

KNUD SØRENSEN. *Engelsk i dansk. Er det et must?* Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1995. Pp. 248.

*Reviewed by FRITZ LARSEN*

These are good years for Danish word-watchers. In 1994 Erik Hansen and Jørn Lund published *Kulturens Gesandter*, an excellent general treatment of loanwords in Danish, with a historical sketch and a chapter on puristic endeavours. The title, 'Ambassadors of Culture', is indicative of the authors' stance on purism. The following year saw an entertaining book on new words in Danish by Pia Jarvad, which I reviewed in *RASK* 3/1995. Although neither of these books is about English loans specifically, half a century of English dominance calls for comment, and in Jarvad particularly, with her focus on contemporary developments, the question of English influence looms large. Contrary to Hansen & Lund, she fears for the future of the Danish language.

Knud Sørensen was a pioneer in the study of the influence of English on Danish. As early as 1973 he wrote *Engelske lån i dansk*, which has remained the standard work, especially with regard to the mechanisms of adaptation of English elements. A briefer treatment in English is Sørensen 1986.

The book under review here is not an updated version of the old one. The treatment of orthography, pronunciation and morphology has been limited to one short chapter, so that the emphasis is now on exemplification of the various loan types and demonstration of the strength of English influence in many domains. The book has thus moved away from the technicalities of adaptation to being more concerned with linguistic change as a result of cultural dominance and with the pros and cons of the ongoing change.

Although Sørensen's book has a different angle, being exclusively about the influence of English, it is very much in line with Hansen & Lund and Jarvad in its concern about the impact on Danish of another language as dominant as English. The answers they give may differ, but they are agreed that there is a question to be raised: what is the result for the recipient language, enrichment or degeneration?

Why has there been this shift of focus? Since 1973 there has been a marked increase in popular protest against English loans and against the use of English in certain social domains. This is a natural consequence of the awareness of an increased presence of English in

Danish and an enhanced status of English in Danish society. There are certainly hard linguistic facts underneath this growing attention to more ideological aspects but, as always, linguistic reactions are intertwined with cultural reactions. There is a long-standing tradition of the English language as the butt of anti-American sentiment, but increasingly a new kind of cultural malaise is taking over: an uncertainty about Danish national identity as European integration proceeds and the composition of the population changes. Whatever the background, there is now a recognized problem, a public concern for the survival of the nation as identifiably Danish, which to most people is inseparable from the survival of the national language.

How widespread the fear of English is in the population is hard to tell, but Danish publishers evidently assume that there is a market for concerned questions such as (on the cover of this book) 'Is Danish being strangled by Anglicisms?' The promise of disaster is being dangled before our eyes. Maybe readers can claim their money back if the answer turns out to be a disappointing No? What Sørensen's answer actually is I shall come back to at the end of the review.

The book, again like the other two I have mentioned, is aimed at the general public. The reader will obviously need a fair knowledge of English, and not all technical terminology can be avoided, but on the whole I think the author has succeeded in making the text accessible to those readers who take an interest in the topic. I hope the book will reach many more people than the students who have it thrust upon them by teachers like myself.

Part of the joy in reading the book is due to the many authentic examples, mostly quoted from newspapers, which not only illustrate the author's point but are also in themselves a cultural panorama of our period.

The words and expressions treated are of necessity a selection, but it is an impressive number all the same: the index contains more than 1,800 items. The author informs us that his registration of English loans now totals almost 6,000, a figure that testifies to a remarkable assiduity in example hunting over many years.

In the introductory Chapter 1 we are given a survey of the different loan types that will be treated more fully in later chapters. The categorization of loanwords is fairly traditional, with the main division being between direct and indirect loans. Words taken over in

their English form usually stand out as un-Danish and are consequently the prime target of complaints. It is no coincidence that the title of the book uses the direct loan *must* which will doubtless irritate some potential readers. But what is the alternative if direct loans are felt to be unacceptably disturbing? One gets the impression from lay utterances that there is a zero option, that foreign words may be simply refused entry and the cultural integrity thus left uncontaminated. In fact the alternative to a direct loan will typically be an indirect loan, i.e. a translation from English or a so-called semantic loan where an existing Danish word is given a new meaning. A typical semantic loan extends the meaning from concrete to figurative. Political doves and hawks are found in Danish too (*duelhøg*), leaders must be visible (*synlig*) and a message must be sold (*sælge*). Whether directly or indirectly, the recipient language is brought in line with the dominant language.

Direct and indirect loans frequently compete, at least for a time, and Sørensen raises the question (p. 74) whether the victor can be predicted. One might expect that a loan-translation once constructed would be a good bet, but in fact the development can go either way: *think tank* gave way to *tænketank*, but we have *bestseller* (not *bedstselger*). As for the *must* of the title, a competing indirect loan *et skal* is attested (p. 76) but does not stand much of a chance. In other cases the outcome is undecided, and there is no principle that will help us to predict the choice that will eventually be made between e.g. *marketing* and *markedsføring*. Will *e-mail* be overtaken by *e-post*? An indirect loan has the advantage that it fits easily into the structure of the recipient language, but the cultural influence has not been halted, only camouflaged. And the naturalization in this case, which is in no way atypical, is brought about by means of the word *post* which in its origin is as un-Danish as *mail*.

Besides these main types, Sørensen operates with a few additional categories. Hybrids are compounds where only one part is English. His examples are of 'half-translations' like *grapefrugt* <- *grape fruit*, but it is in fact hard to keep these apart from combinations of the two languages that result when an originally English word goes native and starts leading its own (promiscuous) life in Danish. Was *natklub* a half-translation of *night club* when it first appeared in the 1920s? The word *klub* is from English but it had come into Danish earlier. And a large number of more recent compounds with *-klub*, e.g. *aldreklub* ('club for old people'), are certainly not the result of

translation from English. (And, by the way, what is English and what is Danish in *motorcykelklub* or *rockerklub*?) If all types of combination of elements from the two languages are subsumed under the label hybrid, the category becomes very large indeed.<sup>1</sup>

What Sørensen calls 'formal reshaping' concerns a small group where an existing Danish word is said to be adjusted in the direction of English (*busstoppested* → *busstop*). In my opinion such cases could be simply analysed as new loans competing with and possibly ousting old words. What is special is only that there is a high degree of formal similarity between the old and the new.

As we saw with *klub*, direct loans from English will lead a separate Danish life without regard to their origin. But there is more creativity than that. So-called pseudo-loans look English but they are not native to that language (*babylift* 'carry-cot'; the word, incidentally, may have been invented by a Swedish producer). And Danish words may be coined as elaborations on an English loan, e.g. *roligan* (Danish *rolig* = 'quiet'), a well-behaved football supporter, the antithesis of a *hooligan*.

I find Sørensen's term 'indirect anglicisms' about the *roligan* type a bit unfortunate as we need 'indirect' as a contrast to 'direct' loans. This is a very different story: special developments within Danish, often consciously created as humorous play on an English expression. That they should appear at all is indicative of the place English has in the minds of at least some creative Danes, and Sørensen did right to include them. These playful developments will also be found with idioms originally translated from English, thus (p. 118) *svare fra hoften* ('answer from the hip'), *fra hestens egen pen* ('from the horse's own pen').

Not everybody would agree with me in regarding deviations from proper English as signs of creativity. To be quite honest, I do not myself find it easy to take a liberal view of all innovations. But logically there is little reason for rejection. How many people are offended by that barbarous pseudo-Greek-and-Latin concoction *television*? A word that has been 'borrowed' does not have to be returned; it ceases to be the property of the original language. The Danes may do with their language what they like, and that includes utilizing for new purposes those elements that happen to have come from English. I am sure that the 350 million native speakers of English can take it. The English language will not be ruined by the Danes calling a choke *en choker* or playing *dart* rather than darts. A

problem only arises if Danes think they can use these home-grown forms when speaking English.

Chapter 2 contains the brief treatment of the orthography, pronunciation and morphology of direct loans. I can well understand Sørensen's reluctance to do a full updating of his 1973 description. For one thing, some of the broad readership the present book targets might easily have balked at the technicalities.<sup>2</sup> It is a pity all the same. The situation has changed considerably over the past 25 years, in particular in the area of pronunciation. As a new generation with a good knowledge of English has taken over, many older variants that were marked by the speakers' lack of first-hand knowledge of English have been ousted by variants that are closer to native English pronunciation.

The result is still some degree of compromise between the sound system of Danish and that of English as perceived by Danes. As Sørensen points out (p. 40) the compromise is determined not only by the individual's ability to imitate English pronunciation but also by a fear of appearing pretentious in deviating too markedly from the accustomed Danish pattern of articulation. Still, the change in the direction of English is clear, and even though the explanation for it is obvious, this development is worth noting since it is often assumed that integration of loans must mean increasing assimilation to the recipient system. That is still a reasonable working assumption, but special historical circumstances may halt or even (as in this case) reverse the development.

The 'natural' processes can be seen in older loans, which are also dealt with in Chapter 2, loans from before the 20th century, predominantly names of consumer goods, maritime expressions and sport terms. They were often subjected to radical processes of adaptation that are rare today, being learned by ear and spelled accordingly (*strike* → *strejke*), or being learned by eye and pronounced accordingly, so that the old loan *punch* about the drink does not have the near-English pronunciation heard in the modern loan *punch* ('force').

In Chapter 3 we return to the loan types in more detail. As I have already commented on parts of this chapter, I shall add only a few notes.

One might imagine that with extensive borrowing much of the vocabulary of the recipient language comes to coincide with that of the donor language. But things are more complicated than that, as is demonstrated on pp. 62-64. Most words have multiple meanings, and typically only one of the meanings in the donor language is borrowed. Thus *drink* in Danish is restricted to alcoholic drinks, and *evergreen* is only used about tunes. This specialization in the borrowing process is logical enough: the need for a new word arises because a specific artifact or concept has to be named, not because there is a general urge to amass new meanings.

One result of the specialization is that two meanings of the same word may be borrowed at different times, thus *check* (1) 'means of payment', Br. E. *cheque*, (2) 'control, investigation' – the latter also with the assimilated spelling *tjek*. Danish *film* until recently was almost exclusively used in senses connected with photography, but now we are all familiar with *husholdningsfilm* ('cling film', 'plastic wrap').

Add to this that established loans, as we have seen, may develop meanings that are not found in English. The verb *filme*, in addition to 'film', has come to mean 'flirt'! As the number of these 'false friends' increases, English teachers will have a job to do after all.

Verbs are morphologically totally integrated. The result is sometimes a fortuitous identity with an existing verb (p. 67), e.g. *liste* ('list' along with the older meaning 'walk softly'), *spotte* ('spot' and the older meaning 'mock'). It is worth noting that a potentially confusing overlap does not block borrowing.

Pseudo-loans in Sørensen's terminology cover a wide range from concoctions like *babylift* to misunderstandings and minor deviations from correct English. The genesis of many of these un-English items can be explained, although the explanation may not be immediately apparent. With a stock-in-trade example like *butterfly* about a bow tie we probably have to do with the dropping of the second element of an older *butterfly tie*. The same process may account for *smoking* about a dinner jacket. It is certainly at work nowadays when Danes play *basket* and *volley* rather than basketball and volleyball; as there were no existing words *basket* and *volley* in Danish, the second element was redundant, so why bother? In contrast, in a loan-translation like *fodbold* (<- *football*), needless to say, the second element is not redundant, you cannot play *fod*.

Sørensen rightly devotes several pages to changes in the use of prepositions. Many prepositions are formally similar in the two languages, and their meanings are often ill-defined and their use only idiomatically fixed. This makes them susceptible to semantic extension and open to new combinations copied from the dominant language. There is a concentration of examples here under *for*, *over* and *på* ('on'), but prepositional use as a whole is clearly under daily pressure from English.

Another area that also deserves the extensive treatment it gets is acronyms and other abbreviations. They are mostly direct loans (*Nato*, *WHO*, *laser*, *cd*) though a few are translated (*FN* = *Forenede Nationer* <- *UN*). Not only is the sheer number of them remarkable, they are potent demonstrations of American political-economic domination in the post-war world as well as of the use of English as *the* international language.

I applaud the decision to dedicate a whole chapter (Ch. 4) to idioms and proverbs. The great number that have entered Danish from English is another good indication of the direction in which the cultural winds are blowing. Much innovation within the language goes on independently of foreign imports, of course, but if the inspiration for new collocations and fixed expressions comes from outside, it comes almost invariably from English.

Sørensen presents two dozen direct loans (like *grand old man*, *you name it*) but by far the greatest number are translated. Unfortunately, there is not space for exemplification here. The material is so extensive that one might get the idea that the Danes are collectively engaged in the translation of a dictionary of English idioms.

Sørensen has attempted a grouping of idiomatic clauses according to meaning, yielding subheadings like 'Paradoxes', 'Despondency', 'Precautions'. I do not think this presentation reflects any natural division in the material and prefer his simple division of the other types according to construction (adj. + noun etc.).

A number of the examples contain quotations or titles of books and films. There is an interesting field here which is only touched upon: our common stock of memorable phrases. Danes will use (unknowingly) translated snippets from Shakespeare and Thackeray, Churchill and Macmillan, variations on themes by LeCarre ('the spy who came in from the cold'), the author of *Godfather* ('make him an offer he can't refuse'), Bob Dylan ('the answer is blowing in the wind')

and less illustrious writers of pop lyrics and TV series. Sørensen does deal with quotations later (pp. 191-3) but concentrates on literature. There are many more sources of this cultural flotsam.

The influence of English is overwhelmingly a question of vocabulary change. When Chapter 5 is entitled Syntactic Influence, it is important to bear in mind that in many cases the impact of English – or what we suspect may be the impact of English – is limited to support for an existing though less frequent construction, e.g. (p. 147) the non-finite *meningsmålinger offentliggjort i dag* (<– *opinion polls published today*) instead of the standard relative construction *meningsmålinger der er blevet offentliggjort i dag*.

The same support for an existing option is true of a construction that has (for some unclear reason) been much maligned in Danish, the conversion of an indirect object to subject in passivization: *jeg blev fortalt ...* <– *I was told ...*

There are many examples of verbs that have developed a new transitive function. Some are so old that nobody nowadays would spontaneously connect them with English, e.g. *eksplodere en bombe*. But more recent examples make it difficult to disregard English influence. Some have gained ground quickly and apparently without resistance, e.g. *lække en hemmelighed* <– *leak a secret*, others have not become accepted (yet), e.g. *gro kartofler* <– *grow potatoes*.

Note that the borderline between syntax on the one hand and semantic loan or loan-translation on the other is very thin here. This is even more true of what I think is the most important phenomenon dealt with in this chapter, namely the proliferation of phrasal and prepositional verbs modelled on English: *bringe op* (<– *bring up*, 'mention'), *leve med* (<– *live with*, 'accept') and so on (cf. Larsen 1994:31). They could reasonably, I think, be regarded simply as vocabulary items on a par with single-word verbs, introduced into the language by translation or given a new use by semantic extension.

The chapter lists a number of developments which are indisputably of a syntactic nature, thus (p. 156) increased use of multi-element premodification (*væg-til-væg-tæppe* <– *wall-to-wall carpet*; *vent-og-se-holdning* <– *wait-and-see attitude*). Also the extended use of *hvad* as an independent relative pronoun (p. 166). Others again I would have hesitated to classify as syntactic: new plural forms of nouns like *indsigter* (<– *insights*), *politikker* (<– *policies*)

and the use of *du* (<– *you*) with generic reference instead of *man* ('one') as in *Du kan aldrig vide* ('You never know').

Chapter 6 deals with the domains of meaning within which the influence of English has been strong. Since this influence is practically all-encompassing, any author would run into problems of organization. Sørensen starts with one cut which I find to the point: a distinction between the vocabulary that refers to phenomena in the English-speaking world and what is common to Western culture.

That Danish has imported words like *mokkasín* and *blegansigt* (<– *paleface*) from America is no more surprising than the importation of *harakiri* and *karate* from Japan. Because of the cultural orientation we know more about America than about Japan, hence need more words to describe American phenomena, but this quantitative difference is not decisive. What is crucial is the function of English as the medium for the spread of innovation in most fields throughout the world, whether the new products or concepts are peculiar to the English-speaking world or not. Nylon may have been invented in the USA and radar in Britain, but the words are now international names for international products. In fact products need not even originate in the English-speaking world to be given an English name, cf. the Japanese *walkman*.

The chapter is divided into small sections on a multitude of domains, making it somewhat hard for the reader to discern a pattern. This may be said to reflect faithfully a situation where English influence is felt over the entire spectrum. The English influence of today is a very different story from the earlier spread of, say, Italian terms within banking and music. Nevertheless, one could point to some larger domains that are particularly susceptible to influence from English at the moment. My favourites would be, in this impressionistic order, communications and computer technology, leisure and entertainment, economics and management. One cannot help being impressed by Sørensen's ability to write informatively about all these topics, from drug culture to clothing, from religion to dancing, to mention a few. I suspect that he may not be an expert in all these areas, but he seems to know who to ask.

Let me end with a comment on Sørensen's reaction to the deluge of English. He is too much of a linguist to fall prey to prophecies about the imminent death of the Danish language (p. 16), but he is worried

and understands why there is popular protest. He is not a purist, though. I would characterize his reaction as one of stylistic irritation. There are two causes for his irritation: one is the incorrect use of English by Danes, which I have already commented on; the other is the unnecessary use of English words in Danish. Some English words are a necessity and an enrichment, he says, but why use *sideeffekt* (<side effect) when a satisfactory Danish word is readily available (*bivirkning*)?

Now, it is hard to argue in favour of the unnecessary use of anything. But how does one determine what is necessary? Sørensen accepts direct loans as names for new artifacts (*computer*) and concepts (*interview*) when it has proved impossible to find a Danish substitute (p. 25). But it is only by writing history backwards that one can claim that a particular English word was inevitable. In fact, there was a long struggle to replace *computer* by *datamat* (not strikingly Danish, of course, but invented by a Dane). That the English word won can hardly be attributed to one form being more necessary than the other. I sympathize with Sørensen's irritation at the overuse of certain fashionable words. It is true that English as the prestigious international language may be used to signal that you are with it. It is, however, difficult to identify offensive behaviour with certain words. Buzz words come and go. Sørensen mentions *knowhow*, *kommunikation*, *konsensus* (p. 26), but can these words in themselves be objectionable?

He suggests disarmingly (p. 221) that his warning against unnecessary and un-Danish expressions may be viewed by some as an old man's pedantry. Perish the thought! In fact, as a teacher of courses on this topic, I can testify that even the youngest of students may complain that the influence of English has gone too far. Certainly the passage of time leads to acceptance of many former 'horrors'; some of the examples that Sørensen exhibits as outrageously un-Danish will not be discovered by young students unless they are pointed out and explained. The real problem, however, is not one of age but of principles.

In some instances Sørensen argues convincingly against a certain usage which the intended reader cannot be expected to understand, elsewhere his irritation is aroused by an expression which may very well have a deserved future in the language. Is it 'unnatural' to translate *abstain* as *afstå* (p. 33) instead of the established expression *afholde sig fra at stemme*? (It does not seem to be unnatural in

Swedish.) We all have our pet aversions, but can we agree? Our reactions are typically individual and unprincipled, hence ineffectual. I have my reservations about the message, but I welcome the debate. The book as a whole I can unreservedly recommend to a wide spectrum of readers. It has an interesting tale to tell, and many native speakers, as well as others with a good knowledge of Danish, will be immediately fascinated by the copious exemplification of English influence, overt or covert. For anyone with a professional interest in contemporary developments in the language the book is a must.

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#### Notes

1. Loans often do not fall neatly into one of the standard categories, a disturbing fact which is rightly not given prominence in this book, aimed as it is at the general public. In the case of indirect loans, it is often impossible to say with certainty whether they are copied from English or are parallel indigenous formations. On p. 23 Sørensen wonders whether *brandfælde* may be a translation of *firetrap*. In the meantime the relevant volume of the supplement to the big dictionary of the Danish language has appeared and seems to confirm his suspicion: the first occurrence of *brandfælde* is in a book about England (Henrik V. Ringsted, *En have i London*, 1949).
2. The transcription system used in the new book is that of the pronouncing dictionary by Molbæk Hansen (1990). For some of us it is a relief to see Danish transcribed with symbols based on the IPA standard. Sørensen (p. 51) points to a possible source of confusion in that the symbol [ʌ] is used in a word like *godt* /gʌd/ although the Danish vowel differs from that of English *gut* /gʌt/. In my opinion this is less confusing than the traditional Danish transcription with /ɔ/ which has tempted many to identify the vowel in Danish *godt* with the retracted and open vowel of English *got*.

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