
English or 'no' to English in Scandinavia?

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Engelsk eller ikke engelsk? That is the question: Engelsk indflydelse på dansk, edited by Niels Davidsen-Nielsen, Erik Hansen, & Pia Jarvad (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1999: Dansk Sprognævns Skrifter 28)

THIS ARTICLE reports on work on English in Scandinavian countries that is currently available in Danish, and in particular presents and analyses a recent book. This contains six papers given at a conference in Copenhagen in March 1998 on the influence of English on Danish, along with a newspaper article that had raised several of the language policy issues somewhat earlier. The book also contains the text of a policy document written for the Swedish government by the Swedish Language Council, 'Proposal for a plan of action to promote the Swedish language' (my translations throughout). This 27-page text has been translated into Danish, as has the one paper by a Norwegian.

The title of the book can be translated as 'English or not English? That is the question: English influence on Danish'. As the code-switch [see sub-title, above: Ed.] and Shakespearean dichotomy indicate, the existential issue is whether English influence on Danish requires action or not. The book is about the tension between a well-established national language, Danish, and an increasingly intrusive English.

The conference was organised by the Danish Language Council, which the editors are prominent members of. Its purpose, according to their brief introductory remarks, was to clarify what is at stake so as to provide a surer foundation for further debate on this controversial issue. They point out that Denmark, unlike the other Scandinavian countries, has tended to favour *laissez faire* language policies,

allowing market forces to determine the extent of borrowing and influence. In language planning terms (Cooper 1989), Danish official efforts have been confined to corpus work (reference works, advice on usage and correctness) as opposed to status planning (the role and rights of all languages in Denmark). A major purpose of the book is to assess whether firmer action is needed. Or will Danish policy continue to vacillate, Hamlet-like, while progressively more communication in Denmark takes place in English?

The cover of the book portrays the Danish flag hemmed in by chunks of Union Jack, a curiously

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anachronistic image in view of the incontrovertible fact that the decisive forces behind the spread of English in Denmark over the past half century have been the political, economic and cultural might of the United States.

Down-grading Danish?

The allusion in the title of the initial paper by Niels Davidsen-Nielsen & Michael Herslund, 'He spoke Danish to his servant', is to an earlier period when German was the language of the court and power in Denmark, Danish serving humbler functions, though Danish is considered to have been a distinct language since 1100. The authors are concerned that Danish is losing prestige through widespread use of English in key domains – in commerce, science, and the media, and the ubiquitous products of American cultural imperialism. Word loans, often used for snobbish, provincial reasons, symbolise and constitute this language shift. The fear is that Danish will ultimately be confined to the domestic sphere unless the example of Iceland and Norway, where there is more energetic national language promotion, is followed. The authors are well aware that attitudes to the use of English, and how far Danish is threatened, vary considerably, but see a need to make Danes aware of the fact that essential values are at stake. They point out the inconsistency of regarding Danish culture as being under threat from immigrants and refugees, whose influence is marginal, whereas overwhelming US influence is unchallenged.

There is a similar thrust in Herslund's paper, 'Danish as "the second language"'. He feels that the consolidation of English as Denmark's primary external link is serving to inhibit contact with other cultures and languages, and fears that bilingualism in Danish and English, exemplified by the shift to English in the business world and in scientific communication, represents a route to English monolingualism (just as in comparable ways the bilingualism of immigrants in Denmark is socially construed as a handicap, a transitional phase along the route towards monolingualism in Danish, which linguistic minorities in Denmark are under massive pressure to shift to.)

American diplomats no longer bother to learn Danish, and instead of Danes resenting this, they feel flattered, since they suffer from the delusion inherent in the common myth that 'Danes are good at English', a belief that would

need proper scrutiny. All these symptoms of linguistic subservience are serving to turn Danish into a second-class language, derivative, and stigmatised, comparable to females being treated as the 'second sex/gender' (de Beauvoir). The paper is an urgent call for the formulation of a more active language policy and for measures to resist English taking over from Danish.

The state of Danish

The following paper, 'Stop, or I'll say bang!', by Frits Larsen, represents a different viewpoint. He provides substantial documentation of loan words from English, and of the processes of incorporation of many covert and implicit loans into Danish, but he claims that to intervene is a waste of time and effort. He rightly points out that linguistic purism invariably has the goal of strengthening the nation and state, thus it is logical for there to be anxiety at a time when contemporary states and national homogeneity are being challenged and redefined. For him, American culture represents a distillation of shared European cultural values, and these (left unspecified) he feels could provide a foundation for the European Union (EU), which currently lacks markers of shared European culture and identity.

This means going along with anglicisation and americanisation, and dropping 'futile' linguistic cleansing. His alternative scenario is to stop using the language, or having it learned, in school. Larsen is sure Danish can survive internationalisation, provided language purists are kept at bay. However, he fails to clarify how Danish can remain fully effective for all purposes unless measures are taken to ensure that this happens. I will provide one example of how flawed his argument is.

He claims 'Danish cannot be used internationally'. On the contrary, not only has Danish been used in much inter-Nordic collaboration for centuries: the many speakers of Scandinavian languages involved in 'international' contact typically have receptive competence in each others' languages. Membership of the EU has also ensured that Danish has extended its use into the supra-national fora of the EU administrative headquarters in Brussels as well as the European Parliament and European Court of Justice. To state this does not imply accepting the myth of the equality of the 11 official languages of the EU, where Danish is at

the bottom of the hierarchy along with other 'small' languages. But Danish has in fact expanded externally over the past 30 years. Massive amounts of translation and interpretation into and from Danish are taking place beyond Danish borders, a substantial effort goes into terminological development so as to facilitate all eleven official languages developing in parallel, and Danish benefits in some measure from EU schemes that fund language learning and student exchanges.

These examples do not represent a permanent guarantee for the future of Danish, but they are integral to ongoing processes of internationalisation and europeanisation. Serious analysis of 'international' languages, whether of the privileged few such as English, or less visible ones such as Danish, needs to explore such complexities (see, for instance the contributions from Finland and Sweden to Melander 2000, a volume on Swedish in the EU).

Creative hybridity

The dichotomy in the book's title frames the issue as a straight choice between Danish and English, either one or the other, whereas the present division of linguistic labour, which is certain to extend into the foreseeable future, involves forms of cohabitation and multilingualism. The next paper, 'English from above or below: language change and cultural identity', by Bent Preisler, addresses the psychological processes underlying the extensive use of English in Danish sub-cultures (specifically hip-hop dancing, computers, rock'n'roll, and death-metal). His article summarises a major empirical study of use of and attitudes to language in these environments as well as a representative national study of Danes' experience of English (Preisler 1999a, summarised in English in Preisler 1999b).

Preisler's point of departure is that concentration on words obscures the underlying, and more important, socio-psychological processes that determine code-switching. Language change is less determined by the way establishment values are propagated top-down, via the obligatory learning of English as a foreign language by all Danes from age 10, and much more by bottom-up, identity-driven choice of language to indicate group values, as in choice of style, communicative activities, and language, signalling membership of internationally oriented sub-groups.

This entails massive English-Danish code-mixing in the relevant sub-groups, a creative hybridity, with leading members of the group setting a pattern (invariably males, with female hangers-on) and functioning as linguistic gatekeepers. It is Preisler's claim that these cultural practices are so strong and influential that they filter upwards into mainstream culture. He provides some examples of this, for instance when commodification processes commercialise and popularise certain styles in a wider population. Linguistically it means that a stuffy top-down school subject meshes with bottom-up youth culture, a productive synergy for individual and societal foreign language competence.

Preisler provides data on preference for British or American English in seven identified domains in a representative sample of the entire Danish population. In the bulk of the population, attitudes to English are very favourable, and involvement in younger generation sub-cultures has a strong correlation with positive attitudes to spoken American English. Whether his conclusions are fully supported would need further exploration so as to facilitate deeper analysis of the mechanisms of americanisation, the actual use made of languages, and their societal and individual functions. Preisler's top-down and bottom-up distinction would need conceptual fleshing out, for instance so as to assess how far his assumption that bottom-up processes are distinct from what is on offer from (top-down) transnational corporations.

To put it more concretely, are young Danes whose cultural choices are largely determined by MTV relatively mindless consumers of soft-sell Anglo-American junk? If Anglo-American sub-cultures function as a linguistic Trojan horse for young Danes, the balance between top-down and bottom-up forces is presumably still tipped firmly in the other direction by schooling, higher education (for which at least reading proficiency in English is essential), and manifold job market needs. Danish public-service television, which is crammed with American entertainment, presumably occupies an intermediate position. All of these uses of English in Denmark can in principle serve either oppressive or liberating purposes. Preisler's sociolinguistic fieldwork provides a fascinating wealth of documentation, but it seems to me that like much work in the sociology of language, it is still somewhat tenuous when it comes to causal analysis. What Preisler does

document unambiguously however is that a significant proportion of the Danish population, the 20% with limited or no proficiency in English, mostly but definitely not exclusively those aged over 50, are being marginalised as consumers and citizens. For them he recommends remedial adult education.

English in Norwegian and the nature of loan words

Helge Sandøy's paper 'English words in Norwegian' is a magisterial presentation of Norwegian official policy on loan words from English, and principles for their Norwegianisation and dissemination. He explains and exemplifies the criteria underlying Norwegian spelling, which build on a century of work of this kind. The strategy is to devise appropriate forms, dialogue with the general public, and induce acceptance of innovations by key models of language use in education and the media. This involves striking a delicate balance between traditionalists and reformists: implementation may be stymied by resistance, as in Germany with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and key authors resisting the recent reform of German spelling (reported in the *Washington Post* supplement to the *Guardian Weekly*, August 17, 2000). Norwegian policy does not seek to stem the flow of loans, if these meet a specific need, but to maintain the essential character and coherence of Norwegian. Research in each of the Scandinavian countries documents how loan words are not only adapted as regards pronunciation and spelling but that semantic change frequently occurs: *box/boks*, *cakes/kjeks*, *interface/interface*, are not identical in meaning in their original and adopted senses.

Loan words are 'culture's emissaries', to use the term used by two Danish researchers (Hansen & Lund 1994), quoting a nineteenth-century Danish scholar who saw words bringing innovation in the domains of Christianity, science, art and industry. This metaphor demonstrates the fact that when language planners distinguish between corpus planning, the nuts and bolts of the language, and status planning, the uses to which languages are put, the concepts create the impression that the two types of activity can be kept apart, whereas they presuppose and mutually reinforce each other. Thus the Danish Language Council has a mandate to do corpus planning, and has hith-

erto ostensibly chosen to steer clear of status planning (and of educational language planning). However, when choosing how to receive 'culture's emissaries', or when ignoring them, the Council is in fact engaged in status planning. Our present-day emissaries represent words, genres, and domains.

What Sandøy stresses from his vantage point in Norway, a country that has been much more proactive in language policy than Denmark, is that language planners are crucially involved in the management of our cultural ecology. Our fragile linguistic heritage is under onslaught from market and state mechanisms which are eliminating hundreds of languages worldwide (the 'black death of languages'), though strong forces are seeking to maintain the rich diversity of our linguistic ecology (see Posey 1999, Skutnabb-Kangas 2000, Maffi 2000, and the Terralingua website, <<http://www.terralingua.org>>). The struggle for survival of the world's biological species and biodiversity interlocks with the need to maintain our cultural and linguistic diversity and creativity, hence the need to challenge narrow functionalist views of language and devise policies which recognize the distinctiveness of different cultures, and can serve to counteract homogenising monolingual tendencies, so as to build on the unique contribution of each language. Language planners can contribute to this.

Loans and language policy

Erik Hansen's paper 'The good conversion word' (Danish *afløsningsord*), deals with principles for word formation in Danish when translating or adapting a loan word or concept into Danish. Hansen runs through and exemplifies all the linguistic levels involved, noting some pitfalls and the challenge of creating transparent terms that are likely to prove widely acceptable. One criterion in the Nordic countries has been to attempt to synchronise lexical innovation/conversion so that Danish, Norwegian and Swedish develop in parallel, which is often but not always achieved. He also provides examples of efforts over two centuries to maintain the character of Danish by purists (see Hansen & Lund 1994). His experience as chair of the Danish Language Council is that in Denmark there is massive popular resistance to firm language policy. In his view to launch a programme 'to protect the linguistic environment is unthinkable and to change

people's attitudes would take two centuries' (p. 101). All that the Danish Language Council can do is to 'help and inform when asked to do so' (ibid.). This conviction must have made it difficult for Hansen to envisage any follow-up to the conference that would have any impact on the way Danish is developing.

I find this stance disingenuous, because Hansen has been a prolific and influential author on language topics for decades, and because of the meshing of corpus and status planning (for instance the dialects of Danish have never been regarded by the Council as a national resource, and their vitality has suffered as a result of ignoring them). The Council answers thousands of queries from the general public each year, publishes authoritative reference works, and advises the government on policy. Thus all employees of the Danish state, and this includes anyone employed by a university, are obliged to write 'ph.d.' in lower case in any documents. This is the law, building on advice given by the Council, which chose to maintain the principle of Danish higher education degrees being written in lower case (e.g. cand. mag. is the equivalent of MA). Their decision maintained a local tradition but did not assist the primary aim of the 1993 reform of research degrees in Denmark, which was to make them internationally comparable and acceptable.

Down-grading Danish?

Pia Jarvad's article 'The nature and quality of the influence of English' builds on extensive research into borrowing in modern Danish. She prefaces her remarks by stressing that the statistics on amounts of loan use tend to be interpreted as being major or minor depending on what one is contrasting, and on attitudes to the phenomena. She provides detailed exemplification of English influence on pronunciation, spelling, grammar, vocabulary and 'use'. She refers to her own dictionary of new words in Danish 1955–1998 (Jarvad 1999), a breakdown of which (p. 110) shows that there are

- 5% loans from languages other than English
- 13% words or phrases that retain their English form
- 14% hybrids, with one English element
- 2% pseudo-English words
- 9% translation or semantic loans from English
- 57% new Danish creations.

In her commentary she is keen to stress that the figures vary substantially in different genres and that the descriptive categories involved can lend themselves to a variety of interpretations. However, Jarvad is in no doubt that loss of domains, when Danish is replaced by English in education, scientific writing, commerce, and administration does represent a major threat to Danish (see also Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas 1999). She points out that in the European Union the formal equality of the official languages means that Danish vocabulary has not suffered, but that the hierarchy of languages means that the 'big' languages are invariably used in the first drafts of legal documents and in lobby work. 'The right to speak your own language is valid for politicians but not in effect for civil servants. The more languages that are declared equal, the fewer the chances are that Danish, for instance, will continue to exist on an equal basis in reality. Speaking Danish in the European Union at the level of politicians and civil servants has only symbolic value.' (p. 115).

Jarvad fears that Danish is in the process of being down-graded to a language of the home, with important functions increasingly carried out in English, a language that Danes will always remain less competent in than native speakers. At the bottom of the social pile will be those unable to operate in English.

Planning for Swedish

The formulation of the Swedish language policy document drew on a lengthy consultation process and the work of five sub-commissions of 12–15 experts. These dealt with Swedish in school, Swedish in higher education and research, Swedish in the media and publishing, Swedish in the workplace and commerce, and Swedish and information technology. There has also been lively debate in the press, and the Swedish government has decided to endorse and implement the report. Minority languages in Sweden unfortunately fell outside the mandate of this exercise, which has led to appeals for a more inclusive plan. The action plan makes a series of very concrete recommendations for how Swedish can be strengthened so that it remains fully functional in Sweden and in EU institutions. The proposals cover a huge range of topics, consumer information, advisory services to improve clarity of texts, teacher education, the training of translators and interpreters,

the availability of scientific information in Swedish as well as English, improving the teaching of Swedish as a second language, etc.

It is also visionary: it assumes that Swedes need real competence in both Swedish and English, as well as having access to other languages; it specifies many research and development needs; it stresses how competence in the national language and in foreign languages can strengthen democracy; it is constructive and forward-looking rather than restrictive and defensive. It suggests how domestic legislation and a more proactive policy in the EU can lead to a healthy multilingual balance and ensure that Swedish interests are maximally promoted.

Conclusion

The published papers by the Danish scholars are still essentially conference talks, personal statements with occasional references to experience elsewhere, and few bibliographical references. Scarcely any of them refer to how the issues are treated in the sociology of language, in work on linguistic hegemony or imperialism, in the voluminous literature on the advance of English worldwide (see Phillipson 2000), or the study of how language policy is being undertaken in theoretically informed ways elsewhere, for instance in Australia, Canada, South Africa, eastern and central Europe. The most useful survey of European Union language policy matters has been produced by the European Cultural Foundation (1999).

Perhaps one cannot expect this from a 'debate book', but it means that many of the conclusions and prognoses are not bolstered by concepts and methods evolved elsewhere. The papers document trends and attitudes, some build on substantial amounts of empirical work, and nearly all engage in crystal-ball gazing that lures them away from their positivistic base. This ironically results in contributors making 'political' statements that would be anathema in their primary professional paradigm as grammarians or lexicographers. Several statements in the brief concluding comments of the editors – for instance, 'English is today the language that people speak and write when they do not have the same mother tongue' – are eminently falsifiable and not even true within Denmark let alone globally.

The nature of the scholarship presented here also reflects the fact that there are virtually no

posts in academia in Denmark in the sociology of language, in multilingualism, in language policy. In political science, anthropology, education, or development studies few if any focus on language issues. This in part explains the text therefore being locally rich but globally poor. It contributes little to theory or a rigorous understanding of how language policy can be handled in political and academic discourse. Danish vacillation means that the admirable Swedish text is reproduced in the book but its relevance in Denmark is not pursued. There is no catalogue of research needs, no hint of how a democratic language policy might build on all the languages now spoken in Denmark, no indication of how language policy might be brought higher up on political and academic agendas. In Australia this happened when a crisis of national identity brought together a range of constituencies. In the Netherlands a far-sighted business sector did key prompting, as is happening in the United Kingdom, see Nuffield Foundation 2000.

Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' is a tragedy that ends with the stage littered with corpses. If a linguistic rerun of this scenario in Denmark is to be avoided, much more resolute language policy is needed. ■

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SNIPPETS 3

A TESOL success

An extract from 'Convention Report', by Raguilli Savadogo, an English teacher in Burkina Faso in West Africa, on attending the 34th Annual TESOL Convention in Vancouver, Canada, in March 2000.

... In another session, *Training EFL Teachers in Hard Circumstances*, Mercedes Rossetti depicted the teaching conditions in Argentina and showed how desperate both teachers and students are there. In this regard the acronym TENOR (Teaching English for No Obvious Reason) is very significant. To some extent, teachers in my country are facing the same situation.

... At the Non-Native English Speakers in TESOL Caucus gathering, I made the acquaintance of many Black professionals. One of the purposes of this association is to encourage the members to attend and present at TESOL conventions. Particular attention was given to Mamadou Montagha Diop of Senegal and me, as we were the only Black people from Africa, and we were encouraged to send articles about the teaching conditions in our countries. We exchanged addresses and committed ourselves to keeping in touch.

... But above all, the trip was a professional dream fulfilled. The cosmopolitan atmosphere and the warmth that prevailed throughout the TESOL convention awakened me to a new sense of community of interest and commitment. For someone like me, who is used to working under difficult conditions, it was very encouraging to realize that one's efforts, far from being isolated and useless, do contribute to the achievement of a world-wide purpose (to help people use English for communication).