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# **Knud Sørensen (1991):** *English and Danish Contrasted. A Guide for Translators*. Munksgaards Sprogserie. København (132 pp.)

No doubt this book will turn out to be an indispensable tool for everybody who is regularly engaged in the process of translating from Danish into English, and vice versa - professional translators, teachers of translation, and students alike. First a word of advice to the user: the book should be read carefully from cover to cover; only then can the wide range of phenomena dealt with be fully appreciated. After such a perusal, the book will well serve its intended purpose, namely that of being a useful handbook to be continually consulted by the translator. Note in this connection that the table of contents is so detailed that in effect it provides a full subject index to the book (the subject index at the end of the book is not detailed enough).

The book is divided into four main chapters: Chapter 1. Introduction, Chapter 2. Syntax, Chapter 3. Lexis, and Chapter 4. The Word-Classes.

In the Introduction Knud Sørensen (henceforth KS) provides an overview of the basic concepts and ideas that underly his approach. Thus he frankly admits that he "has adopted a **normative** (prescriptive) attitude, advising the reader to avoid one construction or form and prefer another". In his judgments concerning correct usage he relies heavily on his own intuition, and this in turn is based on many years of experience and on his in-depth knowledge of both languages. Nevertheless, KS seems to take a defensive attitude in this respect.[1]

The book is a **contrastive** study; moreover, moving back and forth between English and Danish as it does (at least by implication), the con-

[1] There would seem to me to be no need for KS to be on the defensive here. It is hard to see how prescriptivism could be avoided in the teaching of translation. It frequently happens that students come up with proposals which are - strictly speaking - grammatically impeccable, but somehow unidiomatic. Often enough the teacher has to resort to the following argument: "The alternative I have suggested is better, I just know it is". In many cases conclusive proof can be difficult to furnish.

trastive analysis is **bidirectional**. It is not explicitly stated what the **tertium comparationis** is; however, on the basis of the following statement: "it is the translator's task to achieve linguistic[2] and semantic equivalence between the original and the translated text" I take it that, basically, the **tertium comparationis** is MEANING. KS correctly points out that the object of translation is **texts**, as these are characterized by patterns of (linguistic[3]) **cohesion** and (logical) **coherence**. The translator should always start out by a careful examination of the entire text, because the cohesion/coherence patterns invariably will (or should) have an impact on the translation as a whole.

There is no mention of **text-typology**, for example the tripartite distinction between **expressive**, **informative**, and **directive** (or **operative**) texts.[4] This might conceivably have led to some modifications of the notion of **equivalence** (cf. above) - a notoriously complex concept. By and large, I believe it is true to say that the contrastive analysis throughout the book is **sentence-bound**: either full sentences or contrasted, or, especially as regards lexis and word-classes, parts of sentences (phrases or words). Textual considerations are kept to a minimum. The introductory chapter also contains useful sections on **Danicisms** and different types of **Anglicisms**. As regards **theory**, KS's stance is clear: "There will be a minimum of theory, but abundant illustrations, since this is meant to be a practical handbook".

Let us now turn to the three major chapters, of which the chapter on syntax is by far the longest (56 pages). It is impossible to go into all the details, so in each case I shall select points for discussion which seem to me to be of particular interest.

The chapter on syntax begins with some reflections on subject-verb relations. Consider (1):

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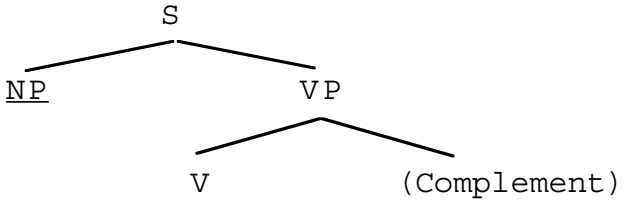
[2] The distinction between **linguistic** and **semantic** is somewhat strange: surely **linguistic** subsumes **semantic**. It would have been preferable to employ the term **linguistic** as **hyperonym** of **hyponyms** like **syntactic**, **morphological**, **lexical**, **semantic**, **textual**, and **pragmatic**.

[3] Presumably **linguistic** here means **syntactic**; cf. note 2.

[4] Cf. e.g. Reiss (1971; 1976).

(1)




Following modern theoretical assumptions, we will say that in (1) the VP compositionally assigns a thematic role to the subject-NP (underlined). It turns out to be the case that in English the subject-NP is capable of bearing a wider range of thematic roles than is the case in Danish. In particular, English allows temporal and locative subjects quite freely, as in (2) and (3):[5]

(2) *1990* introduces a new 5p coin

(3) *The Pacific war* saw the greatest naval battles in history

In such cases Danish typically has to resort to other syntactic means (prepositional phrases for example). There are many further problems relating to subject-selection. These are discussed in detail, and suitable translation equivalents are consistently provided.

A special section is devoted to finite vs. non-finite constructions. English allows a much wider range of nonfinite clauses than does Danish. In the majority of cases, therefore, an English nonfinite clause (or verbless clause), irrespective of its syntactic function, should be replaced by a Danish finite clause. This carries over to other constructions, such as agent nouns:

(4) *Readers* of the novel will know
"*De, der har læst ...*"

or nominal constructions:

(5) He stressed *the importance of an early reply*
" ... understregede, *hvor vigtigt ...*"

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[3] In all the examples cited in this review, the phenomenon under consideration has been italicized. Unfortunately this procedure has been adopted only sporadically in the book. Consistent italicization of the structures under scrutiny - especially in very long examples - would have greatly facilitated the reading. This might be remedied in a possible second impression.

It is also pointed out that there is a certain "criss-cross" relation between dependent interrogative clauses and relative clauses in the two languages: where English prefers a relative clause, Danish prefers a dependent interrogative clause (and vice versa):

(6) You can imagine *the effect this had on me*
"*... hvilken virkning ...*"

The translation **algorithm**[6] here is (7):

(7) Danish ↔ English
Interrogative ↔ Relative

In a special section KS deals with anaphora and cataphora (backwards and forwards pronominalization). Consider (8):

(8) As *he* waited, *Porteus* began to appreciate the commander's infallible instinct.

In (8) *he* and *Porteus* may (but need not be) coreferential. In Danish, unlike English, cataphora is decidedly rare.[7] KS cites the following example:

(9) Aldrig så snart havde *hun* nået bred tilslutning, før *Jernladyen* langede ud med de velkendte påstande

KS may be right in his judgment that (9) "was probably influenced by an English-language source". The possibility of cataphoric pronominal reference has wide-ranging stylistic implications.[8] One section deals with the distribution of the Danish dummy subject *der* and its possible translations. A typical pattern is one which in Danish involves a relative clause (clefting), where English has a simple sentence:

(10) *Der* er en *der har taget min paraply*
*Somebody* has taken my umbrella

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[6] The term translation algorithm is employed here in a loose, pretheoretical sense. With this caveat, I believe that one may say that in many cases KS's objective is to work out a set of translation algorithms. Another term that comes to mind is Catford's **translation shift** (Catford (1965)). However, Catford's notion of translation shift is theory-bound; in particular, it is bound to Hallidayan category-and-scale grammar.

[7] In English cataphoric reference of personal pronouns is not unrestricted. For discussion, see Jacobsen (1978, 422 ff.).

[8] For some illustrations, see Sørensen (1975, 55 ff.).

Other sections deal with word-order phenomena, the placement of adjectives and adverbials (an important issue), premodification vs. postmodification, the different use of articles in the two languages according to fixed parameters, the distributive plural, binomials, etc. It is sometimes the case that the main focus is on English structures. This is true for example of the section dealing with concord of number. Danish displays no such problems (Danish does not have distinct singular and plural verbal forms). Consequently, the contrastive analysis here becomes unidirectional, Danish → English: the Danish learner should be made aware of various concord-phenomena in English. Numerous other syntactic problems are treated,[9] but consideration of space force me to stop here.

Chapter 3. Lexis opens with a section on political terminology. KS emphasizes that this particular lexical field poses great difficulties for the translator. There are often great mismatches between political (and other) institutions of different countries. The next section is concerned with literature. KS points out that "it is a decided advantage for the translator to be well read in classical English literature since many writers have the habit of interlarding their writings with literary quotations and allusions". A good example is the following:

(11) Football returns, with its court of juvenile rioters (*a season of fists and callow bootfulness*)
(Cf. John Keats, *To Autumn*: "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness")

KS does not attempt to translate (11) The italicized NP in (11) **can** be translated - given sufficient imagination; but the translation could never capture the literary allusion. If this were to be transferred into Danish at all, it would have to be in terms of a long explanatory note. The other examples cited present analogous problems (though they are easier to translate than (11)).[10] There follow sections on collocation, cliché, imagery, and proverbs. In the case of collocation and cliché, there is a large measure of conformity between the two languages. By contrast, as regards proverbs, nonconformity is the rule, as in (12) and (13):

(12) *You cannot get blood from a stone*
*Man kan ikke klippe hår af en skaldet*

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9 Many of the problems discussed are only cursorily - or not at all - dealt with in existing grammars or dictionaries.

10 Perhaps only two types of English are devoid of literary quotations/allusions: legal English and technical English. Economic texts frequently contain such quotations/allusions.

(13) *To have a bone to pick with somebody*
*At have en høne at plukke med en*

As far as similes and metaphors are concerned, it seems to be the case that there are not many similes which are identically structured in the two languages; by contrast, metaphors show a great measure of similarity. It is interesting to speculate why this should be so.

A special section is devoted to 'Danish countable equalling English uncountables'. One wonders why this subject has been included under lexis rather than under syntax. The same argument carries over to the section dealing with 'abstract for concrete'. However, these are minor objections: the table of contents will invariably guide the user to the relevant points, and he can then judge for himself whether he thinks that the problem under consideration has been appropriately placed in the overall context of the book.

The chapter on lexis deals with a number of further phenomena, such as 'encapsulation', e.g. *climb*/*clamber*; *climb* is the **unmarked** member of the pair, *clamber* is **marked**:[11] it means not just *climb*, but *climb with difficulty*. A great many examples of encapsulation in this sense are cited. Also negative terms are discussed in some detail. Gender words receive due attention (thus only a member of the female sex may by referred to as *a young person*). Clearly such information is useful for the Danish learner.

Finally, a chapter on contrastive lexis must invariably contain a section on **false friends**. For example English *actual* ≠ Danish *aktuel*; English *eventual* ≠ Danish *eventuel*; English *genial* ≠ Danish *genial*; and many others. The section on false friends is an important one and should be diligently consulted by the Danish student.

The final chapter deals with word-classes. It is shown that in crucial cases translation between the two languages involves word-class shifts.[12] Thus Danish adjective → English noun, as in (14):

(14) *Det kloge* ved denne afgørelse var indlysende
*The wisdom* of this decision was evident

Danish adverbial construction → English adjectival construction, as in (15):

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[11] Throughout the book the distinction between marked and unmarked is often invoked. These are important concepts in general linguistic theory, but no attempt is made to define them.

[12] Strictly speaking, word-class shifts also seem to be a syntactic phenomenon and hence arguably should have been included in the chapter on syntax.

(15) Hun så ud til at være *sidst i fyrrerne*
She appeared to be *in her late forties*

Danish preposition → English verbal construction, as in (16) and (17):

(16) Det er *måske* ikke sandt
It may not be *true*

(17) Problemet er *stadig* uløst
The problem *remains* unsolved

Danish preposition → English participle (+ preposition), as in (18) and (19):

(18) Et værelse *ud til* haven
A room *overlooking* the garden

(19) Fordelene *ved* en samlingsregering
The advantages *arising from* a coalition government

The chapter further contains an interesting five-fold typological classification of English equivalents of Danish noun compounds:

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| (20) | (i) | en *skytsengel* | a *patron saint* (type 1) |
| | (ii) | en *personalechef* | an *appointments officer* (type 2) |
| | (iii) | en *Pyrrhussejr* | a *Pyrrhic victory* (type 3) |
| | (iv) | en *æresgæst* | a *guest of honour* (type 4) |
| | (v) | en *trykfejl* | a *printer's error* (type 5) |

A wealth of analogous examples are cited. The difference between type 1 and type 2 is of course particularly noteworthy.

A brief section is devoted to an illustration of the versatility of English *be*. 14 English sentences with *be* as the main verb are given. The Danish translations contain 14 different verbs (but not *være*!).

Many further problems are taken up in this chapter, but sufficient examples illustrating KS's approach have now been given.

I would like to end this review by reverting to the beginning. Knud Sørensen has written an extremely useful handbook for translators, teachers of translation, and students. As noted above the book is almost devoid of theoretical considerations - some will consider this an advantage, others will perhaps not. However, and I repeat this: it is absolutely essential that the user of the book reads it carefully from cover to cover. Only after having done that, will he or she be able to make full use of it as a handbook - a tool ready at hand. The book clearly fills a gap in the literature by virtue of its bidirectional contrastive approach.

I know of no competitor on the market.

## References

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