

N B: 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

I suppose the top news story this time must be that the web site has gone (a little bit) multilingual. Not surprisingly, the first target language was Danish. After all, Denmark is where the bulk of my customers are. Some of them are probably already poring over the Danish pages right now to find all the mistakes – which is good, because then I can put them right!

The second target language is Hungarian. This is, of course, a bit of an experiment, but small companies like *English support* must take advantage of the breaks they get. With an agent in Budapest and a translator in Denmark, we are in a position to provide a good service for both Danish and Hungarian companies who want to do business with each other.

French and German versions of the web site are next on the agenda, and after that... – well, we'll have to see. ☺

Key strokes and Quality

One of the hardest things about this business is getting the price right – by which I mean finding a price that you can live on and that the customer is willing to pay. Years of competing on price have left their mark on the translation business. So while some people seem to quote 'standard rates' that are way above anything I have ever heard a customer was willing to pay, others report working for such low rates that I start to feel bad about my own proofreading rates!

But price should not be the decisive factor. After all, *what's the good of a bad translation?* With the prospect of increasing competition from translators in other countries, the time is ripe to put the focus back where it ought to have been all along – on quality. Translators and proofreaders are not bits of machinery, but creative wordsmiths. Key-stroke price quotes, high or low, simply send the wrong signal to the market.

Hotline service: No charge for registration

As stated in *News & Tips* no.1, the registration fee was aimed at putting off 'time-wasters'. But it seems to have put off quite a lot of other people too! ☺ So this fee has been dropped (and credit notes have been issued to those who have already paid).

But you still have to register, because: 1) We need your invoicing details, and 2) you need an identifying code only known to you – to make sure you only get invoiced at the end of the quarter for *your* use of the hotline.

I hope this change will make the *hotline service* more attractive for everybody.

From the workshop...

Third person singular, present and correct!

Leaving aside the strange case of the verb ‘to be’, the only place in the English language where you have to worry about making the verb ‘agree’ with the subject is where the present tense is used. This fact may explain why even highly educated non-native speakers have such difficulty just here – they are simply focussed on other problems.

A lot of the mistakes can be quickly found by putting the text through the spelling and grammar checker in your word-processing program. But there is no substitute for your own attention to this particular piece of ‘elementary’ grammar.

And, of course, to make the verb ‘agree’ with the subject, you have first to decide whether the subject is singular or plural. With some subjects, that is not always obvious...

Meaning versus ‘grammar’!

In *News & Tips* No.1, the point was made that whether the subject is singular or plural in English is often a matter of *meaning* rather than ‘grammar’. The examples given were: *A number of cases of typhus were reported* and *The number of cases was 65*. In the first sentence, the focus is on the *cases*. There were several, more than one, at any rate. In the second sentence the focus is on the (word) *number*, which is clearly singular.

But it does not matter how many people you may have in mind, *anybody*, *everybody*, *nobody* and *somebody*, and *anyone*, *everyone*, *no one* and *someone* are always singular – the rare triumph of ‘grammar’ over meaning! And remember that constructions like *Everyone is here* are to be preferred over *All are here* – which sounds extremely stiff in English.

Plural, please!

Then there are cases where the noun is always plural: *Clothes*, the *police*, and *people* (used as the usual plural for *person*). And ‘pair’-words like *scissors*, *binoculars*, *pliers*, *tweezers* and *trousers* are plural unless preceded by *a pair of*. Contrast these two sentences: *There is a pair of scissors on the table* and *The scissors are on the table*.

Uncountable problems!

And the many *uncountables* in English cause no end of difficulties: *advice*, *bread*, *furniture*, *information*, *money*, *news*, *progress*, *travel*, *weather*. These are all singular nouns in English, and none of them can be preceded by the indefinite article (*a/an*) – a fact that often takes non-native speakers by surprise!

Group nouns

A large number of nouns that refer to groups of people, like *committee*, *government*, *staff*, and *team*, can be either singular or plural, depending on whether we are thinking of the group as a single (impersonal) unit or as the people who make it up. For example: *The committee meets every Tuesday*, but *The committee have a beer after their meetings*. [Note: This latter usage is less common in US English].

More on this subject next month!

Best wishes

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When it has to be perfect...

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