

## MORE THAN LOAN-WORDS: ENGLISH INFLUENCE ON DANISH

by  
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The background to this article is the growing awareness that the impact of English on Danish calls for more than aesthetic judgment. What happens to a language if there is persistent massive influence from a dominant language? Are we witnessing the first stages of the death of a language? The lesson of the demonstration in the first half of this article is that there is more to English influence than meets the eye, or at least the untrained eye. The second half, nevertheless, predicts a long life for the Danish language, even under continued English influence. The article ends with a plea for an unprejudiced assessment of bilingualism.<sup>1</sup>

Linguistic influence follows cultural dominance. The description of language change as a reflection of cultural orientation is a traditional task of historical linguistics. But it is also possible to observe ongoing contemporary change in languages that are under strong outside influence, cultural and linguistic. The dominant language in the second half of the 20th century has of course been English. In fact it is hard to overlook the presence of English in most parts of the world. I shall take Danish as my example of the recipient or dominated language, but the same story could be told – with variations – about many other languages.

The article is concerned with vocabulary and semantic developments. I shall proceed by means of Danish examples<sup>2</sup> which contain words or expressions that are clearly of English origin or can with some probability be traced back to English. The focus in this article, after an introductory section on direct loans, is on covert influence. In such cases, there will often be an element of uncertainty about the English provenance of an innovation, since parallel independent development in Danish cannot be ruled out. I have selected examples that seem convincing to me, but I may well be wrong on some. That would not upset the general argument, though. The impact of English is abundantly clear from the mass of recognizable and indisputable loan-words, and it stands to reason that the influence of a dominant language will not only leave overt traces.

*Code-switching and loan-words*

The presence of English in a Danish context manifests itself in different ways, the most obvious being code-switching, where the speaker (or writer) simply alternates between the two languages:

- (1) - The answer is maybe. And that's final, sagde han, da han blev spurgt, om han nu var for København eller Risø.

The two languages remain intact; elements from one language are not (or not yet) integrated into the system of the other. In (1) the switching point coincides with a syntactic boundary. The more intimate type of intra-sentential code-mixing seen in (2), which is often found when bilinguals communicate among each other, is not common in the Danish context, but it appears – here no doubt with an intended humorous effect:

- (2) ... fylder i morgen 75. Still going så godt som strong.

Code-switching reveals what languages are available to the speaker or, more interestingly, what languages are assumed to be available in the audience. For Danes, as for many others, the second language is English, and some knowledge is taken for granted. Even so, an explanation is sometimes deemed necessary, as the next two examples show.

- (3) Over Nord-, Øst- og Sydsjælland samt Møn og Lolland-Falster regnede det derimod 'Cats and Dogs' (katte og hunde), som englænderne siger, når det er rigtigt slemt.
- (4) Men det betegner Erik Merlung som 'rubbish' - det vil sige det rene vrøvl.

There is no absolute boundary between the extraneous elements in code-switching and loan-words (direct loans). Loan-words can be said to be the institutionalization of code-switching, and there is no objective way to determine at what point a foreign element has become an institutionalized part of the recipient language. A practical cut-off point, which one may have to resort to, is when a foreign element is included in dictionaries of the language. But that

definition obviously begs the question: dictionary entries are not objective registrations but the result of decisions. What was the basis for the decision to include a particular item? Are there explicitly formulated criteria?

The integration of a loan-word is accompanied by some degree of adaptation to the phonological and morphological structure of the recipient language. But again we are faced with a matter of degrees. Moreover, even with code-switching, which is in principle a non-integrative process, there is usually some adaptation of one of the languages to the phonological system of the other – that is, to put it less technically: one of the languages is spoken with an accent.

While it is thus impossible to define the exact stage in the borrowing process at which we have an accepted loan-word, loan-words are certainly the best studied reflection of cultural dominance. But as the title indicates, the present article has a different focus, and for the interesting story about the integration of English loan-words in Danish, what fields of activity they are most frequent in, etc., I shall refer instead to the standard work by Knud Sørensen (1973). For obvious reasons, examples from the last 20 years will have to be found elsewhere, but the general principles as described then are still valid. Here I shall restrict myself to giving just two examples as a demonstration, one from either end of the spectrum of morphological adaptation: (5) with unmodified foreign elements, and (6) with a formally fully integrated verb.

- (5) Ligesom der er noget, der hedder Prince Light og Cola Light så byder DR nu også på et program ved navn 'Sport Light'.
- (6) Jeg linkedede det sammen med den straffesag, siger Allin.

Example (6) reveals a further complication. The foreign element is formally completely integrated, which is often considered the hallmark of an accepted loan-word, but as it happens one would search in vain (so far) for a verb *linke* in Danish dictionaries. The more accepted a loan-word becomes, the greater the tendency to formal integration, but it is only a tendency; there is no formal criterion that can distinguish between ad hoc code-switching and borrowing into a language.



*Less obvious than loan-words*

It is the appearance of an increasing number of unassimilated or only partially assimilated foreign elements that leads to protest from native speakers. The standard reaction is one of unease about what is perceived as pollution and debasement of the language, but in recent years this puristic concern has been overtaken by a debate about the future of the Danish language. I shall deal with this debate, but only after demonstrating some mechanisms of influence that I find more intriguing because the linguistic traces are less obvious.

The situation is ironical: while many native speakers of Danish are upset by the overt foreign elements that stand out by virtue of un-Danish spelling and pronunciation, other things happen to the language that are often not noticed but may well have more drastic consequences. Let me illustrate with two examples.

- (7) Det bliver mere og mere åbenbart, at Gorbatjov mener business.

It is clear to everybody that (7) contains a direct loan (*business*); it is less obvious that the speaker (the Danish chief-of-staff, as it happens) would never have used the expression *mener business*, were it not for the existence of *mean business* in English.

- (8) Røveren, der var skjult bag en fullface-styrthjelm, forsøgte at vriste posen fra budet, ...

Again, attention is immediately drawn to the loan-word *fullface*, which may strike some as an unnecessary and disturbing foreign element, but few people will realize that the 'good old' Danish word *styrthjelm* is a translation of English *crash helmet*.

It is with examples such as these that this article is concerned; examples where the connection with English is not always clear, in fact often cannot be proved. This raises problems for the evaluation of many examples, and the verdict about English influence will often have to be tentative. But that is precisely why examples such as these are significant: when the foreign influence is covert, there will be less resistance; and the full extent to which the recipient language is undergoing change modelled on the dominant language will go unnoticed.

*Semantic loans*

The next few examples show the English noun *lift* as a loan-word – or two rather: one is common gender with the meaning 'elevator', as in (9), seen on the back of some lorries; the other is neuter gender, with the meaning 'a ride',<sup>3</sup> as in (10).

- (9) Parker mindst 3 m fra liften.

- (10) På et eller andet tidspunkt er der altid et lift på tommelfinger.

Both loanwords occur in (11), but the neuter noun here has the meaning 'lifting, upward move, improvement'.

- (11) Skiløbernes humør fik et lift. For fjerde gang er skiliften på Slagterbakken stillet op, ...

The use of *lift* with this meaning has become very common. Now compare (12) and (13).

- (12) Havde romerriget givet ibererne et økonomisk lift, var ideen om kulturrevolutionen ...

- (13) For Jørgen Jørgensen var det afgørende, at man gav provinsens kulturliv et løft.

Both examples are from books published in 1992. What we have here is a semantic loan (13) parallel with the older direct loan (12). That is, an existing Danish word has had its meaning extended or otherwise modified so that it becomes aligned with English without changing its form.

The close relationship between English and Danish facilitates such a development. There are thousands of cognates in the two languages, ready to copy meaning developments in the other language. Or rather: Danish is ready to copy English; there has been no copying in the other direction for centuries.<sup>4</sup>

One cannot prove that there is a connection between English *lift* and the proliferation over the last few years of *løft* with the same meaning. But the theoretical possibility of an independent Danish



development becomes hard to defend in the face of the recent appearance of a semantic extension of the verb *løfte*, too:

- (14) Og det vil de blive ved med indtil kroaterne løfter deres blokade af forbundshærens kaserner.  
(From English *lift*; ordinary Danish expression (*op*)*hæve*.)
- (15) FN har tilbudt at løfte fødevare-boycotten.
- (16) Hvis man nu bare løfter sanktionerne, ...

Examples (17) and (18) below show a similar semantic development in the case of the noun *disk* ('counter').<sup>5</sup> Some people will know that the cognate in English is *desk*. And a few seem to have felt the need to express in Danish the meanings associated with the English word:

- (17) ... men som lederen af den danske disk i OECD-hovedkvarteret i Paris, S. Blomdal, siger til Politiken ...  
(From English *desk*; ordinary Danish *afdeling*.)
- (18) Over til nyhedsdisken!  
(Ordinary Danish *redaktion*.)

I have selected a few examples of Danish words with a meaning that is presumably borrowed from English. I give the ordinary Danish expression after each example, mostly taken from the suggested translations in the standard English-Danish dictionary (Nielsen 1964/1989).

- (19) ... samt plantning af beviser i forbindelse med arrestationer.  
(English *plant*; Danish *hemmeligt anbringe*. The verb *plante* has been used with this meaning for at least 25 years.)
- (20) Uanset det britiske papirs indhold havde det nok været naivt at tro, at Holger og konen ville købe det på stedet.  
(From English *buy* with the meaning 'accept'; ordinary Danish *acceptere, godtage, tro*, but *købe* is now a common alternative.)
- (21) Vi skal se om Jeltsin kan sælge det her rigtigt.  
(English *sell* = 'make believe that something is true/desirable';

Danish *gøre acceptabel*.)

- (22) Jeg tror ikke på splittelse. Der skal være rum til flere opfattelser.  
(English *room* about space; Danish *plads*.)
- (23) Jeg har altid ment, at man skal undgå et stort gab mellem lovgivning og praksis.  
(English *gap*; Danish *kløft, afstand*. Cf. Sørensen 1978:136; Petersen 1988:88.)
- (24) Jeg er 49 år og møder således ikke deres alderskriterium.  
(English *meet* = 'satisfy'; Danish *tilfredsstille, honorere*.)
- (25) Man har puttet et aktstykke foran os, ...  
(English *put*; Danish *lægge*.)
- (26) Ministeren vil gerne gå ned og gøre sit bedste.  
(English *go*; Danish *tage*. The meaning of *ned* here was 'down to Brussels'.)
- (27) Det der bevirkede at vi danskere delte os i to lige store dele den anden juni, det kan vi nu overkomme.

*Overkomme* with the same meaning as English *overcome* (ordinary Danish *overvinde, komme over*) seems to be spreading. (See Petersen 1984:363 for first occurrences.)

In the case of *overhøre*, similarly, an extension of meaning has taken place to include the meaning of English *overhear*, as example (28) demonstrates. This is such a well-established use that it is registered as one of three dictionary definitions of the verb in *Nudansk Ordbog*.

The semantic extension of *overse* found in example (29), on the other hand, is a recent innovation.

- (28) Om natten klokken 2 overhørte han en samtale mellem skatteministeren og ...  
(English *overhear*; competes with expressions like *komme til at høre, tilfældigt høre*.)



- (29) Foreløbig skal de jo kun overse at blokaden ikke blir overtrådt.  
(English *oversee*, Danish *påse, føre tilsyn med*.)
- (30) ... hvis der er nogen der stepper ved siden af, så får de klø.  
(English *step*; Danish *træde*.)

The use in (30) of the earlier loan word *steppe* = 'tap dance' with the more general English meaning is uncommon, but experience has taught me to beware of pronouncing an example a nonce mistake without a chance of becoming accepted in the language. This is also true of the next example (which, incidentally, I owe to the then prime minister, whereas (30) was said by the leader of the opposition).

- (31) De 11 vil fortsætte arbejdet efter den timeplan der er lagt.

The example is quite complicated. The Danish *timeplan* is normally used about schoolchildren's timetable, whereas the term for trains, etc., is *køreplan*. In a figurative sense it is the latter that is the established expression. (And, to complicate matters further, presumably came into use as a semantic loan from English *timetable*, cf. Sørensen 1973:106,108.) We may very well be dealing here with an isolated gaffe, but if *timeplan* has no future in Danish, it is not because there is already a noun *time* = 'hour', cf. what was said earlier about *disk* (in Note 5). One could also mention that the verb *time* /taimə/, a direct loan, has had no trouble becoming accepted.

#### *Loan-translations*

I shall now turn to the other main channel through which Danish can be aligned with English without revealing too openly the origin of the innovation. First an example (32) with a loan-word, then two with a loan-translation:

- (32) Det gjaldt den blacklistede havnearbejder ...
- (33) Lige til 1933, hvor Hitlers racecensur sortlistede Nathansen.
- (34) Frygt for sortlistning.

A loan-translation is a compound with the elements translated one by one. Existing Danish words are used, only put together in a new way. There is nothing to reveal foreign influence, there are none of the frequent problems with the phonological or morphological integration of a foreign element, but a new concept has been introduced all the same. The possibilities are limitless, and there is the added bonus that something appears to be an innovation that is really only a copy. Here are a couple of examples. I begin with one that is completely established, followed by some fairly recent arrivals.

- (35) Primadonna i ugens politiske sæbeopera har været Fremskridts-partiets Kirsten Jacobsen.  
(English *soap opera*; began as a loanword in the 1950s. Nielsen 1989 still gives an explanation rather than a translation.)
- (36) Jeg giver mig ikke af med mudderkastning, men der var mange kedelige episoder i løbet af VM-turneringen.  
(English *mud slinging, - throwing*; Danish *nedrakning, bagtalelse*.)
- (37) Og hvis ikke børn og unge under 15 år var blevet flittigere til at blive døbt og konfirmeret, ville det røde tal på bundlinien være endnu større.  
(English *bottom line*. Recent; Nielsen 1989 has the expression *in terms of the bottom line* = *når det kommer til stykket*.)
- (38) I deres påståede rolle som brødvindere ofrer de sig ved at blive på det tørre hjemme i byen, ...  
(English *breadwinner*; Danish *(familie)forsørger*.)
- (39) Østtysk øjenåbner. ... noget af en øjenåbner at besøge fabrikant Peter Ludwigs samling af DDR-kunst ...  
(English *eye-opener*; Danish has *noget der åbner ens øjne*. Sørensen (1975:223) had an early example (1975) but one which is explicitly a loan-translation in a text about America.)
- (40) ...hyldet af 1200 børn der var til snigåbning på festivalen.  
(English *sneak* - , as in *sneak preview*.)



*Set phrases and idioms*

The process of translation is at work not only in the case of compounds but in any type of set phrase. Here are some examples of expressions that are not (yet) ordinary Danish, and whose appearance can hardly be explained without reference to English.

- (41) EF-samarbejdet er for alle praktiske formål et konføderativt samarbejde.  
(English *for all practical purposes*; ordinary Danish e.g. *i alt væsentligt*.)
- (42) Her er Bikuben allerede i front.  
(English *in front*, Danish *forrest*, *i spidsen*.)
- (43) Nægtes kan det dog ikke, at bogen trods sin fortælleglæde kan gå død hist og her.  
(English *go dead*; Danish e.g. *gå i stå*.)
- (44) Socialdemokratiets Robert Pedersen rystede hånd med Kristen Poulsgaard ...  
(English *shake hands with*; Danish e.g. *give – hånden*.)
- (45) ... han havde fået børn, han var stinkende rig, men lykkelig var han langt fra.  
(English *stinking rich*; Danish *svømme i penge*, *være stenrig*.)
- (46) Men knapt to års forsøg med hjemmekompost i Høje Tåstrup kommune viser, at der er en vej ud.  
(English *a way out*; Danish *en udvej*, *en løsning*.)
- (47) Vi ser voldsofre sammen med voldsmænd - som viser sig at være ofre i deres egen ret!  
(English *in - own right*; the meaning here seems to be roughly 'who can also claim to be victims'.)
- (48) Statsminister Schlüter siger, at hvis de borgerlige partier gerne vil have en anden statsminister, så er det i orden med ham.  
(English e.g. *all right with him*; Danish *for ham gerne*, *for hans*

*skyld ingen alarm*.)

- (49) Hvis Egtved f. eks. ønsker to mindre centre, er det  fint med os, siger Birte Weiss.  
(English *fine with*.)
- (50) Så hvis hans biologisme og dyreparallelser kan hjælpe til at give bedre vilkår for de allermindste – ja, så er det ok. med mig!  
(English *OK with*.)

A type of construction that is very open to copying is the combination of verb + particle. Danish has the same two constructions as English, synthetic compound verbs, as in *overkommel/overcome*, and analytic phrasal or prepositional verbs, as in *komme over/come over*. The meanings, however, are often quite different in the two languages or overlap only to some extent; this may invite semantic borrowing from the dominant language, as we have seen in the case of *overkomme*, *overhøre*, *overse*, examples (27)-(29). Danish has *give op* parallel with English *give up*, but also *opgive* with the same meaning; in these cases there is a possibility of lexical support for the analytic expression. Finally, in many cases, such as *give in* ('yield'), there is no corresponding analytic expression in Danish, at least not with anything like the same meaning; the outcome under English influence may be a new phrasal or prepositional verb – as we shall see. The net result could be a noticeable increase in the number and frequency of analytic expressions. This would be a reversal of an earlier development in the history of the Danish language when a major source of renewal was loan-translation of German synthetic forms of the type *aufgeben*.

Many of the expressions that have come in from English are so well established that their origin is perceived only by the historian, e.g. *leve op til* from English *live up to*. The examples below show one that is completely established (51), one that is on its way (52), and some that are in my judgment still felt to be peculiar.

- (51) Amerikansk kapital er oppe imod den danske regering i spørgsmålet om mobiltelefoner.  
(English *be up against*; used in Danish at least since 1970, see Petersen 1984:357.)



- (52) Jeg går ud fra at mødet i retsudvalget i morgen ender op med at ministeren ...  
(English *end up with*; ordinary Danish *ende med*.)
- (53) Overskuddet skal bruges til at pløje tilbage i virksomheden.  
(English *plough back* = 'reinvest'.)
- (54) ... de spilleregler vi i fællesskab satte ned dér.  
(English *set down* = 'write down'.)
- (55) Han faldt ud med sine gamle fæller, Danton og Marat, ...  
(English *fall out with*; Danish e.g. *lægge sig ud med*.)
- (56) Selv om hun tilsyneladende holdt lav profil over for vores dynamiske forældre, kunne hun stå op for os, hvis hun fandt dem urimelige, ...  
(English *stand up for* = 'defend, support'.)

Sometimes there is vacillation as to the extent of alignment with English. In (57) English *break down* has led to, or at least supported, Danish *bryde ned* for the ordinary intransitive<sup>6</sup> *bryde sammen*. In (58), in addition, the cognate verb *brække* has been chosen.

- (57) Inden datamaskinen brød ned, måtte vælgerne stå i kø ...
- (58) Det ville have været force majeure hvis boremaskinerne var brækket helt ned.

It should be noted that the mechanisms for copying are more restricted when it comes to nouns. It is not possible to use the English sequence of elements in *breakdown* as a model for innovations like \**brydened*, \**brækkened*. So the only choice for the corresponding noun, if English is copied, seems to be (59):

- (59) Nedbruddet berørte ca 50.000 abonnenter i Stor-Odense.  
(English *breakdown*; Danish *sammenbrud*, *driftsuheld*.)

Now a look at idioms. An idiom is a set phrase whose meaning cannot be predicted from the meanings of the separate elements. But however much of a semantic unit, it can be translated element by

element, and this seems to be an irresistible source of stylistic renewal. As with other translated expressions, the road to acceptance is short, and in example (60) below only one of the expressions is likely to strike most native speakers of Danish as being an innovation (*vippe med båden* with the figurative meaning of English *rock the boat*; ordinary Danish *forstyrre ligevægten*, *lave ravage*).

- (60) Budskabet er enkelt: tag det roligt, vip ikke med båden og hold krudtet tørt.

In reality, however, practically all of (60) goes back to English: *take it easy* and *keep the powder dry* – the latter apparently dating back as far as Oliver Cromwell.<sup>7</sup>

The following examples range from well-established (61, 62) to recent imports. The latter may not all become common expressions, but some of them will. Again, the alternative Danish expressions that I give are mostly suggested translations in the standard English-Danish dictionary (Nielsen 1964/1989).

- (61) ... rollen som den hårdkogte referent, der synes, hun kan klare det hele med stiv overlæbe.  
(English *stiff upper lip*. Known in Danish since the 1970s (Petersen 1984:472); competes with e.g. *uden at fortrække en mine*.)
- (62) Det er ikke regeringens kop te.  
(English *not – cup of tea*. Common; other expressions are e.g. *ikke – nummer*.)
- (63) Hvis der er nogen, der efterlever talemåden om ikke at tage nej for et svar, så er det ham.  
(English *not take no for an answer*; Danish e.g. *ikke ville høre på afslag*.)
- (64) Det skal ikke opfattes sådan at jeg nu vil bide i den hånd der har fodret mig i tre år.  
(English *bite the hand that feeds*. Nielsen 1989 explains the meaning as *være utaknemmelig over for sin velgører*.)



(65) Om han lige skulle tage ti af de mindre sager først, før han kaldte det en dag?  
(English *call it a day*; Danish *holde fyraften*.)

(66) Det er svært at få enderne til at mødes i husholdningen.  
(English *make ends meet*; Danish *få pengene til at slå til, få det til at løbe rundt*.)

A different version of (66):

(67) ... så det vil mange steder være endog meget svært at få enderne til at nå sammen, siger cheføkonom ...

(68) Vi skal ikke så at sige stjæle deres torden.  
(English *steal - thunder*; Danish *tage ordet ud af munden, komme i forkøbet*. Sørensen (1975:230) has an isolated example as early as 1972.)

(69) Ikke noget at skrive hjem om for en oliegeolog.  
(English *to write home about*; Danish *at prale af, at råbe hurra for*.)

(70) ... men i tilfældet Frank Jensen synes jeg, der bliver gået op ad nogle forkerte træer.  
(English *bark up the wrong tree*; Danish e.g. *være på vildspor*.)

Finally, there is one idiom that should not be swept under the carpet, one that will no doubt live for ever in the history of the Kingdom of Denmark. In 1989 the prime minister denied involvement in a cover-up and ended his exoneration speech in parliament with a forceful

(71) Der er ikke fejlet noget ind under gulvtæppet.

The ensuing political scandal is not our concern here. One linguistic outcome was the compound noun *en gulvtæppetale*, i.e. 'a carpet speech' (Jarvad 1992:8). As for the idiom, Sørensen (1975:227-8) has an example from 1974, but the context there was American. As late as 1990 *Nudansk Ordbog* had only *skubbe problemer ind under gulvtæppet*. By then the broom image of the loan-translation was of

course well known and is in fact given as the translation in Nielsen 1989. It has been taken over also in Norwegian, as *feie noe under teppet* (*Språk i Norden* 1988:74).

### *An endangered language?*

It has been the purpose of the article so far to indicate some mechanisms by which cultural dominance is transformed into linguistic storage, thus altering the communal frame of reference of the recipient culture. While the battle – the losing battle – is being fought over the overt loans, there are subtler processes at work which readjust the vocabulary in accordance with the dominant language. This is happening elsewhere, too, but the close family relationship between English and Danish facilitates some of the less overt processes. The outcome for the recipient language may be quite dramatic in the end: it may be reduced to the status of an alternative code adapted to give expression to the culture associated with the dominant language.

Against this background, it should come as no surprise that some native speakers of Danish fear for the future of their small and dominated language. They see contemporary change, often all change but certainly the growing foreign element, as evidence of a deterioration in the command of proper Danish. The heart of the problem is often taken to be the infatuation of young people with things American. In the distance looms the spectre of the mother tongue becoming a half-English pidgin, hardly worth preserving.

Danish linguists have increasingly been drawn into this debate about the future of the Danish language (see e.g. Lund 1991, 1992; Hansen 1992). On the whole, the impression that one gets (contrary to what is the case in some other countries) is of a patient attempt on the part of professionals to instil some reasonableness into the discussion: a language must renew itself, and most of the renewal of Danish takes place without foreign import anyway. Moreover, the vocabulary derived from English is peripheral: according to some counts, words from English account for only a couple of per cent of an ordinary running text.

How compelling is the statistical argument? A good basis for a calculation of the share of English in the development of new words and expressions is the survey by Pia Riber Petersen of the growth of



the Danish vocabulary in the period 1955-75 (Petersen 1984). Some statistical information is found in Petersen 1988. By far the majority of new words are derivations and compounds that utilize existing elements. Loan-words (and word coinage) play a much smaller part. Some have claimed as little as 10 per cent, but that figure cannot be a measure of foreign influence since loan-translations and semantic loans also utilize existing elements. Petersen's own figures for English influence on Danish in the period 1955-75 distributed on loan types are

Direct loans <10%  
 Loan-translations <10%  
 Semantic loans 4%

In other words, less than a quarter of new words and expressions derive from English. One must assume, though, that this is a minimum count, considering the difficulties involved in detecting all cases of loan-translations and semantic loans.

Moreover, figures from 1955-75 may not be valid today. In fact, a list by the same author (Jarvad 1992) of new words mainly from the years 1989-91 shows a much stronger involvement of English. In round figures, half the words listed there have an English origin, i.e. twice as large a share as in the old data. Of those half are direct loans, i.e. 25 per cent of all new words, many computer terms. It is also instructive to note several examples of what one might call 'pseudo-loans', English expressions that are home-grown rather than imported, e.g. *bad taste-party*.<sup>8</sup> Of course percentage counts depend crucially on the criteria for data inclusion, but with all due reservation, the earlier figure of English accounting for less than 25 per cent of new words may well be too low.

A main source for figures about frequency in running texts is an investigation of Swedish (Ljung 1985; for an assessment, see Ellegård 1989). The foreign share was low, and there is no reason to suspect that a similar investigation of Danish would yield markedly higher figures (cf. Brink 1988). Danish texts, at least outside a few specialist areas, are far from swamped with English words.

In an important sense, though, this comforting result misses the point. The large majority of words in any running text are function words and other very frequent types. It is quite possible for the basic vocabulary of Danish to remain unaffected, while nevertheless a

comparatively large share of the information-bearing words are from English. A tabulation by Knud Sørensen (1986:46-47) of new loans by word-class, covering both Petersen's and his own collection of material, shows a clear preponderance of nouns. Words like *tv*, *grill*, *computer*, *charterrejse* (< *charter travel*), *produktudvikling* (< *product development*), *beslutningsproces* (< *decision-making process*), *kønsrolle* (< *sexual role*) may not be at the top of a frequency list, but when it comes to an identification of the structure and orientation of our culture, they can hardly be called peripheral.

One must conclude that the English proportion of new words is high, words that are characteristic of contemporary culture. And there is no comparable influence from other foreign languages; in fact - apart from a little from Swedish - the impact is insignificant.

Membership of the EC does not seem to have changed that; the influence is from English, not French or German. In his article about the future of Danish, Erik Hansen (1992:86) speculates gleefully about a coming anti-EC revulsion which will strengthen national feeling in general and the position of the Danish language in particular. I wish him luck, but I would not expect European administrative structures to have much influence on the global phenomenon of English dominance.<sup>9</sup>

Neither do I see anything to support the idea (Brink 1988:7) that the dominance of English is coming to an end, that it is not so fashionable any longer to imitate English. A major cultural and linguistic reorientation is not a mere affectation that will stop because people get tired of it.

One may argue about the interpretation of statistics or about possible scenarios, but there is no way round the conclusion: cultural dominance does alter a language. Strong cultural dominance - and that is what we have now and shall have for some time yet - may alter a language pervasively.

But language change does not equal language death. After all, English survived with half its vocabulary taken over from French and Latin; Danish survived centuries of German dominance.

#### *Good old German*

So much of what is now felt to be good old Danish started out as loans from German. The history of the German language in



Denmark, in particular the social background, has been copiously documented recently by Vibeke Winge (1992). The book spans the long period when Danish was spoken in a multicultural state where German, in addition to being the mother tongue of a section of the population, was extensively used as a second and auxiliary language. It was only after the territorial expansion of Prussia in 1864 that German became a foreign language in a Danish nation-state. Before that, as the book demonstrates, the presence of German as a second language in the Danish context was a matter of course.

The result was pervasive changes in Danish on the pattern of the more prestigious language, first Low German, later High German. We have little documentation of the actual process of integration in the early period, but we must assume (Braunmüller 1989) that the process was aided by the fact that the two languages, Danish and Low German, had extensive structural correspondences, in phonology, morphology and syntax. According to Braunmüller, the similarities must have been strong enough to allow a practical form of 'semi-communication' in the bilingual communities, i.e. the active use of one's own language combined with a passive knowledge of the other language – the type of communication that is quite common among Scandinavians as an alternative to one (or both) of the parties speaking a foreign language.

This close contact resulted in a massive transfer to Danish of individual words, derivational patterns, and set phrases (Naumann 1989). Are there any similarities to today's situation? The cultural and social circumstances today are of course very different from then. A main difference is that English is not the mother tongue of any significant section of the population. Neither are the conditions for semi-communication between speakers of Danish and English present. Semi-communication demands some competence and a lot of tolerance on both sides, and that cannot be expected when one side has institutionalized the learning of the other side's mother tongue. On the other hand, the media explosion, which leaves no corner of Denmark and no section of the population untouched by the dominant language, may speed up the transfer process. It may not be far-fetched to see what is happening today as a second major transformation of the Danish language. Whether the English element in Danish will ever be as prominent as the German element remains to be seen. In any case, what we are witnessing is at most a transformation.

### *Language loss*

This is not to say that languages cannot die. There are many attested historical cases. Some Celtic languages have died quite recently: Cornish in the 18th century, Manx in this century. A large number of small language communities today lead a precarious existence.

It is important, though, to understand under what circumstances this happens, and what the actual processes are. For one thing, language death is not a special process, it is an outcome of the general process of language loss when the speakers affected happen to be the last. The process of language shift and language loss has been widely studied by sociolinguists. A particularly well-documented case is the gradual disappearance of Hungarian in Eastern Austria. Although the specific circumstances differ, the processes at work are similar to what can be observed in many other bilingual areas where social change has upset the established demographic and occupational patterns. Susan Gal's study (Gal 1979) is a demonstration piece in several textbooks (e.g. Fasold 1984; Romaine 1989), not least because it shows how an investigation of language shift in a community, in addition to standard variables like age, sex and class, must include a mapping of the social networks that each individual speaker is part of. Briefly, the story of the transition is this:

The bilingual, like the monolingual, has at his or her command a number of linguistic varieties. The difference is that the bilingual has more than dialectal and stylistic options. Where the possibility of choice of variety exists, choice of one rather than another is a means of presenting oneself, of signalling one's identity. In a period of instability it becomes crucial what the individual speaker perceives the two languages to stand for. In this case, as in many others, the dominant language (German) is identified with modern society and with mobility, the non-dominant language with the traditional peasant community. The community remains bilingual for generations, but the bilingualism becomes unstable. The non-dominant language gradually loses more and more domains, i.e. younger people start using the dominant language in social contexts where the non-dominant language used to be the only choice. There is no abrupt change from one language to the other, but with each



generation the dominant language is used more in an increasing number of domains. As the original first language of the community is used in fewer domains, it loses value and prestige, and the next generation has even less incentive to learn and use it.

What happens to the first language as it is under pressure from the dominant language? Although it is still being used, one can observe a gradual loss of proficiency in the speakers. This will come out as word-finding problems, leading to a dramatic influx of loan-words ('relexification'). But it will also be apparent as simplification of the morphology and as a lack of stylistic variation (examples from various languages in Appel & Muysken 1987:42-45,174). Among the symptoms of language attrition, then, is indeed relexification. But borrowing, even large-scale relexification, is not by itself a sign of language loss, let alone its cause. It is a general loss of proficiency one should watch out for.

Whether the Danish language will ever find itself in that situation, is impossible to predict. The scenario is certainly not immediately applicable. The full range of symptoms of language attrition mentioned above can be observed in the Danish spoken by emigrants, e.g. in an English-speaking environment, not among Danes in Denmark.

It should also be born in mind that the sad situation described by Gal is that of a language which had lost its status as official language (when the area was transferred to Austria in 1921), and which is not the language of the state schools. In addition, after World War II, the language was identified with the Communist system on the other side of the border, not least its economic backwardness, and contact with speakers of Hungarian there virtually came to a halt. It is no wonder that Hungarian has given way to the dominant language.

A recent article by Susan Gal (1993) reports on her study of what is in a way the reverse of the language-shift situation in Austria. Here the minority community is German speakers in southern Hungary, descendants of 18th century immigrants. The continued bilingualism under adverse circumstances, including deportations in the 1940s, testifies to the resilience of some minority communities. There is no doubt that linguistic minorities, whether immigrants or other communities surrounded by a dominant language, are almost invariably under strong pressure to adopt the majority language.<sup>10</sup> But the transition from bilingualism to loss of the original language is by no means inevitable.

Nevertheless, since the road to language loss does go via bilingualism, it is not surprising that bilingualism may be seen as a threat.

### *The fear of bilingualism*

Widespread bilingualism is a prerequisite for language shift in a community, leading to language loss – which in some cases equals language death. But it is not bilingualism as such that causes language shift, it is unstable bilingualism. A bilingual community will preserve both its languages if the domains are securely distributed, i.e. each language has its uses.

A language, in our case Danish, will survive to the extent that it continues to be used for a variety of purposes. It must be felt to be useful for those purposes. (And quite possibly the most effective way to preserve the usefulness and vitality of a language is also the simplest: to allow the language to adapt to changing circumstances.) Even if all speakers of Danish were bilingual, the Danish language could well survive and prosper. They are not, but let us pursue the theme of individual bilingualism for a moment.

Monolinguals have amazing ideas about bilingualism. Instead of being seen as an extra asset, bilingualism has often been stigmatized as an abnormality, a disease to be cured in order to rescue the individual from becoming intellectually retarded or at the very least cognitively underdeveloped. There is a long scientific tradition of proving the inferiority of bilinguals, especially bilingual children. One standard procedure has been to compare verbal performance in one of the child's languages, often the socially dominant and less well-known of the two, with a monolingual's performance. Uriel Weinreich (1953/1968:116ff) lists a number of older investigations of intelligence and character formation in bilinguals. For a more critical review of 'objective' testing, see Romaine 1989:99ff.

The most blatant prejudices about bilingualism may be a thing of the past. But as Charlotte Hoffmann points out (1991:137), the common assumption behind all the strong views, whether negative or positive, is that bilingualism has some sort of influence on the individual's cognitive development or character formation. I cannot refrain from quoting her scathing and refreshing comment:



But why should bilingualism have a particular effect on the bilingual? No one ever asks whether monolingualism exerts a specific influence on the speaker - and in view of the fact that well over half the world's population is bilingual this does not seem an unreasonable question to ask.

What lingers today of the view that monolingualism equals normality is the idea that if one language goes in, the other goes out. Despite the existence throughout the world of millions of people who have been happily bilingual from childhood, the fear persists that an early acquaintance with more than one language is harmful.

This negative attitude to bilingualism is reinforced by the frequent identification of language and culture. Cultural identity is felt to be closely connected with one language, preferably a language not shared with other societies, and bilinguals may consequently be regarded with suspicion, as potential traitors.<sup>11</sup>

Most of the arguments against bilingualism, both as an individual and as a societal phenomenon, are dubious, but I shall rest the case here, for the simple reason that it is not relevant to the Danish situation. Despite the unrivalled position of English as dominant language, and despite all the effort invested in language teaching, Denmark is not a bilingual country, and nothing points to the next generation being in doubt about what is the mother tongue. The Danish language will reign supreme for the foreseeable future. The situation will continue to be marked not by a loss of proficiency in Danish among the Danes, but by their severely limited proficiency in anything but Danish. Proficiency in English is sufficient (at least in certain innovative circles) to lead to a massive linguistic import as a reflection of the cultural dependence on the English-speaking world.<sup>12</sup> But only a minority have a level of proficiency in English (or any other foreign language) which allows more than basic transactions with foreigners.

A situation where the Danish language really loses ground as the internal means of communication of the nation is not inconceivable, but there is no indication that such a situation is in sight.

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## Notes

1. I want to thank my colleagues Leo Høye and Hans Frede Nielsen for helpful comments.
2. I have not found it necessary for the purposes of this article to give either the date or source of the examples cited. They were gathered, unsystematically, from a variety of sources; many are from the Copenhagen daily *Politiken* and from news broadcasts. The majority are from the years 1992-93. As far as possible, I have avoided translated material.  
In each example, the word or phrase under consideration has been highlighted by underlining.
3. The verb *lifte* ('hitch-hike') is probably a separate development in Danish (Sørensen 1973:102).
4. It should be mentioned, though, especially amid all the worry about the pollution of Danish, that the verb *lift* in English was apparently taken over from Scandinavian, almost a thousand years ago. The English language survived all the same!
5. Note that *disk* is also found as one of the many direct loans that have accompanied the introduction of computers:  
(72) To floppy diske med informations-søgnings program.  
The existence of a homonym, here *disk* meaning 'counter', does not prevent the introduction of a loan-word.
6. The phrasal verb *bryde ned* already existed as a transitive = English *break down, knock down, demolish*. The synthetic verb *nedbryde* overlaps in meaning, and the noun corresponding to both is *nedbrydning*.
7. In the case of *budskab* we have a semantic loan from English (cf. Sørensen 1973:106). The Danish word has lost its earlier lofty connotations and taken over the more general meaning that used to be covered by words like *besked, meddelelse*. Here is a Post Office commercial reminding us of the approaching Christmas - without religious overtones:  
(73) Post. *Budskaber* til tiden. Send dit senest i morgen.
8. An earlier example of a pseudo-loan is *babylift* about a carry-cot, a compound utilizing the loan-word *lift* of example (9). For some further examples of the independent life of English loans in Danish, see Sørensen 1989.
9. In the long run, naturally, our present cultural orientation will shift. What that means, however, is not a gloriously enhanced status for Danish, but the substitution for English of another foreign language as the vehicle of cultural dominance.
10. One such community in Denmark was that of the Dutch on the island of Amager outside Copenhagen, the result of 16th century immigration. About



the shift to Danish (via German), a process that took more than 200 years to accomplish, see appendix in Winge 1992: 335-345.

Needless to say, I leave a vast topic untreated here: the varied and complex language situation of present-day immigrant communities.

11. To many good people, the assimilation of an immigrant child is not complete unless the child has become monolingual in the dominant language. Thus normalized, the child can proceed to foreign-language classes. I wish this were only a joke.
12. Within the confines of this article, I cannot give serious consideration to the argument raised by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson (1987) that the English language, as the vehicle of American economic and cultural imperialism, poses a threat, in Scandinavia as elsewhere, which must be countered by language-policy measures. Briefly, the present article underscores the impact of the language of the dominant culture and supports the view that the cultural influence, as lodged in the recipient language, is more profound than many people realize. It dismisses the popular notion that language change equals decay, as well as the persistent idea that healthy societies and individuals are monolingual. The question I cannot take up is whether the currently dominant culture is good or bad. One may very well consider American political, economic and cultural dominance a threatening disease, but while I do not want to underestimate the role of language as a vehicle, it seems to me that the dominance of the English language is better regarded as a symptom than a cause, and I have little faith in the effectiveness of symptom treatment. An example: dubbing American films instead of showing the original with Danish subtitles will remove the immediate impact of the English language; it will hardly put an end to American media imperialism and the Americanization of Danish culture. I hasten to add that a recent book by Robert Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism* (1992), which has some vitriolic attacks on English and English Language Teaching as the vehicle for Anglo-American world domination, in fact has a comparatively relaxed assessment of the situation in Scandinavia (1992:317).

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