

Portrait of a Contender

Stacey Cozart

- Head of Language Services Unit at Aarhus University



This summer, “Language at Work – Bridging Theory and Practice” magazine had the pleasure of speaking with Stacey Cozart, Head of the Language Services Unit within the Faculty of Arts at Aarhus University, in Aarhus, Denmark.

The Language Services Unit at Aarhus University offers copy-editing services for staff and PhD students in English, translation services for administrative staff from Danish to English, and English language skills development, mainly in the form of courses in English for academic purposes.

Who is Stacey Cozart?

After having studied International Studies in the French language in the United States, and then living and working in France, Stacey Cozart moved to Denmark 21 years ago. Stacey quickly realized the value of full immersion in the Danish language and immediately began completing language courses. After one year of Danish language studies she enrolled at Aarhus University to continue her French studies – in Danish, and finally became employed at the same institution in 1996.

Today, Stacey is able to think back and recognize the change of the language landscape within the academic and professional contexts, *“When I came to Denmark I knew that I wanted to study...and I could only do that if I learned Danish, because at that time [20 years ago] you couldn’t just come here and study in English, and I can see how one’s motivation might not be the same today, because now you can function in English [without Danish].”*

When asked about how the Danish language affects Stacey and her capacity as an employee within the Faculty of Arts at Aarhus University she notes that, *“My Danish colleagues and I are using Danish all the time. I used to be the only native English-speaking employee in the unit, but now that we have another colleague from the U.S., we speak English together. However, if we are in the hallway having a conversation in English and one of our Danish colleagues approaches, we switch over to Danish.”* Upon further reflection as to why the language switch happens, she replied, *“We have both*

lived here for a long time, and we want to respect the fact that this is a Danish workplace.”

Language Opportunities and Challenges

However, at Aarhus University the dynamics between the Danish and English language are changing, as newsletters and other such communications are provided more frequently in English due to the increase in the number of non-Danes being hired.

The presence of foreign academics and employees at Aarhus University poses some unique challenges when it comes to addressing the issue of teaching English-medium lectures in an international setting at Danish universities. Stacey has been a part of a multi-university initiative, which provides courses to instructors in order to solve English language-related problems that have not previously been brought to the forefront. Stacey’s involvement in the course “Boost Your Lecturing Skills in English”, worked to provide tools, linguistic strategies and intercultural competence for meeting the challenges of lecturing in the international classroom.

When asked about how her knowledge of the Danish language has provided an advantage in designing this course Stacey notes, *“Maybe you do need to have the [Danish] language to be able to address the lecturers’ needs, but you definitely need to have the culture. You need to have an awareness of how Danes behave in the classroom regarding the unwritten rules of exchange and behavior between the teachers and the students. This also goes for activities such as group work and exam situations...those are extremely culturally bound.”* Stacey added that, *“I couldn’t be involved in these initiatives that are trying to address the cultural, pedagogical and linguistic needs in the classroom without having Danish as a language.”*

On the other hand, there are certain disadvantages to having such a strong command of Danish as a foreign language in Stacey’s job. She simply states that, *“It affects my English. Language attrition has affected my English in a way where it is not necessarily deteriorating, but it is changing. For example when I read scholarly articles or am correcting English, sometimes I have to take a second look to make sure that it is acceptable, and not just the Danish way of writing in English, which no longer stands out as much as a ‘mistake’.”*

Final Thoughts

Based on our conversation thus far, ‘Language at Work’ had the following question for Stacey Cozart, *“Since your job focuses on providing services for Danish and foreign academics and employees in English, is there a motivation for them to take up the challenge of learning Danish, as you have done?”*

Stacey answered, *“I think it is a relevant problem for them because they don’t know if they should invest the time in this particular language. ‘Is it really worth it?’, so to speak. I think it would be more motivating to learn Danish if it were a larger world language such as Spanish or Chinese, but the fact that Danish is only spoken by 5.5 million people*

makes this decision to learn more difficult, if you don't know that you are going to stay in Denmark. However by learning the language as quickly as possible, foreign employees will be much better able to understand Danish culture and to interact in a richer way with their colleagues and friends."

Upon a final reflection about the value of learning and using a foreign language in a professional setting, Stacey noted the following, *"These days the international workplace is characterized by having many different cultures, and if you want to be successful you have to be able to negotiate all of the misunderstandings that will inevitably arise when you're working with many different cultures. **Language is one way to do that. When you learn language, you learn culture.**"*

- Interviewed and written by Michael Lambarena; 2011.

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