The British Church in Copenhagen (c. 1880)

STRATEGIES AND MECHANISMS IN TRANSLATION (DANISH-ENGLISH)

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'An analysis of some mechanisms and strategies in the translation process based on a study of translation between Danish and English'.
In this case, no page divisions are cited because the lay-out was confusing.

I.0 Introductory Comments

There is a gap between literature on translation and what we meet in "teaching" or "doing" translation in classes. True enough, some books on translation contain examples of specific types of errors but others focus almost exclusively on "good translations" without telling the inquisitive reader how to make them. And in classes at translation, teaching is often bogged down by discussing nice points of grammar and semantics at the expense of an instruction of how to *translate.*

The reason is, I think, not far to seek: you cannot really teach people how to handle languages and linguistic systems, if they have no feel for the finer shades.

But even if we cannot therefore *teach* translation by one universal method, I think it is possible to demonstrate that even good translators and bad translators have techniques, strategies, in common. What is more: a more conscious exposition and discussion of such strategies and techniques may actually improve performance in translation, although it will not make somebody who is utterly unfit, brilliant overnight

II.0 The Corpus of the Present Study

The present article is based on an examination of 110 translations into both English and Danish. The translations covered five **exams** at the 'bifag', BA- level (i.e. English as a minor) at the University of Copenhagen. From the piles of exam translations at five consecutive exams, I took ten translations made by Danes and *one* by a non-Dane, usually a native speaker of English. Table 1 shows how they are distributed:

Distribution of translations in the corpus

Number of source texts	Number of translations of each source text by Danes	Number of translations of each source text by non-Danes	Total
5 from Danish into English)	10	1	55 translations from Danish into English
5 from English into Danish	10	1	55 translations from English into Danish
Total: 10 source texts	100 translations	10 translations	110 translations

At the exam, the students had 4-5 hours at their disposal for doing both source texts into the other language. The length of each source text is c. 300-330 words. This means that the total corpus analysed is of 30,000+ words, comprising 10 different source-texts and the way they were handled by 55 future language workers.

Danish students will usually have had much experience with translation in some form or other for c. 9 years (although it is used mostly for grammar drills or for checking comprehension at school prior to university).

What makes the material exceptionally good for studying strategies and processes in translation is that no dictionaries were allowed at the exam. (This was subsequently changed).

The reason for this prohibition is that the studies are geared mostly towards teaching posts and the like. And as teachers-to-be they must stand forth as passably good models for others both in their command of English (and Danish) and in their ability to translate (which is used in TEFL in Denmark).

The texts selected for the exams are purposely more difficult to translate than the average Danish and English texts, and they frequently include points which appear hard even to the examiners.

III.0 Frames of Reference for Assessing Errors in Translation

At the risk of being accused of saying the obvious, I shall just stake out the ground for translation:

1. Translation is a type of cross-lingual communication where the transmission is not direct but brought about by an intermediary who is neither the sender, nor the addressee/receptor, but one whose job it is to ensure that the addressee gets a correct understanding of the sender's message.

2. Barring some exceptions within the literary field, a "good" translation should

a. reproduce the style and the contents of the source language text loyally, precisely and comprehensibly in the target language.
b. be within the target language's normal linguistic system, or at least something which passes as such: the translator's command of the linguistic system must be so good that it can pass for an idiolect, or, at the very least, an interlanguage which seems to be legitimate, real, native idiolects with the receptors - never as obvious interlanguages.

Apart from obvious features like "false friends" and "interference" - a term I shall consciously avoid in the present article - most discussions of "errors" in translation tend to focus on the rendering of finer shades and the like. Here I shall focus mostly, if not in exclusively, on indisputable errors. And I shall also follow Stig Johansson in holding on to the fact that both in professional translation and at exams, specifically the corpus of my study, it is "unreasonably to require a higher degree of proficiency (foreigners) than from native speakers." [l)]

Now, then, what is then indisputably "wrong"?

As the students who have done the translations in the present corpus are to stand forth as future teachers of English, they must demonstrate that they are tolerably good models for high-school students; they must conform to the linguistic norms in both Danish and English; and they must be able to comprehend and render messages couched in syntactical and lexical features and correspondences into another language.

The hierarchy of errors we get is therefore at variance with "communicative competence". True, we know that lexical errors are more apt than syntactical ones to bring about a distortion between what was meant and what is actually expressed for the addressee to decode. But in a translation, syntactical errors are not loyal to the source-language text, provided it is written in standard language, no matter whether the sense gets through or not: poor syntax reflects on the addressee's idea of the sender and - perhaps - on the translator. In this sense, translation is transmission of messages in a social context: translation is a social act.

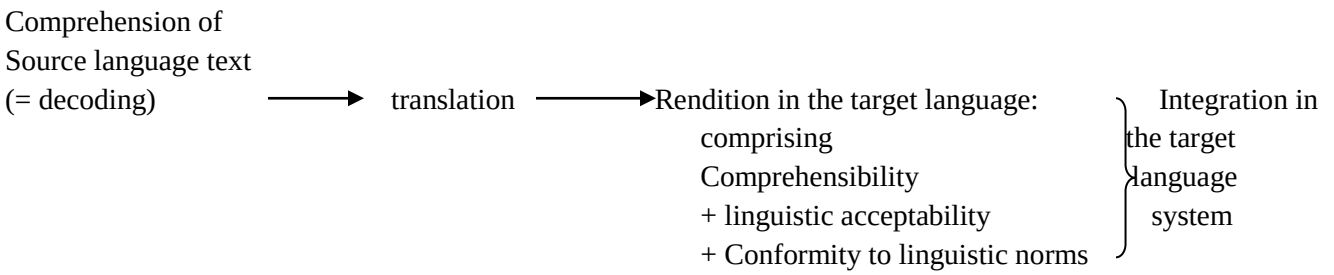
In principle we can set up any hierarchy of errors. For the purposes of the present discussion, it appears to be most useful to base the main axis on the *content* relationship between the source language text and the target-language text. We thus get the following tentative and overlapping hierarchy:

1. Complete reversal of original meaning;
2. Incomprehensible rendition;
3. Nonsensical or self-contradictory rendition of original meaning;
4. Major distortion, but comprehensible;
5. Minor distortions and comprehensible;
6. "Correct" translation.

It must be stressed that the above hierarchy is *tentative*: it covers both decoding (comprehension of the source text) and the final translation (entailing command of the target language), and it can be un-

covered only by collating the target-language text with the source-language text. In theory - and sometimes in practice - a translation covering several of these errors (e.g. 1, 3, 4, 5) may read smoothly in the target language: unless the two texts are collated, nobody will know that the translation is disloyal to the sender, and that, consequently, the translation is not a truthful social act.

From the above comments it is possible to set up a model that can serve as a point of departure for discussion of errors in translation with one individual translator:



This furnishes us with the last premise for the following discussion: errors in translation are due to

1. Incomplete or erroneous decoding of the sender's message in the source language. It could be argued that errors based on this are really "intra-lingual". But in the present context, where we deal with translation, these errors tell in the expression, and they therefore run counter to the principle of loyalty to the sender: they appear, and must be viewed, as translation errors.

2. Incomplete expression in the target Language. Although this may be due to an incomplete command of the target language such errors are brought out by means of translation, and in the social context they are disloyal to both sender and addressee.

3. A complex interplay between the source-text and the linguistic system it belongs to, and the target-language text and the linguistic system to which it belongs, as well as an interplay between the two languages. Some errors of this type are based on transference of features from one language to another, e.g. false friends and calquing; but others are brought about by the very fact that a translation must take place, e.g. semantic decoding, synonym searches, and context derivation.

IV.0 The Hypothesis

With the above premises in mind, we can have a look at specific errors, and set up hypotheses about how they came about. The underlying principle is that if a fairly reasonable explanation offers itself for an error, then this explanation is only one out of a number of different hypotheses about what caused that particular error, not necessarily a correct description of its cause. But when the same explanatory model works as the simplest way of explaining other errors, it gains strength: not because it is correct in the cases under discussion, but because it turns out to be a fairly good model for describing the genesis a number of errors. Some of the errors used for illustrating it *may* have arisen in the way proposed; yet the picture is blurred, since many errors can be explained in more than one way, and since they are

frequently caused by several reasons, i.e. there may be more than one single cause behind an error.

From Cambridge

V.0 Discussion

In the following discussion, I shall be moving from the smallest typographical units to larger segments, and I shall often be jumping from source language to target language, as well as from minor distortions to major ones.

V.I Punctuation

The import of punctuation may be overlooked in decoding the source-language text: When ”our timetables [are] the most lucid, simple, and at the same time **comprehensive**, of any that have appeared” (henceforth used for source texts) is rendered as ‘*vores køreplaner [er] de enkleste der nogensinde er fremkommet og så er de samtidig* ***forståelige for alle,***’ (henceforth used for target-texts) they have, in Danish, become **comprehensible to all,** partly because the comma has been overlooked, partly because the translator has used semantic decoding. [2)]

The failure to decode the import of the commas in the sentence ”in a series of articles, the asterisks, footnotes, abbreviations, and what not were dilated upon, the outcome of which was to elevate Bradshaw to a national institution”, means that a translator cannot identify the agent and renders the sentence as ‘*asterisker, fodnoter, forkortelser og hvad* ***man ikke havde regnet med var at resultatet af alt dette var*** *selvfølgelig ...*’. Once more compounded by ignorance of a specific word (”dilate”), the sentence comes to mean ‘and what had not been reckoned with/counted on was that the result was ...’ (possibly because of a partial word picture, ”calculated”).

When the Danish sourcetext ”et mindre værelse, der tjente som familiens arbejdsrum **og** sønnernes værelse, og endelig et soveværelse”, is rendered in the target language as ‘*a room, which served the family as a working room, and the sons' room, and, finally, a bedroom*’, the comma after ‘working room’ is formally permissible in the English linguistic system: but it distorts the message as we get one more room in the flat in the English description than in the Danish one.

Actually, the question of punctuation is even more obvious in *calquing:* when the Danish source-text runs "en stue med reoler og en ottoman, hvor tanten sov" and this is calqued as '*a room with bookcases and a couch, upon which the aunt slept*', the Danish defining sentence is all of a sudden a non-defining aside in English, and implies that the visitors actually saw the aunt asleep.

Calqued punctuation may be an obstacle for *a good integration* in the target language: the translation '*President Roosevelt was one of those who at an early stage realised the consequences of the Japanese expansion and the Hitler regime and his Secretary of State Cordell Hull was of the same opinion*', not only disregards the scanty Danish punctuation, but also leaves the English reader gasping for breath, if not totally confused, by the number of parallels.

V.2 Spelling/Orthography

Spelling errors in translation can be logically identified only in the target language. But they can be ascribed to various causes - even when we disregard some that must be due to dyslexia.

A funny one with Danish students is influenced not by the pronunciation but by *phonetic transcription* (which they have to do as part of the study programme). E.g. 'dainingroom', 'grouth'.

Secondly, there are spellings influenced by *pronunciation* within the target-language system. They are formally wrong but not logically incorrect with the (hopelessly illogical) orthographical systems in Danish and English: e.g. (in English) '*nessecity*', '*ruf*' (for 'rough'); and (in Danish) '*appelerende*', '*tittel*', '*shok effekt*'.

Some spellings are influenced by *slurred or nonstandard pronunciation,* e.g. (in English) '*inhabitans*', '*destinctly*'; and (in Danish) '*interrasant*', and '*dramtiske*'.

Some spellings are probably influenced by other words with a somewhat similar spelling, e.g. in English '*coach*' (for 'couch'); and (in Danish) '*tømmerflod*' instead of 'tømmerflåde' (the intervening words seem to be 'coach' and 'flod' (= river)). In these cases we are dealing with what I term *partial word pictures* in the target-language systems.

The interplay between the two languages, viz. in the form of calquing, is found in spellings such as (in English) '*turist*' (for 'tourists', but influenced by Danish "turister"); in '*danish*' - instead of 'Danish'; and '*det Viktorianske England*' - instead of "Det viktorianske England': the source-language usage of minuscule vs. capital letters has been calqued. And calquing also accounts for errors in word division in translations of "juvenile lead" and "Londonpolitiets næstkommanderende" as, respectively '*ungdoms rolle*' (which should have been one word), and '*London's policedepartment's next-commanding chief*'.

Some spellings are based on *constructs,* i.e. forms whose components exist in the target language, but where the rendition is non-standard, as when we find the spellings '*Wiking-Period*' (in English), and '*glasbovler*' instead of '-bowler' (in Danish). However, the interplay between the languages at another level cannot be disregarded either: these errors are based on the frequent correspondence between Danish 'v' and English 'w', e.g. 'vin', vs. 'wine', so it could be argued that the errors cited are hypercorrect.

Some spelling errors are even *compounded:* in '*marg*' (for 'March' in English), the initial minuscule

is calqued from Danish, and the last letter points to a spelling pronunciation based on a non-standard pronunciation in English.

The Royal Theatre, Copenhagen, Denmark

V.3 Individual Words and Phrases

V.3.1 Source language

V.3.1.1. Semantic/Etymological Decoding

It is obvious that in decoding the source-language text, the translators often try to identify the sense of an unfamiliar word by means of their knowledge of one well-known component in it. Translations of the Danish word ”drabelige” (i.e. impressive and somewhat terrifying), like ‘*deadly*’, ‘*deathly*’ and ‘*that can kill*’ indicate that the translators took the noun from which it is derived, ”drab” (a killing/murder) as their point of departure.

This type of *etymological/semantic decoding* can be difficult to pinpoint because it may be based on unexpected parts of the problematic word. The Danish sentence, ”ydmyghed ... der kendetegnede danske bønder” comes out as follows: ‘*the humbleness ... which located Danish peasants*’ and as ‘*the humbleness which was significant for Danish peasants*’. Meaning ‘typical of’, the word ”kendetegnede” has been unknown. The first translator presumably focused on ”EGN”, i.e., district, locality, etc., (”kendet**egn**ede”) and then tried to make sense of it; the other one seems to have zoomed in on ”TEGN”, i.e. sign, signal, (“kende**tegn**ede”) and made use of this.

Semantic decoding may cause serious distortions: when ”an unindicted conspirator” is translated as ‘*en uskyldig [i.e.innocent] medsammensvoren*’, it is presumably based on a derivation within the correct semantic sphere of ”indict”, possibly because ‘skyldig’ has surfaced as the outcome of a synonym search in Danish around the verb ‘at anklage’ (i.e. ”accuse”, ”bring to court”, or ”indict”).

V.3.1.2 Partial Word Pictures

Akin to the semantic/etymological decoding are the cases where it is obvious that a word which has some typographical or orthographical features in common with the source-language word interferes or is somewhere in the translator’s mind.

Fairly simple examples are found when English ”exalted” comes out as ‘*overdrevent*’ and ”daunting” as ‘*vovelig*’, where there is little doubt that ”exaggerated” and ”daring” have been hovering in the background. And when the Danish word “overlevering” (= the oral tradition) is rendered as ‘*delivery*’ this is due to confusion with the words ”aflevering” or ”udlevering” in Danish.

A small subgroup which it is difficult to bracket exclusively in the source-language system is the *partial word translation,* as when ”although” is rendered as ‘*selv*’ (even (though)) instead of the correct ‘selv om’.

V.3.1.3. Context derivation

Another strategy is *context derivation.* This is frequent in the corpus, but the examples, inevitably, long. One example must suffice: the word ”daunting” about a book with long lists of names is rendered as ‘*kedelig*’ (i.e. ”boring”) - not at all a bad guess. But at times it leads to major distortions, and in some cases, where the translator is weak on vocabulary, it simply becomes the main prop for a translation, which may even read fluently.

V.3.2 Words in the Target Language

V.3.2.1. Constructs

As hinted (in section V.2) *constructs* are words which follow accepted rules for e.g. spelling, conjugation, and word formation in the source- and target-language systems, but where the actual words in the translated text are non-standard words made up by the translator. They are clearly based on transfer of learning and related to legitimate linguistic creativity on a par with what we find in children’s language. Typical examples are, e.g. - in English - an ‘*advocator*’ and ‘*a commandor*’ where the verbs are combined with the Latin-derived agent suffix. The English suffix is found in, e.g. ‘*opposer*’ (instead of ‘opponent’). In Danish we meet with examples like ‘*sammensværger*’. But in these cases there is no impediment to understanding, only disloyalty towards the sender as the word sounds funny or clumsy.

In so far as constructs are totally non-existent words, as when ”an element of sanctuary” is rendered by ‘*et element af sanktuaritet’*, however, communication breaks down.

Arguably contamination belongs to this category, e.g. ‘*undoubtedly*’. And sometimes constructs - like other errors - are compounded with other categories: in ‘*law obeydiance*’ (instead of ‘law-abidingness’), the construct is based on the spelling of the verb and a component calque translation.

V.3.3 Errors in the Interplay Between the Two Languages

Most errors presuppose interplay between the two linguistic systems, even though some of them are particularly prominent in either the source-language decoding or the target language-expression.

V.3.3.1 False Friends and Partial Word Pictures

One type which has been discussed extensively in the literature on translation is *false friends.* In my view the term should be used only about words which have an almost complete orthographical identity in the two languages but differ in semantic content.

Accordingly there is a false friend in the translation '*komfort var en* ***prioritet***' for "Comfort was a priority", because the Danish word 'prioritet' means "mortgage"; and in '*de eksalterede* [i.e. overexcited] *mystikere*' for "the exalted mystics".

When "Cordell Hull **delte** [i.e. shared] hans syn" is translated as '*Cordell Hull* ***delt*** *with his point of view*', the false friend is also influenced and contaminated by the English expression "to deal with".

But with the stringent definition given to false friends here, the rendering '*de eskalerede* [i.e. escalated] *mystikere*' shows a transference of *a partial word picture.* And the same goes for the translation of "fredens sag" (i.e. the cause of peace) as '*the sake of peace*'.

V.3.3.2 Calques

Calques are also found at this level (and one might of course argue that a false friend is actually an orthographical calque). They often combine with others. The Danish translation '*tidstabeller*' (instead of 'køreplaner' or 'togplaner') for "timetables" [for trains]" is a construct, although there seems to be some influence from an (associative) wrong equivalent, viz. 'tidstabeller [for planes]'. And when "offergave" (i.e. offering) is rendered as "*offerpresent*', it is a calqued (component) translation, combined with a false friend.

V.3.3.3 Component Translations

A special type of calque translation is the *component translation.* Here the source-language word or phrase is split up into its component parts.

The Danish phrase "de militaristiske diktaturstater" is thus rendered e.g. as '*the militaristic dictatorial states*', and as '*military states of dictatorship*'.

The strategy may cause a complete distortion as when "høj toldbeskyttelse" (i.e. high tariffs) is rendered as '*a high protection of the duty*'.

It goes almost without saying that it may combine with others: "misvækst" (poor harvest(s)) is rendered as component translations in both '*bad growth*' and '*poor growth*'; but in '*misgrowth*' it combines with either a false-friend prefix or partial word-picture.

V.3.3.4 Description or Function Translations

Bordering on component translation (depending on the components in the source language), but obviously neither calques, nor synonym searches, are *description or function translations* which describe the original word or its function: thus the translation '*nothing to burn*' for "ingen brændsel" (i.e. "no fuel") focuses on the uses made of fuel, while '*stealing of cars'* (instead of 'car-theft') for "biltyveri" focuses on the criminal act. One of the finest examples of this type of translation is found in a sentence which should properly have been translated as 'On an average New York has more than one homicide a day', and which is rendered as '*New York, when you take all the murders and divide them with the days of the year, had more than one murder per day*'.

V.3.3.5 Wrong Equivalents

The errors termed *wrong equivalents* can be broken down into different types whose common denominator is that somehow or other the word in the target language belongs to the same semantic sphere as the source-language word or phrase.

V.3.3.5.1 Genuine Wrong Equivalents

By *genuine wrong equivalents,* I understand those words which sometimes do have the meaning they get in the translation, but which are not adequate in that particular context or collocation. Examples of this type abound, as when "directors" (theatrical ones) are translated as '*direktører*', instead of the correct one, 'instruktører', a feature which can be illustrated as follows:

ENGLISH	DANISH
"Director"	'*direktør*' (manager)
	'**i**nstruktør' (theatrical directors)

When the Danish "offergave" (i.e. offering) is rendered as '*sacrifice*', the selection of the wrong equivalent is based on the Danish word 'offer' which splits up in English:

DANISH	ENGLISH
"offer"	'*offering*'
	'sacrifice'

Once the wrong equivalent is chosen, it may be compounded by, e.g. component translations like '*a gift of sacrifice*', and '*a present of sacrification*' - which adds a construct.

But many other equivalents are not truly genuine: the target-language equivalent will not correspond to the source-language equivalent chosen.

V.3.3.5.2 Restrictive Equivalents

Restrictive equivalents which narrow the semantic content or range in the target language are frequent. It is seen when the vague Danish "berette" (i.e. inform in any way) is rendered as '*write*' in English. The process can be illustrated as follows:

DANISH	ENGLISH
"berette" (inform)	'write' (on paper)
	'tell' (by word of mouth

Similarly, "Da vi kom" (i.e. as/when we arrived/came) is fairly vague in terms of space and time in Danish, but much more precise in the English rendering, '*When we entered*' which states that it takes places precisely when 'we' arrived. In the translation of Danish "varer" (i.e. goods) as '*wares*', it combines

with either a false friend or a (hypercorrect) partial word picture.

V.3.3.5.3 Hyperonymic Equivalents

Conversely, some translators use *hyperonymic equivalents.* This is seen when "arkæologiske fund" (i.e. finds) is rendered as '*archeological things*'; or "dash off" rendered by more colourless '*tage af sted*' (i.e. to leave). The process looks as follows:

ENGLISH		DANISH
"Dash off" (hurriedly)	→	'tage af sted' (to take leave in any way: slowly or hurriedly; go away, etc. [more options])

V.3.3.5.4 Unmarked Elements in the Source Language

In some cases an error is due to the fact that the target language has *an unmarked linguistic element,* i.e., it is non-existent or a sort of 'umbrella' element in the source language from a contrastive point of view.

Thus the English definite article,"the", splits up in four forms in Danish:

ENGLISH		DANISH	
		Common gender	WRONG
The [man/house]	→	'den' '-en'	mandet, det mand
(unmarked gender)		Neuter gender	
		'det' '-et'	husen, den hus

An unmarked element is also behind one of the major formal errors among Danes translating into English: wrong congruence between subject and verb, especially with the 3rd person singular (present tense)

DANISH	ENGLISH
sg. + pl.. present tense	I & you have/give
both: "har", "giver" etc.	He/she/it has/gives (MARKED)
	We/you/they have/give

This, thus, is behind constructions like '*Such discoveries has been made*'.

V.3.3.5.5 Vague Equivalents

There are some vague types where the target-language renditions are somehow or other within the

same semantic sphere, but fall so wide off the mark that they cannot be bracketed in the above sub-group:

V.3.3.5.5.1 Redundant Translation

An obvious type is *redundancy* especially when compounded. In cases like '*a feast of celebration*' and '*party meal*' for "festmåltid" (i.e. a banquet), there is a kind of semantic overkill based on, respectively, a false friend or partial word picture ('feast' vs. "fest"), and a wrong equivalent ('party' = "fest"), combined with uncritical calques of all components.

In other cases, it seems as if redundancy may have been introduced to clarify the meaning, i.e. to integrate the texts stylistically in the target-language system: the most frequent one with Danes translating into English is 'because of the fact that'. It is inelegant but rarely impedes understanding.

V.3.3.5.5.2 Associative Rendition

Sometimes these renderings in the correct semantic field cannot be called translations at all, but rather, *rendition by association* to another word with some common denominator.

When "at gøre korsets tegn" (i.e. 'cross oneself') is rendered as '*genuflect*', the common ground is religious gestures and movements.

And when "glass domes of wax fruit" appears as '*glasskåle* [i.e. glass bowls] *med voksfrugter*' and '*glasbowler med voksfrugter*', the domes have been turned upside down - presumably because they have been visualised, and domes with flowers etc. have been unfamiliar to the translators.

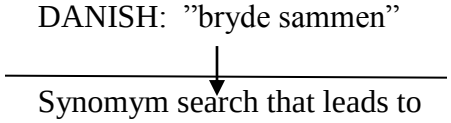
V.3.3.7 Synonym Searches

One interesting translation strategy is the *synonym search.* It is related to, and may overlap with, problems about equivalents. The basic mechanism is that the translator cannot find the exact equivalent and then focuses on finding synonyms - mostly in the source language - which can then be translated.

The process is seen in embryonic forms which overlap with restrictive equivalents when the Danish expression "færdes i [en by]" (i.e. 'move around') is rendered as '*go around*' and '*get around*' based on synonymic Danish phrases: "gå rundt" and "komme rundt", respectively.

In the expression '*a low grade of criminality*', for "en lav kriminalitet", the synonym search has uncovered "en ringe/lav grad af kriminalitet" in Danish; this leads to a calque translation, which includes a wrong equivalent, or a false friend.

"Det tyske finansvæsen brød sammen" has brought out the verb "*at krakke*" (i.e. 'to go bankrupt') and appears by means of a false friend (or partial word picture) as '*the German finances cracked*'.
The process behind the last example can be illustrated as follows:



(”at krakke” (i.e. to go bankrupt))
which is also a ‘false friend’

ENGLISH: ‘The German finances cracked’

The outcome is an English sentence that is incomprehensible.

A similar process is found with the sentence ”Det vakte uhyre forargelse i USA” (i.e. ‘It caused immense indignation in the USA’), where the synonym search brings out ”harme”, possibly by means of the frequent collocation ”at vække harme”. This leads to complete distortions:

Example 1

DANISH: ”Det vakte uhyre forargelse i USA”

Synonym search leading to
(”harme” (i.e. indignation))

English: ‘harm’ (i.e. ‘damage’, ‘injury’)
(= False friend. Noun)

ENGLISH: ‘It aroused much harm in the US’

Example 2

DANISH: “Det vakte uhyre forargelse i USA.”

Synonym search leading to
’vække harme’ (i.e. to cause indignation
= a verbal phrase that leads on to the verb
‘at harme’ which is a false friend)

ENGLISH: ‘This harmed the American people much.’

Synonym searches in the target language are clearly prompted by the attempt to make for better integration in it, or to make some kind of sense of the text. One example will suffice:

”Christianity was an exclusive raft which saved ...”,

Although the word ”raft” is unfamiliar to most translators, many were also aware that the Danish word‘en rafte’, i.e. pole with bark on often used for fences, was a ‘false friend’ that would not do. Nevertheless some used the false friend as their point of departure: in its clearest form we find ‘*en overdådig gren*’ (i.e. a branch). Another translator uses a hyperonymic equivalent, ‘*et eksklusivt hegn*’ (i.e. a fence). A third translator combines it with context derivation, viz., the verb ”saved” and emerges with ‘*en redningsplanke*’, combining the idea of rescue with the single pole.

In these synonym searches in both the source language and the target language, there is no doubt that *frequency* has a certain influence. Several translators used ‘*overdådig*’ and ‘*udsøgt*’ about the ”raft”. The explanation is that in Danish the word ‘eksklusiv’ is often used vaguely in contexts where it is almost interchangeable with ‘opulent’, ‘abundant’, notably in ‘et ekslusivt måltid’ - which to most Danes is not really truffles and rare wine, but a grand cold Danish buffet.

The white cliffs of Dover (Great Britain)

V.4 Word Classes and the Like

A few word classes stand out and should be mentioned, if only briefly.

V.4.1 Prepositions

Prepositions almost never show shift in word class, but are calqued as word class, frequently with wrong equivalents. Most often they only sound a bit odd, as when we get ‘*the natural respect to the food*’. Sometimes they combine with false friends as when ”han får æren for ...” (i.e. ‘he is credited with’) - in combination with a wrong equivalent - comes out as the slightly puzzling ‘*he is given the honour **for** …’*

In the translation of ”an increase **to** 1 shilling” as ‘*en forhøjelse **på** 1. s.*’, however, we have a distortion - the price in Danish has had the shilling added to the previous price. And the wrong equivalent for the crucial preposition in ”Modstanderne både blandt republikanerne og **i** Roosevelts eget parti, demokraterne, var af en modsat mening” introduces a third party in the serious distortion ‘*The opponents **between** the Republicans and **between** Roosevelt's own party, were ...*’

V.4.2 Articles

Another word class which is frequently calqued is articles. But Danish and English differ in their use of

articles in a number of respects. Here calquing often introduces slightly odd phrasings, and in the case of ”regeringskontorerne i Washington”, the translation ‘*the offices of the government in Washington*’ hints that there are other government offices than those in Washington in the US. This type of error is particularly obvious in the case of concrete vs. abstract nouns where Danish tends to use the definite article + a noun, and English no article.

V.4.3 Relative Pronouns

With relatives, the major source of error is the choice of a wrong equivalent. Danish ”der” and ”som” are thus virtually interchangeable, to a much higher degree than ‘that’, ‘which’, and ‘who’: this causes inelegant or awkward constructions like ‘*Denmark that/ who has been in contact with the rest of Europe .. is influenced*’. And the erroneous equivalent may distort the message. In the Danish sentence ”Værdigheden understregedes af menneskenes holdning, som ikke led under”, the relative refers to ”holdning” (i.e. ‘attitude’), but it is transferred to the people in ‘This *was emphasised by the attitude of these people, who did not suffer from ..*’.

V.4.4 Verbs and Temporal Aspects

It is obvious that verbs are sometimes *constructs* in their form, e.g. ‘*publicate*’ instead of ‘publish’; or in their conjugations, e.g. ‘*hided*’ for ‘hid’ [past tense of ‘to hide’].

Calquing is particularly obvious with the auxiliaries: In a phrase like ”*London can still be happy*” for ”London kan ... glæde sig”, this is probably caused by a false friend. There is little doubt that this problem is caused by the orthographical and frequently also semantic similarity between Danish and English auxiliary verbs.

One point where the two languages differ is in the use of extended tenses which are rare in Danish. In Danish target-language texts, calquing of extended tenses usually only makes for clumsy reading. But the feature is interesting for another reason: it is one of the few places in my corpus where we arguably deal with translation errors which are based on *hyper-correctness,* especially in translation from Danish into English. And it may lead to distortion: in the phrase in the Danish source text ”Når udviklingen nu går den gale vej ...”, things are going downhill. But in the translation: ‘*When the development is now turning in the wrong direction*’, the process is taking place right now, partly because of an associative rendering of the verb.[3)]

There is a highly problematic area that concerns the tenses and temporal aspects in translations between Danish and English.

Some errors can be explained as calquing of the tenses. Thus, for instance, some translations into English sound somewhat puzzling, until it is realised that the translator has failed to render the Danish historical present into its usual, correct English equivalent, viz., the past tense.

Generally speaking the problem is often caused by calquing the word-class, so that e.g. a source-language verb is rendered by another verb. The equivalent in the target language may even be correct, but either the verb selected or other features in the context distort the original idea.

The sentence ”the public was persuaded that ...” is dynamic in the larger English (source)context (i.e.

”because”), but the Danish rendering ‘*offentligheden var overbevist om* ...’ is static, partly because of the choice of a wrong genuine equivalent (and - in this context – also a ‘false friend’). The Danish sentence ”de til guderne indviede hvide okser” is durative, but partly because ”indviede” (i.e. ‘consecrated’) has been translated by an associative rendering, the English counterpart ‘*the white oxen prepared for the gods*’ is punctual and concrete.

The phenomenon involves prepositions, articles, nouns, adverbs, combined with synonym searches, calquing, etc. Accordingly, one simple example must suffice to illustrate its existence: in the English text, the author cites a number of instances of dark colours in decor, then to say ”wallpaper ... was **again** dark of colour”, i.e. again = ‘too’, ‘also’. One Danish translation disregards the contextual meaning and translates by a genuine equivalent in ‘*Tapet .. blev igen mørkt i farven*’, i.e. once more, and thus introduces an extraneous temporal aspect.

V.5 Errors in Segments

Although several of the examples cited show serious distortions and thus affect the contents of the message transmitted, it is, nevertheless, appropriate to focus on the failure to attain a good integration of the message in the target language in a way which is loyal to the sender.

Most errors at this stage are stylistic, and because they are obvious, I disregard them in the present context and focus on a few examples of distortion affecting the message in the source language.

Subordination presents a problem, especially when it involves calquing of words, word-order, or component translations. It is particularly striking in connection with adjectival components and nouns: the rendering of ”lidt dåsefisk i tomatsauce” as ‘*a little fish in tomato sauce from a tin*’ - a calqued component translation - makes only the sauce come from the tin. ‘*The criminal statistics*’ for ”kriminalstatistikken” (i.e. ‘the crime statistics’), another component translation including a wrong equivalent in the adjectival false friend, may be a true description of the actual state of affairs, bur is not loyal to the original. And I would not like to live in a town where - because of a component translation and a synonym search in either the source- or the target language for the prefix of ”næst-” in of the word “næstkommanderende”, they have a ‘*vice chief of the... Police*’.

It must be stressed that the types of errors discussed this far are mostly concerned with content. And since they exist in linguistic contexts, their impact may be quite disastrous. This can be illustrated by means of two examples.

The Danish sentence, ”England og Frankrig kunne efter 1918 kun betale deres lån tilbage ved at **kræve erstatninger** af Tyskland, men det viste sig, at Tyskland måtte købe disse beløb i USA” contains the idea that the victors in World War I could repay their loans to the US only by demanding **reparations** from Germany.

By rendering the crucial word by a description translation involving a relative pronoun, the message is distorted completely in ‘*After 1918 England and France were able to pay back their loan to the US only by demanding Germany to pay for* ***what they had destroyed****.’*

One of the source texts opens with a modification: ”Although at first glance, it seems unlikely that there

was any similarity between the people of mid-Victorian England and those of the Caucasus, yet it is to be traced ...". In the Danish rendering, the first word is only a partial word translation, and it becomes an emphatic confirmation which confuses us later on when we hear about the similarities: '*Selv ved første øjekast [i.e. Even at first glance ['Selv' instead of 'Selv om']] synes det usandsynligt, at der skulle være nogen lighed mellem englændere fra midten af den viktorianske periode og folk fra Kaukasus, og alligevel kan ligheden spores.*'

But errors accumulate. In the following translated sentence calquing is the mainstay, but it combines with constructs, wrong equivalents, and erroneous collocation so that it is well-nigh incomprehensible in English: "*But positive comparations will not comfort the Britains. They want the development to move in the opposite direction*". Communication breaks down in the target-language system. In other cases, especially when a translator has used context derivation extensively, the message does make sense in the target language. There is, however, no true communication - for the message is distorted, the translation is disloyal to the sender, and misleading the addressee.

In talking about errors in translations, teachers and students often refer to sloppiness or haste. In my corpus, however, this factor seems to be insignificant: less than 100 errors cannot be explained by any of the explanatory models I have presented here.

It must be stressed, however, that the above explanatory models are not mutually exclusive, as has been repeatedly hinted: one error may be explained in various ways. One example will illustrate this: the spelling '*repared*' in a translation into English can be described as e.g. (a) a spelling pronunciation, influenced by words like 'pare' vs. ('pair') -; or (b) influenced by frequent verbs with other prefixes, e.g. 'compare' -; or (c) a partial word translation from Danish "reparere": the strategies and mechanisms outlined above are, therefore, never more than hypotheses when applied to any given error.

On the other hand, the system works: it has been tried out in classroom work in that my students analysed the corpus, and in more than 95 per cent of the cases, it has been possible to set up an explanatory model for the genesis of an error. The above breakdown in strategies and mechanisms behind errors is thus communicable and covers most of the ground.

VII.0 Pedagogical Implications

In the corpus, it has been possible to identify some students who lean heavily on specific strategies and mechanisms, i.e. they are the most reasonable explanations for an unusually high percentage of the errors. And this, in turn, points to the fact that an analysis of student translations in classroom according to these explanatory models can be used for diagnostic purposes - it is probably more useful to explain to the students what strategies they use too frequently, instead of correcting the errors without making the students aware of some underlying mechanisms which are not at all obvious.

By discussing the texts in the corpus in classroom with students in order to uncover explanations for errors, it has turned out that the heightened awareness of strategies in translation was beneficial: after 16 hours of classroom examination of translations, it was possible to find a marked improvement in student performance in translation proficiency. [3)]

VIII.0 Concluding Remarks

The corpus on which the above discussion is based suffers from one limitation in terms of general applicability: it is confined to translations between Danish and English. For all I know, there may be some strategies which are more prominent in translations between other languages, but it is beyond the scope of the present article to investigate this question.

I do argue, however,

- (a) that virtually all errors in translations can be explained in terms of fairly simplistic, identifiable mechanisms (which undoubtedly vary in mutual frequency between different languages).
- (b) that the strategies and mechanisms operate independent of individual words - they operate with widely different words and at widely different levels (e.g. calquing which is allpervasive); and they may represent a kind of subconscious (?) system present in the translators' minds.
- (c) that in so far as teaching is concerned, a careful analysis of the individual student's translation may sometimes prove useful for identifying specific weaknesses and thus be used as a diagnostic tool.
- *(d) that* ***the strategies and mechanisms will often lead to correct translations, even though it is logically impossible to prove this point: but semantic/etymological decoding, context, derivation, synonym searches, and constructs must, surely, sometimes lead to "correct" solutions instead of errors. And if this assumption is correct, a discussion and a more conscious exploitation of these mechanisms in classes on translation must be beneficial.***

I wish to make one final point: once an error has been integrated in the target-language message, it may operate at widely different levels, depending on the linguistic context. Even the minutest errors may - contentwise - have disastrous consequences for the addressee's comprehension of the text.

For this reason, I am disinclined to believe that there is anything like a clear-cut hierarchy for assessing errors.

FOOTNOTES

1. From Johansson, Stig, "The Identification and Evaluation of Errors in Foreign Languages: A Functional Approach", in (ed.) Jan Svartvik, *Errata. Papers in Error Analysis,* (Lund 1973), p. 106.

2. "source text type" is used for quotations from the source texts and '*target text type*' for quotations from the target-language translations. The quotations have sometimes been edited in order to make the error under discussion stand out.

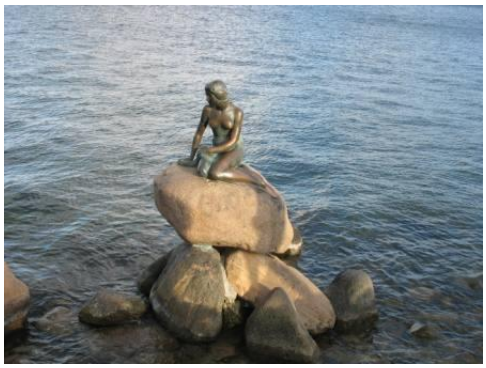
3. This was checked by having the students in class do translations at this interval as at an exam. There were two sets of source texts, and at the first exams half the students got the first set and the rest the second set. The order was reversed the next time. The sittings were mandatory for continued permission to attend class.

I am indebted to Mr. Viggo Hjørnager Pedersen and Mr. Jørgen Erik Nielsen for having corrected and marked the translations as at a normal exam. The overall improvement was 1 mark for translation from Danish into English which is quite remarkable, but none from English into Danish. The reasons for the latter are probably (a) that the students were convinced they knew Danish, (b) we check and test **expression** in the ETL text; but **decoding** in the Danish target-language text, i.e. two different things, and (c) that my classroom examinations had focused on the translations into English until then (Point (b) is traditionally overlooked by Danes).

4. It will be obvious to the careful reader that some of the English 'source texts' were originally heavily based on

British articles if not downright translations from English which the students were then asked to translate back into English. This was an old tradition and it was not until I rose to a position where set the exam papers that there was no doubt that source texts were ‘genuine’ Danish or English.

I wish to express my gratitude to the students who have participated in my classes on translation criticism based on the corpus used, and who have made significant contributions to the analyses of translation.



The statue of the ‘Little Mermaid’, Copenhagen, Denmark