



Parliament Building in Brasilia, capital of Brazil

This was first published in Faria, Neide de (ed.) 1995. *Language and Literature Today: Proceedings of the XIXth Triennial Congress of the International Federation for Modern Languages and Literatures*. Brasilia: Universidade de Brasilia. Vol. 1. 373-381.

TRANSLATIONAL IMPACT ON LANGUAGE CHANGE AND QUANTATIVE VS QUALITATIVE METHODS IN RESEARCH

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This article addresses interlinguistic and intercultural influence, consequent language change, and qualitative vs quantitative methods in research into it.

Today, all national cultures are affected by others in terms of language and outlook. The influence is polydirectional: all cultures are under foreign influence. In this context, I shall focus on interlingual communication as a force in language change, using the Nordic countries, notably Denmark, as a paradigmatic example for my discussion.

Situated in Western Europe, the Nordic countries are: Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Denmark. Finland is not discussed because the Finnish language falls outside the pattern discussed.

The Nordic countries became independent nations in the 7th to the 10th centuries under central governments, were christianised, and then saw unruly periods with civil wars and unease between aristocracy and kings. The 15th century saw a short-lived political union. The 16th the introduction of Lutheranism. Then came peaceful agrarian reforms, urbanisation. The 19th century saw the rise of the middle classes, improved infrastructures, improved education, the rise of democracy and nationalism. Despite the Second World War, the 20th century has

been dominated by general prosperity.

All the Nordic languages belong to a subgroup of Indoeuropean called 'Northern Germanic', deriving from Germanic on a par with West Germanic - which is the root of, for instance, German, English, Frisian, and Dutch. Nordic, or 'Norse', is preserved on Iceland, whereas Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian have had separate developments, but no more so than it is possible for us to communicate - albeit with trepidation - using our respective languages.

So if the Nordic nations had been developing countries, what they proudly flaunt as distinct national languages would have been classified as regional dialects belonging to the same tongue.

Since the introduction of Christianity, these languages have been subject to outside influence. First the Latin of the Christian clergy introduced words such as 'biskop', 'pave', 'kalk', and 'mur' ['bishop', 'pope', 'chalk', and 'wall']. ...// 374 ... Later the proximity and trade with Germany made for the use of Low German words relating to trade: 'handel', 'told' ['trade', 'customs/dues'], to crafts, such as 'slagter', 'skomager' ['butcher', 'shoemaker'], and to urban life and social class: 'borger', 'greve', 'hertug' ['burgher', 'count', 'duke']. The period 1500-1700 saw French and high German words, reflecting developments in military matters: 'oberst' and 'soldat' ['colonel', 'soldier'], and in international concepts such as 'opera', 'teater' ['opera', 'theatre'] and so on.

Continental influence continued until around 1900. Since then the Anglo-American influence has been dominant.¹

This is the period under discussion.

In the Nordic countries everybody has a radio, television, and subscribes to a newspaper.²

These countries are heavily dependent on foreign trade. Although Sweden has iron, and Denmark and Norway some oil, they must import other raw materials for industry. They also import most entertainment. A considerable portion of the news are of foreign provenance. There is no illiteracy.

In stating these facts, I also hint at channels or media for foreign linguistic influence on the Nordic languages:

Nordic language users will receive foreign language messages, for instance,

(a) through television where more than 50 per cent of the programmes are in foreign languages. They are subtitled for the benefit of viewers who do not understand the original.

(b) through the radio - especially in the heavily americanised music and entertainment programmes, and

(c) through reading - newspapers, magazines, manuals, and books, fiction or non-fiction: The Nordic countries are the most translating and the most reading cultures in the world.

In brief, people receive foreign influence through the eye - reading. Through the ear - on the radio. And both auditively and visually via television, via films and

via videotapes.

This intercultural communication is taken care of by linguistic mediators.

Professional mediation came into existence with mass media, first with mass book production in the last century, where so much was translated that people could actually eke out a living from translating. Today there are various types of full- or part-time professionals in the Nordic societies: Legal translators interpreting at courts and translating legal documents. Permanent staff at the European Communities. Literary translators who may also be critics and editors. Subtitlers for films, television and video companies. Simultaneous conference interpreters at meetings and humble community interpreters without formal training mediating on behalf of immigrants.

There are more people involved: much news is foreign. Usually foreign news is handled, translated and edited by journalists.

Most people in the Nordic countries speak at least one foreign language, above all English, tolerably well. Awareness of foreign languages and knowledge of one or several languages among the language users is not a matter of prestige and status, but a prerequisite for the survival of the society - and the culture. Since these societies are functionally bilingual in many respects, most citizens are sometimes required to act as linguistic mediators, for instance, when they help a tourist along and when they render the contents of something originally delivered in a foreign language into their own. ...// 375 ... It is therefore hard to draw a line for professionalism. No law prohibits a journalist whose English is bad - and whose Danish is worse - from rendering English into poor and sloppy Danish.



Headquarters of one of the Danish dailies at the main square of Copenhagen

And even the best linguistic middleman, translator, subtitler, and interpreter may commit errors.

My contention is that directly or indirectly - by means of interlingual transfers, bad as well as good ones - the foreign language barrage affects the Nordic languages substantially. But this is not the only force in language change. Radio came into use in the 1920s. Television in the 1960s.

In less than thirty years these mass media have done away with the wide variation in dialects. True, social mobility, new wealth, the transition from agriculture to industry, and foreign travel, have also contributed to this change, but the uniformity of the language now spoken is due to the mass media, in all likelihood both because the mass media use the oral rather than the written medium as well as the fact that announcers, anchormen and the like tend to come from the relatively educated strata of society.

Does this make for less variation ?

In phonetics, yes. In linguistic width, possibly not: for there is also an emergence of new sociolects, of new jargon which is impenetrable to the uninitiate. There is the jargon of the discjockeys in entertainment, of sports fans, of hobbyists. The politicians have their sociolects, the delegates at the European Communities have theirs, and so on. Once we called it 'jargon', now it is 'Language for Special Purposes'. Or why not 'sociolects' as they are confined to social groups with much the same professional background?

The foreign influence on these sociolects varies. Entertainment and technology are extremely sensitive to influence from the US. Agriculture and national literatures seem to be rooted in native culture. In many parts people can watch television from the other Nordic countries and here there is Nordic influence. The cultural elite are also subject to influence from the other Nordic countries because of the ancient cultural and linguistic bonds. The eurocrats have developed a sociolect which smacks of English words, French convolutions and German syntax.

The sociolects also vary in terms of permanence: the sociolects of the entertainment industry are found in subtitles, in tabloid newspapers and pop magazines: it is oral, easily forgotten. Conversely, the sociolect of the Nordic cultural elite finds its way into national newspapers, journals, and interviews on television. The sociolects of the eurocrats are rarely heard in public, yet ultimately they become part of the permanent, written law of the country. There is no direct relationship between the foreign language influence on the individual and its impact in the national language.

You may object that I'm not discussing standard language, but merely variants which are heavily influenced by other languages. I agree: in my view, no word of foreign provenance is Danish until it is used by one Dane to another Dane in a purely Danish context. ...// 376 ...

But I do not decide what constitutes standard Danish.

Who does?

Above all, it is the language users. Let me offer you three Danish examples of

changes in words and idioms made by the general users.

Formerly there was a distinction in personal address between the polite 'De' and the informal 'du', as in Spanish 'Vd' vs 'tu', French 'vous' vs 'tu', etc. Around 1970, a 'du'-revolution swept all Scandinavia, so that the 'du'-form became dominant overnight.³

Five years ago people started using the adverb 'rimelig' meaning 'reasonable' in the sense of 'extremely, highly'. It was unnerving not to know whether a person who was "rimelig stærk" was just 'moderately strong' or simply 'unbeatable'. Of course, one wouldn't want to check it out the hard way.

There are numerous subtle and surprising language changes: I do translation classes. In one of my classes six years ago the Danish source article had it that a ferry-boat had cost "godt 600 million kroner". Half my students translated this as if the ferry cost less than 600 million kroner instead of the correct 'slightly more than'. I corrected the error. There were pained protests. I always use democracy to suppress dissident views, so we had a referendum. Surprise: half the students agreed with the rebels. I contacted the Danish Language Council, our supreme court of appeal in language matters. They informed me that they had, in fact, registered a change in the meaning of the expression between people aged more - or less - than 45. This is an odd change. In real life, such a shift in sense makes quite a difference.



A history of the Danish Language Board

This last example, then, takes us to my methodological point, the use of qualitative vs. quantitative factors in the recording of language change.

Unlike Iceland, which does not accept loanwords and uses Norse equivalents, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark boast of no rigorist Academie Nordique which forces us to abstain from Nord-English.

The Danish situation is typical. There have been flexible language norms since the the 17th century. The present century saw the publication of the authoritative and descriptive dictionary of Danish, ODS, covering Danish from 1700 to 1955 and comprising nearly 150,000 words, all of them recorded from written sources by conscientious scholars on slips of papers with the sentences in which they occurred, that is, by qualitative methods, which, by sheer mass, also constitute a communal quantative effort. After the completion of the Danish Dictionary, Parliament set up The Danish Language Council to keep track of the development of Danish. It has a staff of 5 who will patiently record new words and meanings in Danish. They are empowered to be prescriptive in terms of spelling by means of the 'Danish Orthographical Dictionary'. They also answer questions about linguistic usage in writing or by phone. They may recommend specific usage, but never dictate it.

The Council is officially only descriptive - and yet, by means of its records it also determines what is Danish.

How do the staff work? ...// 377 ...

Mostly by recording excerpts, that is words and the sentences in which they occur, from their own reading. Being academics, they find the new words in literate newspapers, in the news, in literature. In other words: the recording system is geared towards the educated Dane. Children's books get scant attention.

Let me give you an example of what this implies.

Fifteen years ago, I listened to the radio. The news was about a state gaining independence and the setting up of "en overgangsregering". The word was perfectly understandable. Only I had not heard it before. It used to be 'interimsregering' or 'interimsstyre'. So I phoned the Language Council about this new word, clearly a translation loan from English 'transition government'. So the Language Council listened to the radio, and lo and behold, there it was on file within a few days.

This is not to poke fun, but to make some points: First, the medium was oral, and hence transitory. Secondly, many people must have had heard the word without realising that this was a new form because it was so perfectly understandable. And, thirdly, it shows how the recording of new words and meanings depends on pure coincidence. In this case, the word must originate in a creative journalistic translation, but whether it was first in a newspaper, on the radio, or on the telly, we shall never know. It clearly caught on.

There are, thus, situational limitations on recordings in terms of sources available, and, of course, their place in time and space, personality and interests. It also depends on their orientation: all the Nordic Language Councils cooperate closely. Formerly they therefore often tended to ascribe new words first to other Nordic languages, even in cases where the English or American original were easily identifiable by scholars of English.

Two years ago work on the New Danish Dictionary was started (*Language International* 4 # 1, (1992), 17). It will cover the whole vocabulary of Danish from 1955 to 1993. In addition to the excerpts in the collections of the Language Council, the dictionary staff will use large corpora, namely one of 40 million words and, on top of this, files from newspapers. In other words, here we meet with a quantitative approach from the start.

These quantitative data will make for more reliable word-counts and frequency lists. They will also (a) make the dating of 'first appearance' of words more precise, (b) make for seemingly 'more objective' establishment of when a loan transmitted from other cultures does become 'Danish' no matter what definition we use, and (c) make for a more precise identification of the fringe areas of the language.

But I doubt that they will objectively furnish us with more precise information about 'correct', let alone 'desirable' Danish usage. The qualitative approach is not sufficiently critical and does not discriminate sufficiently well between levels of

comprehensibility. Neither will the quantitative approach furnish researchers with any reliable information about how the changes in Danish come about. The problem being that the data will not normally furnish the situational information as to whether a given usage may be influenced by foreign languages or not. ...// 378 ... If the former is the case, the data will confuse recording phenomena embedded in legitimate language usage with "interlanguage errors", typical of translation work, and which may or may not affect the target language permanently: at all events, it is, at most 'language change *in process*' rather than *in fact*.

Linguists and translationalists can guess, but not say with certainty, what influenced a journalist, or an author and whether we are dealing with "translationese" or not. Other language users are helpless.

Let me exemplify:

An article about illegal immigration in the US in the Danish national daily which is most conscious of linguistic usage ran as follows: "Indsmuglingen af mennesker er overtaget af mafialignende organisationer... som når de handler med narkotika, "renser" uhyre pengesummer. På det sidste har kystvagten *fanget* seks fartøjer ... som var ved at bringe *ulovlige kinesiske indvandrere* i land."⁴ (*Weekendavisen*, 25 June-1 July 1993). The author was the newspaper's Washington correspondent who must have used, indeed literally translated, American sources.

When excerpted for use in the dictionary corpus, the newspaper will be cited - not the identity of the writer. It will also be impossible to recognise the larger context of the article revealing that there is a non-Danish source text somewhere behind it.

This example is not unique. On the contrary. In some translation classes I pick a daily at random and have my students find traces of linguistic usage from foreign languages and hypothesise about their origin (source and media for transfer). This exercise is an eye-opener: it shows not only that the media used for the intercultural exchanges and the middlemen's work affect Danish. It also shows how insensitive Danes, namely my students, may have become to the subtle changes and how it will ultimately affect their own language.

What is then the specific foreign influence on the Nordic languages ?

There is considerable influence at the word level, as the front page of a national daily shows (*Politiken*, 7 July 1993). I disregard the date of the first recording of the words, but merely use them to illustrate the linguistic impact of foreign language knowledge and all types of translational work.

There are direct loans from English: 'service' 'computer';

direct loans adapted a bit to Danish spelling: 'præsident for Hells Angels' (as noted by Stig Johansson, this feature is found much more in Norwegian than in Danish and Swedish);

direct loans making new formations: 'computer-kommunikation', 'computersnak' ['talking about computers'];

translation loans or calques: 'netværk' ['network'];

Extension of meaning: 'Der blev gjort massive fund af salmonella-inficeret kød.' ('massive' in the sense of 'large' was formerly unusual in Danish).

Collectors of loans will know that there are more types from the publications of individual scholars with an English-language background (*Nye ord i dansk* (publications of neologisms by the Danish Language Council); Sørensen; Pedersen 1990; Galberg Jacobsen 1993).

There are also changes in points of syntax.

Thirty years ago the absence of the definite article in the combination of age + name as in "this is due to the efforts of 7-year old Brian" was noted as new (see Galbjerg Jacobsen 1993). ...// 379 ... It derived from sociolects connected with the entertainment industry (its magazines and Anglo-American sources). And with sports, for all Nordic sports-journalists go to England in wintertime when the inclemencies of our Nordic climates do not allow for our beloved outdoor football matches. Galberg Jacobsen (1993) reports that this feature has no ambitions to move outside these genres, but the literary magazine of the serious *Weekendavisen* had a string of names without the articles 10 September 1993: 2, c. 4. So it moves after all.

But I suggest that the language changes in syntax are more sweeping than usually suggested in loan-word research. Disregarding a number of points concerning word classes and word-order which others have discussed (Sørensen 1973: 59-74; Hjørnager Pedersen 1983/1988; Sørensen 1987), I find the following ones the most marked ones.

The use of 'man' for an indeterminate, human subject ("one") has almost disappeared. Today, it has been replaced by 'du' and the passive voice. Both modes of expression must be due to the use of 'you' or the passive voice in the English-speaking world (Sørensen 1973: 68; Dollerup 1978: 53-54). By now the use of the passive is so widespread that it is no longer considered worthy of scholarly debate (Galster Jacobsen 1993)

It may also be that the 'du'-revolution which hit all of Scandinavia - at the same time - was ultimately of English/American origin, if it was inspired by the uniform use of "you" in address in English. If so, it would not be the only example of the 'same end result' of Anglo-American influence due to linguistic transfers in all Nordic languages at more or less the same time - a feature noted by e.g. Sørensen, 1973: 96.⁵

And finally, there has, in my subjective opinion, been a remarkable reduction in the sentence-length of idiomatic Danish. True, this could perhaps also be due to the orality of television and broadcasting, but the hypothesis could be checked by comparing sentence-lengths in Danish at ten-year intervals. Perhaps the large corpora may help determine whether my hypothesis is correct. I doubt it, though. For the large corpora will connect with the elitish texts, including complex sentence formations found in legal documents. Unless of course, somebody

deliberately checks on the feature with my hypothesis in mind.

In conclusion, then: In terms of methodology, we should first make the obvious point that the quantitative methods do sometimes - and often too blatantly for sensitive scholars - prove that something which has been accepted on a qualitative basis is incorrect. In most cases, however, quantitative methods are not useful without critical discrimination, perhaps a formulation of hypotheses on a qualitative basis. On the other hand, it is certainly possible to have a fruitful interplay, when quantitative results are assessed sensibly. Let me be explicit again: provided the corpora covering Danish are handled with care, they will probably show that Danish is more fluid and more tolerant than prescriptive teachers - including me - will accept. The qualitative assessment is that there must be teaching which is deliberately and explicitly prescriptive. ...// 380 ... Especially in translation, for otherwise one of the cornerstones in intercultural mediation will go down the drain: the definition of what is good in the target language and the definition of the ideal - perhaps an unattainable one - one must strive for in interlingual transfer work.

The other lesson is that we cannot be dogmatic. There are continual language changes, not only in the Nordic countries, but all over the world. Part of them can be ascribed to the internationalisation of messages. These changes are not exclusively due to poor linguistic transmission. They are also due to creativity in linguistic middlemen, a creativity dictated by the needs and the possibilities of their chosen media and by the need to be understood by the end users of the transmitted messages. And last, but not least, to the fact that we are watching a world in change where both source languages and target languages must comprise and describe new phenomena and other cultures, and where life is easier when they are understood all over the world in the global village.⁶

Endnotes

1. The influence of English on the Nordic languages is discussed in numerous publications. The titles of the articles of *Språk i Norden in 1989* (= *Nordisk språksekretariats skrifter 10*) are illustrative: "Danish under an Anglo-American spell?", "English influence on Faeroese", "Anglo-American influence on Icelandic", "English in Swedish", "Fighting Anglo-Norwegian", "English loans in Finnish" (My translations).

2. There are of course variations, depending on the definition of the parameters, but they are small by international standards.

3. The 'du'-revolution is discussed in detail in Hansen 1992. It seems as if it made its appearance in Sweden before it did in Denmark. Since c. 1990, there has been a

come-back for the 'De'-forms, promoted mostly in shops, post offices and banks.

4. "renser" is a poor calque translation of "launder" and in the context it is a wrong equivalent. "Uhyre" is a calque translation, missing out the required complementary word, in this case 'large' in Danish. "fanget" is a wrong equivalent in the collocation since only living beings can "fange" something. And in Danish, immigrants cannot be 'illegal', but they may try to gain entry illegally, whereas it is all right to be an 'illegal immigrant' in the States - linguistically speaking, of course. It is, however, possibly only a matter of time before this American usage is accepted by most Danes.

5. These occurrences may be ascribed to any combination of the following factors: (a) the phenomenon is totally new, (b) the Nordic languages being similar, they will absorb the new word in much the same way, or (c), the absorption into one language strengthens the common Nordic form in the other Nordic languages.

6. I am indebted to Henrik Galberg Jacobsen and Annette Lindegaard for valuable criticism of the article.

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A Danish wood in springtime