

English support
Business House (PO Box 618)
Jernbanegade 23 B
4000 Roskilde

News & Tips
from

English support

No. 33 – July 2007

© English support 2007

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!*

Dear friends

Impact on the world – that is the significance of last quarter's amazing **83% increase in turnover** compared with the first quarter's record figure. At one point it looked as if the increase would be more than 90%, but some of the work ordered did not arrive in time to be included. Increased turnover is not the only measure of impact. Last month also saw a dramatic 55% increase in the number of daily visits to the *English support* website, and an unusually large number of enquiries.

An ever-growing circle of satisfied customers

Of course, the impact is still small. Just a drop in the ocean. And turnover is not the same as profit. I am still as poor as a church mouse. But if security is an ever-growing circle of satisfied customers, then *English support* has a secure existence in front of it. This means we can focus on the real aim of the company, which is not *just* to survive or provide a source of income in my old age, but to make an actual difference in the quality of English written by non-native speakers.

Why is that important? Well, English is the language of international commerce and science (not to mention films, pop music, etc.), and if your English is full of mistakes, it makes you look incompetent, even foolish. At worst, it can make you completely incomprehensible.

One of my very first customers was a Danish software producer aiming at the US market. He knew that his potential customers would judge him at least partly by the quality of his English. And poor English could also make his highly technical message difficult to grasp. He still has his material checked by *English support* – like many others.

And in the case of scientific papers, poor quality English can lead to your message not getting out at all! It is quite a common reason for papers being rejected by English-language science journals.

Export means English ...

In the globalised world that everybody is talking about, English is the modern *lingua franca*. Any organisation that wants to reach out beyond the borders of the country it happens to be in has to have a website in English. Yet the plain fact is that, even in Denmark, where a lot of people are quite good at English, far too many websites have large numbers of language mistakes on them – from small companies bidding you “**wel**come” at their websites, to great institutions of learning offering “international **edu**cations”. A lot of money has often been spent on the medium, but all too little on the message.

There is certainly no shortage of work to be done!

So if YOU are a native speaker of English, have a good command of Danish (or other languages), and would like some freelance translation or proofreading work in your native tongue, *please get in touch*. You can write to me at: LW@englishsupport.dk. Thanks!



English support needs YOU!

Please turn over!

Little and small

These two adjectives mean much the same, yet not quite. For instance, *a little boy* is also *a small boy*, but somehow “little” is smaller than “small” and is more often used when exaggerating or speaking derisively about someone or something, whereas “small” is more usually used in a literal and straightforward sense.

This means that non-native speakers should think twice before using the word “little” where “small” would also fit.

But “small” is seldom used with uncountables. Apparent exceptions, like *small change* and *small talk*, are examples of combinations in which a new noun is created. In these cases, the word *small* is not so much an adjective as a constituent part of the two-word concept. So for uncountables, we normally use *little* or *a little*.

Little and a little

These two work much the same way with uncountables as *few* and *a few* work with countables. If I say, “*She gave me little information*”, the focus is negative: **not much** information was given. Whereas if I say, “*She gave a little information*”, the focus is more positive: she gave me **some** information.

Note that *little* and *a little* can also be used as adverbs, with a parallel difference of meaning. So we can speak of the economy slowing down *a little* (to some extent) or *little* (to hardly any extent) and you might be *a little* confused by this difference or (I might hope) *little* confused by it. ☺

Few and a few

The same difference exists between *few* and *a few* (except that they can only be used as adjectives and only with countables).

Again the focus of *few* is negative. If I say, “*He has few friends*”, I mean he does not have many, whereas if I say, “*He has a few friends*”, I focus on the fact that he has some friends. The latter is clearly more positive.

More and less / fewer

Since *few* is used with countables, we use *fewer* as the opposite of *more* with countables. For example, the opposite of *more rain* is *less rain*, but the opposite of *more cars* is *fewer cars*.

While this usage is admittedly under challenge, as more and more English people say things like “*less cars*”, the recommendation must be that non-native speakers use the more correct “*fewer cars*”, especially in writing. Alternatively, of course, one can say “*not as many cars*”.

More than four hundred topics have been tackled so far in the pages of

News & Tips

You can look them up on the website at: <http://www.englishsupport.dk/EN/backindex.htm>, and back issues can also be downloaded at: <http://www.englishsupport.dk/EN/backissues.htm>, where you can also download a whole year at a time (if you wish) by clicking on the year heading.

From the workshop...

Hardly

The first thing to be clear about with *hardly* is that it is no longer the adverbial form of *hard*, for which English often finds another expression, like *with difficulty* or *with a great deal of effort*. In some senses, however, *hard* itself can be the adverbial form of the adjective, e.g. *hard work* is when *you work hard*. This is also the case in *hard-earned*, *hard-hitting*, *hard-won*, etc.

The word *hardly* started life as meaning *with difficulty*, but in modern English has come to mean *only just* or *almost not*. If I say, “*I hardly knew him*”, it means that I knew him so little that you could almost say I didn’t know him. Similarly, “*They were hardly alive*”, means they were only just alive or almost dead.

But, sometimes, *hardly* implies *not at all* – as in, “*That can hardly justify your actions*”. This usage started life as irony, but is now quite common.

This means that when an English speaker reads a sentence like “*Even today’s fastest computers can hardly carry out a full-folding simulation of a moderately sized protein*”, we become unsure whether the author means they **can** (only just) or **cannot** (at all) do the job.

So a good rule is that where you mean *not*, you should write *not*, and where you mean *only just*, you should write *only just*. Use *hardly* with care! And the same applies to *scarcely* and *barely*.

Scarcely and barely

These words started life as the adverbial forms of *scarce* and *bare*, but in modern English have come to mean exactly the same as *hardly*. The word *scarcely* even has the same ambiguity in the same places, but *barely* always means *only just* or *almost not*.

All three words have a strong negative sense, and although the negative sense is not absolute, it is no longer correct English to combine them with a negative. So we don’t say, “*He can’t hardly walk*”, but, “*He can hardly walk*”.

When *barely*, *hardly* and *scarcely* are used at the beginning of a sentence, the subject and verb are inverted, as in “*Scarcely had I arrived when I was asked to chair the meeting*”.

Translators, secretaries, teachers ... **English support Hotline** ... helps you get it right!

You ring or write and we drop everything to concentrate on your problem for the time it takes.
Register now (FREE) – per minute charge: 10 kr. – invoicing once a quarter (minimum 120 kr.)

The wonderful world of language

I came across a nice (Swedish) word the other day that exactly expresses what I do: *Språkvask*. It means *language revision* or literally *language cleaning*. It is short, sharp and to the point, so next time somebody asks me what I do, I’ll probably just say, “*Språkvask!*”, and see what happens. ☺

And don’t forget to register for the

KOMMUNIKATIONS- OG SPROGFORUM 2007

Wednesday, 26 September, in “Ovnhallen”, CBS Copenhagen

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

Tel. 33 91 98 00 or e-mail: forum2007@kommunikationogsprog.dk

See you there!

Please turn over!

Order and sequence

I changed the word *order* to *sequence* in a text on a piece of software, but my customer argued the case for using these two words differently in technical texts:

While “sequence” just refers to the position of one thing following another, the word “order” means that the sequence follows some sort of criterion or “key”. So the data in a table have a sequence, but not necessarily an order, unless they have been sorted in some way.

Unicode, for instance, uses the words like this when discussing the order of combined sequences of letters in various alphabets, see <http://unicode.org/faq/normalization.html> and search for “order”.

The distinction is useful and makes sense. Indeed, even in ordinary everyday English we might speak of an *ordered sequence*, but never of a *sequenced order*. And when we speak of *genome sequencing*, for instance, we use sequencing in the limited sense suggested by my customer.

However, it should be noted that outside of the technical world of computing, the two words are usually used in almost exactly the same way – and with both meanings. See for instance the explanation of genome sequencing given by the Human Genome Project Information website at http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human_Genome/faq/seqfacts.shtml, which uses the word *order* with the same limited meaning with which it uses the word *sequence*.

Did you know?

English support can offer **native-speaker** help with not only *English*, but also *Chinese, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Hungarian, Icelandic, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Rumanian, Russian, Serbo-Croat, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish and Ukrainian*.

Science papers in Russian or Czech

English support is pleased to announce a capacity for translation of scientific papers into Russian and Czech. We now have two freelance partners who are well-qualified for this kind of work in their respective languages, which means we are now able to offer to translate papers written in English or Danish so they are ready for publication in Russian or Czech scientific journals.

This capacity will be extended to other languages as opportunity allows and customers request the service.

Language festival in Copenhagen

In addition to Kommunikation og Sprog's Forum on 26 September (see page 3), another language event is taking place earlier in the same month. The Copenhagen Language Festival 2007 will be held on 15 September at Det Grønlandske Hus, Løvstræde 6, 1007 Copenhagen, and the theme this year will be: “*Native languages in a globalised world*”.

For more information, contact festival organiser, Betty Chatterjee on tel. 38 89 10 13 or by e-mail at chatterjeebetty@hotmail.com. If you can read Danish, you can also look at the Copenhagen Esperanto Club's website at <http://www.esperanto.dk/sprogfestivalen/lingvofestivalo.html>.

More next month!

Best wishes
Lawrence White
LW@englishsupport.dk

www. **English support** .dk
Your natural language partner

Proofreading • Copy editing • Translation • Teaching