

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!*

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Dear friends

KomSprog Forum 2006 on 26th September was a considerable success. More than 320 people took part and there were stands from 17 different companies and organisations. There is a short report on the event on the *English support* website at www.englishsupport.dk/EN/komsprog.htm. I want to say a special *Thank you!* to those who helped man the *English support* stand on the day, namely three of our native-speaker freelance collaborators, Eileen, Nancy and Paul.

Should English become the second official language in Denmark?

Last month I wrote about the Radical Liberal proposal to make English the second official language in Denmark. My main point was that this would only make sense in the context of a massive educational effort to raise the standard of English spoken and written in Denmark using a lot of native-speaker teachers and starting children learning English while still toddlers.

Spokespeople for the Confederation of Danish Industries wrote to tell me they do not in fact support the Radical Liberal proposal (as I mistakenly asserted). They believe it would double the cost of administration, which would outweigh any advantage. But they do strongly agree with the need to improve English skills in Denmark.

Now, in my view, that is where the real expense lies. Aiming at a fully, or even largely, bilingual population, so that Denmark (as Bjarne Jakobsen from Danish Trade and Service put it) can be “qualified for a globalised world”, would require a sustained effort and cost a lot of money. This is because genuinely bilingual people have to start learning both languages very early in their lives and from native-speakers. On the other hand, that is also the way to make dramatic improvements in English language skills and reap the advantages.

On a lighter note, a Russian friend warned, tongue in cheek, that at a time when leading circles in Russia spoke French rather than Russian, Napoleon invaded and burnt down Moscow! Well, yes, but that was not long after the British had bombarded Copenhagen without that particular *raison de guerre*. ☺ My friend also argued that many African states have English as an official language without being more visible on the world stage, while China has very few English-speakers yet is very visible.

All this is true, but good English enables you to communicate what you *do* have to offer. Many Chinese companies have websites in English, but since the English is often very poor, it does not communicate what they are offering very well. This makes them less visible than they otherwise would be.

The same applies to Danish companies, organisations and individuals who wish to communicate to the world at large. The fact is that *poor English makes a poor impression* – and weakens the impact of even very good (and very expensive) graphics and layout.

Please turn over!

Kindly

The basic meaning of the adverb *kindly* is *in a kind way*. A person who is kind to another person might be said to have treated them kindly. By extension, I might express gratitude for the way I was treated by saying that someone kindly helped me.

Note that you can (normally) only be kind to people or animals, because kindness is something that is *experienced by a subject*. So if I say that you should treat your computer kindly, I am trying to be a little bit amusing.

But *kindly* can also express annoyance. When *kindly* is used with an imperative, for instance, or in requests, it often suggests impatience with the person addressed. So if I say to the waiter, “*Kindly bring the bill*”, it sounds as if I am fed up with waiting for it. “Please bring” would be more polite. And if someone says, “*Would you kindly take your feet off the chair?*” this has a definite ring of annoyance about it.

And there is an expression, *to not take kindly to* something, which means to be unwilling to accept something. E.g. “*She did not take kindly to being told that her book was boring*”.

Take the liberty of, take liberties with

Another expression to be used with care is to *take the liberty of* doing something. The basic idea in *taking liberties* is that of taking *unauthorised* liberties with someone or something and being presumptuous. So if you write that you have “taken the liberty of doing” something, you want to be pretty sure that in reality the other person won’t mind a bit! ☺

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The *ING*-form after prepositions and phrasal verbs

We use the *ING*-form (gerund) after expressions like *take the liberty of*. This rule applies to all expressions with prepositions including all phrasal verbs: e.g., “*Without **waiting** for an answer*”, “*He had difficulty in **understanding** the letter*”, “*I am looking forward to **hearing** from you*”, etc.

The only exception is the phrasal verb, *to go on*, which has two possibilities: *to go on to do* and *to go on doing*. The phrasal verb, *to go on doing*, means to continue to do, but *to go on to do* describes the next thing that was done. Contrast, “*He went on climbing until he came to the top*”, with, “*He went on to climb Mount Everest*” – i.e. later on he climbed Mount Everest.

The *ING*-form is used after a number of other (non-phrasal) verbs, too, but that is a subject too big for the space remaining in this newsletter. For more on the *ING*-form, see next month’s edition! An unexpected and sudden increase in the pressure of work forces me to keep this particular issue quite short...

Best wishes

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