Believers are characterised by deciding to adopt as True some proposition that flies in the face of all known facts and common sense. For example, that I stood up in front of a load of translators (all potential customers) and deliberately insulted them. The next stage is missionary. The True Believer has to convince *other* people that her True Belief is indeed True. She might, for instance, write an 11,000 word article deriding the opposition and asserting her Belief. With luck, she might cajole (or hijack) some *influential* people, like Mette Aarslew, into supporting her. At this stage what we have is the beginnings of a crazy cult. If the True Believers manage to convince really large numbers of people (help from some state power is normally required), we might end up with a new religion. Thankfully that seldom happens and usually takes centuries anyway.

Those who think they might agree with Dee Shields should consider the following points:

Please turn over!

Discussion

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1. What Dee Shields has decided to “truly believe” is something about what was (allegedly) *going on in my head* at a seminar where she was not even present. Now I realise it’s a wild claim to make, but I think I am the best authority on what was going on in my own head.
2. I did not set out to insult anyone. Dee Shields simply made that up herself. On the other hand, for someone complaining about an (alleged) insult, she is clearly not averse to dishing out insults herself, massively, and quite deliberately.
3. I did not attack *Dansk Translatørforbund*. There are a lot of people and organisations that use “state-authorized” in Denmark. *Dansk Translatørforbund* was not the centre of attention on that day. On the other hand, Dee Shields has clearly done her best to attack *English support*.
4. I have never questioned Dee Shields’ professional skills. Dee Shields, who has absolutely no knowledge of my skills, has taken great care to suggest they are non-existent. How barmy can one get? After all, I do make my living from them!
5. I gave (more than) equal space to Dee Shields in *News & Tips*. She and the rest of the *Translatørforbund* leadership are refusing *any* space in *MDTnyt* for a reply to her scandalous article. And now they want to stop the discussion!
6. Dee Shields claims to be defending “the profession” against an insult. I say I am trying to help Danes correct a mistake which has become accepted (in Denmark). My point was that your native tongue can trip you up when you speak or write a foreign language, so things can “sound right” that aren’t right. That is what has happened with “state-authorized” when used of translators, accountants, lawyers, estate agents, and so on. You don’t believe me? Well, do the *empirical experiment* I suggest and find out *for yourself* whether I’m right or not.
7. Dee Shields does not discuss the issue. She is not interested in the discussion. In

fact, she didn’t even register the fact that I changed my position on “certified” in favour of “authorized” under the influence of one good point she made. She is only interested in uttering derisive remarks in an attempt to *stop* discussion of the issue.

What drives Dee Shields potty is the fact that she is faced with an opinion that is different from her own. (Even her lawyer got a rap over the knuckles for accidentally referring to me as a *translatør*.) Worse still she can’t answer my arguments. So we get this attack of verbal diarrhoea.

Now the thing about diarrhoea, apart from the fact that it is very unpleasant for all concerned, is that it is very revealing. We get the “inside story” as it were. And it’s not a pretty picture. Here’s another gem:

Okay, I thought. Let's write a pseudo-scientific dissertation on "state-authorized" and the reasoning behind it, so we state-authorized folks will have the explanation handy if a client suddenly decides it's wrong.

Just look at the amazing contempt she displays here – for her clients, for her colleagues, and for her readers! The words just spew out and their meaning doesn’t matter (for her), but what use is a “pseudo-scientific dissertation” *for anything*? Except maybe for wiping your bottom. Actually it was more of a pseudo-*historical* dissertation than anything else – pretending that someone somewhere did some really deep thinking about the “translation”. But whichever way you cut it, very revealing.

Perhaps you can see why I compare her to the con-artists in *The Emperor’s new clothes*? She knew she was making it up, and went right ahead anyway. And like them she pretends that those who disagree with her aren’t at her level. Well, we really wouldn’t want to be!

So, next time Dee Shields needs to relieve herself, perhaps someone could take her gently by the arm, guide her in the direction of the lavatory, and persuade her to use the toilet paper provided, rather than the pages of *MDTnyt*. Thank you.

LW

If you received this newsletter in the post, you will need to subscribe if you want it again. See web site for how.

From the workshop...

Dates

People often ask: What is the correct way to write the date in English? Well, here are a few rules. The names of the months and the days of the week, being names, must be written with a capital letter. If you write the month first, you must put a comma between the day and the year: July 1st, 2006. And if you use the ordinal numbers, you need to get the letters right: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, etc.

But there are many ways of writing the date. In Europe we usually put the day first, while in the US it is usual to put the month first. So it can be confusing if you write the date using just numbers: 1/7/06. An American will tend to read that as January 7th, 2006. In business letters the day is normally written without the ordinal ending. So today's date is **Saturday, 1 July 2006**.

One last thing. In British English we write the date as 1 July 2006, but we *read* it as "the first of July 2006". You do not *write* "the" or "of", but you must *say* them.

*Please note **this** date in your diary ...*

KOMMUNIKATIONS- OG SPROGFORUM 2006

Tuesday, 26 September, Porcelænshaven, CBS Copenhagen

Information and booking: <http://www.kommunikationogsprog.dk/Forum/>

Tel. 33 91 98 00 or e-mail: forum2006@kommunikationogsprog.dk

See you there!

Capital letters revisited

In *News & Tips* No. 9 we looked at when to use capital letters in modern English. The basic idea is that you use a capital letter in proper nouns or titles and any words derived from these. Unlike most European languages, English regards the names of the days of the week and months as proper nouns (see **Dates**, above).

But when is a noun a proper noun? Some care is needed here. There used to be something called East Germany, but now we would refer to the eastern part of Germany. Similarly there is no place called "Western Denmark" or "North Europe", so Jutland might be described as western Denmark, and Great Britain and Scandinavia are in northern Europe. On the other hand, there is a place called Northern Ireland, but note that the southern part is called the Republic of Ireland.

And then there are book and conference titles! You do not *have* to use capital letters; I chose not to in the case of my booklet: *How to write a scientific paper*. But if you do want to use capital letters in such titles, put them only on the main words, i.e. the words on which the stress falls when you say them aloud: *How to Write a Scientific Paper*. It looks very odd to have a title like: *A Research Symposium That Rotates Annually Around The World* – quite apart from the image conjured up of researchers in a sort of low (yet impossibly slow) orbit around our planet! ☺

Teachers!

– Do you sometimes have to go through complex equations for your students in English?

Speaking maths is a new *English support* leaflet that can help you find the right expressions!

Available now – FREE on request.

e-mail: info@englishsupport.dk

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From the workshop...

As well as

Here is an expression that is used far too much in Denmark! In lists of things, it would be better just to use *and*. Where you want to emphasise that two things go together, you can use *both ... and*. The expression *as well as* (used of two things or adjectives) is quite strong and should be limited to where you might have used *not only ... but also*: e.g. “He is fat *as well as* ugly”.

If you use *as well as* to link two *clauses* in this way, be careful to use the *ING*-form (gerund) in the second: “She wrote the play *as well as acting* in it”. The meaning changes completely if I say: “She wrote the play *as well as she acted* in it”. The second sentence focuses on how *well* she did these things – and suggests she probably didn’t do *either* job very well!

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Miss doing and fail to do

The fundamental idea in the word *fail* is *a lack of success* (in doing something). So you can *fail an exam*, but you can also *fail to understand*. If machines or parts of the body *fail*, it means they stop working. By analogy *fail* can also mean to let someone down, as in: *Words failed me!*

The verb *to miss* is used in two very different ways. The first contains the idea of failing to do some very specific things: *hit a target*, *catch a train*, or *reach a goal*. E.g. if I *miss a train*, I fail to catch it. By analogy, you can *miss the point* of something (fail to understand) and “*You can’t miss it!*” means you cannot fail to see or notice something.

But there is a second meaning, which contains the idea of *feeling that something is no longer present, but you wish it was*. If someone asks me whether *I miss London*, they are not talking about my failure to hit it! In this sense you might *miss your mother’s cooking*, or *miss going for a swim every day*, or say of someone who has just died, *He will be sorely missed*. *To miss doing something always* contains this second (subjective emotional) meaning.

How to write a scientific paper

Lawrence White

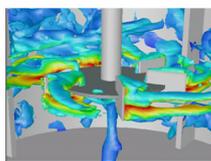


Figure 1. 3D model visualization of a protein structure for the paper writing in author's brain

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

New booklet for science researchers

“*How to write a scientific paper*”, is an excellent guide – even for the experienced author of scientific articles and reports. It is easy to read and gives good advice about the structure of such papers, the writing process, and a number of the many linguistic traps that authors who do not have English as their mother tongue tend to fall into.

Published by *English support*

Kurt Lauridsen, MSc, PhD
Danish Decommissioning

I hope you have enjoyed reading this unusually long issue. Normally *News & Tips* does not exceed four pages.

Best wishes
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