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Bjorn again

(extract: Associated Press, New York, as printed in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 Oct 90).

It sounds like something out of Monty Python. A tall, blond American suddenly starts speaking with a Scandinavian accent after collapsing with a stroke.

But, according to Dr Dean Tippet, a fellow in neurology at the University of Maryland, the 32-year-old Baltimore man was displaying a rare disorder known as 'foreign accent syndrome' that may shed light on how the brain produces language.

Although the man was 'Scandinavian looking', he had never visited the northern European countries, and had no experience with foreign languages.

However, after the stroke, he sounded Nordic and seemed unfamiliar with English, said Dr Tippet. Initially, the man enjoyed his new accent, saying he hoped it would help attract women.

But by the time it had almost gone – six weeks after the stroke – he said he was happy to be speaking 'like an American' again. His speech was normal three months after the stroke.

Foreign accent syndrome is a rare condition in which a brain malfunction produces speech changes that sound like a foreign accent. Other reported cases among Americans have involved what sounded like German, Spanish, Welsh, Scottish, Irish and Italian accents

The syndrome is triggered by bleeding in the brain, head injuries or strokes, which block blood supply to an area of the brain.

Icelandic worries

(extract: 'Iceland: A Case of War Fever', *Newsweek* 18 Feb 91).

When Iceland's Channel 2 began picking up live war reports from CNN, the station clearly violated Iceland's ban on foreign-language broadcasts. So the minister of education and culture stepped in and lifted the ban, no doubt gratifying CNN fans. But Icelandic purists at Morgunbladid, the

nation's largest paper, warned that if English broadcasts 'go on unhindered, Icelanders might well come to speak . . . broken Icelandic.'

But most Icelanders welcome a chance to shed their isolation. Bars and radio shows buzz with war news. 'This country is full of people who have been discussing nothing but the weather for the past 40 years,' explains poet Dagur Sigurdarson. 'At long last they finally have something to talk about, and everyone grabs the chance.'

English explosion in Sri Lanka

(From the *EFL Gazette*, London, Feb 91).

Sri Lanka is the setting for the biggest mass English teaching project ever, organised by the Colombo International School and the BBC.

About five million people, one third of the island's population, are following the BBC TV and radio series 'Follow Me'. Partwork

sections of the course book are sold for the equivalent of 7p (US 12 cents) each. The 800,000-copy first edition sold out in 24 hours.

In a unique experiment, Sri Lankans can follow up the broadcast lessons in a steadily-increasing number of special 'Follow Me' centres which offer classes at the equivalent of two pence an hour. Students who complete