ESSAYS ON TRANSLATION: FORLAG ARNOLD BUSK, COPENHAGEN 1988, (144 pages).

1. Introductory

In a previous article of mine (PEDERSEN 1979b) it was argued that translation helps to create its own medium, i.e. that contact with SL concepts, words, and constructions forces the translator to modify TL (Target language) in order to get the message across. To further substantiate this contention, I propose to look at the way in which languages influence each other within the language services of the EEC, and in particular to examine the impact of English, French, and German on Danish.

EEC translations seem particularly interesting because it is obvious that at the moment a specific EEC dialect or jargon is developing which cuts across language barriers. The reason Danish has been chosen as TL is simple: as, for obvious reasons, more texts are translated into Danish than vice versa, this language seems less likely to influence than to be influenced, and more likely than more extensively used languages to be exposed to heavy foreign influence.

2. Background for the Translations

The translation services of the EEC work in principle into and out of all the official languages. Translations are executed by civil servants, normally possessing a degree or diploma in modern languages besides, in some cases, professional training in translation. These people always translate into their native language, and usually work from two or more source languages. Normally, translations are revised by experienced senior translators, the so-called "language revisers". This system, of course, is intended to ensure uniformly high quality. However, a number of factors work against quality, notably:

2.1. LACK OF TIME. Translations often have to be carried out at very short notice. In the case of longer texts this often entails the further disadvantage of the texts being divided between a number of translators, whose efforts the revisers are often given very little time to coordinate.

2.2. USE OF FREE LANCE TRANSLATORS, also working to a tight time schedule, often in isolation, without access to sufficient documentation.

2.3. THE NATURE OF THE TEXTS, which are often highly technical. Normally translators are not experts in the subjects dealt with, as they have to cover a very wide range of texts.

2.4. THE POOR QUALITY OF THE SOURCE TEXTS, often produced in a hurry by people of limited linguistic ability.

2.5. THE QUALITY OF INDIVIDUAL TRANSLATORS, which, not surprisingly, varies considerably, irrespective of their formal qualifications.
3. Methodological Problems
In the normal translation situation there is a SL text, conceived and produced by a native SL (Source Language) writer. Within the context of modern international trade, politics and administration, however, a text often represents the outcome of deliberations in which people speaking a variety of languages (and frequently speaking them badly) have taken part. Usually a document will be drafted in a certain language - within the EEC frequently French, which still seems to be rather more "equal" than the other official languages - but the person performing this operation need not necessarily himself be a native speaker of that language. The mixing of languages, then, will frequently have begun already before the completion of the SL text.

For the translation critic there is the further problem that finished EEC documents exist in seven parallel versions, none of which can be said with certainty to be the original document, as it is normally impossible to ascertain which language(s) it was drafted in.

4. Material
Partly for the above reason, a large part of my material consists of reports of parliamentary debates, which have the advantage of having easily identifiable source languages (but also of course, the disadvantage of being reported and edited speech rather than original writing). In addition, some reports and a compilation of terminology have been examined.

The texts examined comprise the English, French and German contributions for two days (10th and 11th February 1981), roughly 200 pages in the Official Journal of the European Communities. References are to page and column of the Danish edition, as the pagination of the various editions is unfortunately not identical.

5. General Remarks on the Texts
The quality of the translations is by and large fair, and my initial hypothesis of a high degree of interference has not been borne out. Quality varies, of course, from one translator to another - frequently it becomes obvious in mid-column that a new translator has taken over - and generally speaking the quality of the translations from the French seems to be inferior to that of the translations from the English and German. ²

² That Danes seem to find French more difficult than English and German is confirmed by the authors of the feature article of the Copenhagen daily "Politiken" for the 12th of July 1982, who on comparing 4 different versions of the same Danish text, found that the French was worse than the English and German, and about as bad as the Spanish.
The translations are generally fairly free as far as details and rhetorical flourishes are concerned. The following example of 3 translations, none of which correspond exactly to the German original, is typical, also in that the sentence in question is relatively unimportant - factual details and important statements of policy are rendered with much greater exactness:

Ich weiss, dass das auch im Sinne der anderen Fraktionen ware

Jeg er sikker på, at dette også er i stil med de andre gruppens ønsker - 116.1

I think this would also suit the other groups

Je sais que ceci serait également souhaité par d'autres groupes

The fact that translations often differ from the original more than is strictly necessary raises the problem of criteria for correctness or (degree of) exactitude of equivalence (Cf. PEDersen 1975). In texts such as those under consideration here there are, of course, virtually none of the completely random errors one finds in the work of translators who are clearly unqualified in SL. However, many, though by no means all, the instances of less than perfect equivalence do have this in common with palpable translation errors that the language of the translation deviates from normal TL owing to interference\(^3\) from the SL text.

A very gross example which anyone will recognize as "incorrect" Danish will illustrate this:

...dette abortproblem, at man har anført så meget, at jeg ser mig ude af stand til - 120.1 < cette question de l'avortement qu'on a déjà tant évoquée que je me vois...

(French que = Danish at, and Danish som which would have been the correct solution; of course attraction to the 2nd "at" of the Danish is also a possible source of error).

But really, from the point of view of interference there is little difference between the above and examples such as

...midler til fordel for beskyttelse af det spirende liv - 118.1 < mesures en faveur de la protection de la vie naissance-

...man kun har taget små briller på - 118.2 < l'on ait pris le petit bout de la lorgnette

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3. For the concept of interference, cf. WEINREICH (1953), who defines "interference phenomena" as "those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language" (1953: 1).
which are examples of unidiomatic, but hardly "incorrect" Danish.

In the following I shall concentrate on aspects of interference or stimulated linguistic change which seem to me to touch on the TL system, i.e. changes in grammar, idiom, and vocabulary, which are not unique occurrences but seem to point towards a permanent modification of the TL system. It is far from easy to structure this material; but I have chosen to deal with the above aspects one by one, moving under each of the main headings from the more to the less important.

6. Grammar

6.1. General remarks on syntax

Generally speaking, the construction of periods and paragraphs is often surprisingly bad, not only in the translations - though obviously repeated transformations of a text do not tend to make it look prettier:

Europa-Parlamentet, der henviser ...
1. bifalder ...
2. mener ...
3. beklager, at harmoniseringen af nettene, den fælles fastlæggelse af tilslutningsnormerne, grænseflader og udstyr, som først og fremmest berøres af det internationale samarbejde, ikke på et tidligere tidspunkt har været gjort til genstand for en mere energisk og beslutsom aktion fra De europæiske Fællesskaber, hvis medlemsstater udgør flertallet af medlemsmerne af CEPT ..., der fortsat er den rette ramme til at opnå den størst mulige harmonisering af nettene;

(Dokument 1-138/81 af 27/4-81, p.5)

(tthere are 28 further points)

Frequently, however, it is the source text that is diseased - there is no other word for it:

"COMMENTING ON THE PART DEALING WITH APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY AND ADJUSTMENT OF PROJECTS TO THE LOCAL CIRCUMSTANCING OF THE COMMISSION REPORT TO THE ACP/ECC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION IN 1980 UNDER THE FIRST LOME CONVENTION, THE ACP NOTED THAT INFRASTRUCTURES AND EQUIPMENT FINANCED BY THE COMMUNITY ARE NOT ALWAYS ADAPTED TO LOCAL CONDITIONS, PARTICULARLY IN THE SOCIAL SPHERE. THE COMMUNITY IN ITS REPLY STATED THAT IT SHARES THE VIEW OF THE ACP STATES ABOUT THE USEFULNESS OF USING APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY AND ADJUSTING PROJECTS TO LOCAL NEEDS AND CONDITIONS SINCE PROJECTS APPLIED FOR WERE OFTEN (sic) OUT OF SCALE WITH BOTH NEEDS AND MAINTENANCE CAPACITY AND ULTRA-SOPHISTICATED EQUIPMENT WAS INCONSISTENT WITH CUSTOMS AND LIFESTYLES".

(from a telexed amendment to a report)

It is as if the writer of the SL text does not quite know what to say, and the translator, out of a mistaken sense of loyalty to
the hopeless form of the original, tends to make matters even worse.

6.2. Specific grammatical problems

6.2.1. In English, the word-order is the same for subordinate as for main clauses, whereas in Danish the position of adverbials is different: "Han gjorde det ikke (SVO)/ Han spurgte, om han ikke skulle gøre det" (SAVO). However, in nominal that-clauses one may find the word-order of main clauses (STELLER and SøRENSEN 1966: §231). Consequently, one cannot claim that an example such as

jeg vil gerne gøre det klart, at et eksamensbevis er ikke et pas som giver et job - 206.1. < we must realize that a diploma is not a passport to a job

is unacceptable; but certainly, such examples indicate that a relatively rare Danish construction is gaining ground owing to English influence.

6.2.2. Danish favours demonstrative + noun when followed by a restrictive relative clause, rather than noun + enclitic article + relative: "den mand, jeg så" rather than "manden, jeg så". However, in my material there are several examples of the latter construction. As similar examples do occur in original Danish texts it is impossible to say to what extent their occurrence in translation is determined by the form of the SL utterance; but it is obvious that influence from other languages, notably English and French, is at the moment helping this construction to spread:

alle punkterne i dette program, som... 127.2 < tous les points que...

vi værdsætter ånden, i hvilken... 139.1 < nous apprécions l'esprit dans lequel...

6.2.3. Number: There are several examples of plural abstracts which in normal Danish would be in the singular:

3. Cf. DIDERICHSEN (1962: §82 tillæg 1) and MIKKELSEN (1911: 192), Åge HANSEN (1927: 119) seems more doubtful as to the preferability of the demonstrative, but Poul LEVIN, lektor in Danish language at Copenhagen University, to whom I owe this information, supports DIDERICHSEN and MIKKELSEN.

4. SøRENSEN (1973: §90) discusses this question, and I agree with his contention that "If ... a Danish construction deviates from normal usage, and at the same time is close to an English construction, it seems reasonable to assume English influence, even if there is no absolute proof ..." (my translation). It seems even more reasonable to add that the presence of SL models for Danish constructions, as in most of my examples, comes very close to constituting a positive proof of SL influence.
...forstået af alle dem, der har fulgt vore arbejder - 124.2 < compris par tout ceux et toutes celles qui ont suivi nos travaux.

...påtage dem nogle ansvar - 147.1 < prendre des responsabilités.

In English, plural pronouns are used to refer to collective nouns if the individual members of the collective are in focus. (Cf. STELLER and SØRENSEN (1966: §409) and SØRENSEN (1973: §99): "The government said they were opposed to this". This type is now gaining ground in Danish:

...vil Kommissionen vide, at De (sic) har vor fulde støtte - 206.2 < the Commission will know that they have our full support.

It must be admitted, however, that this form is also found without any direct SL source, probably because at this point Danish is already changing under the influence of English:

Kommissionen bør overveje ... de forslag, vi har forelagt for dem - 221.2 < die ihr von uns vorgelegten Vorschläge.

The use of a singular Danish noun where a plural one might have been expected is apparently rarer, but there is one good example:

en øget bestræbelse - 176 (cf. French "un effort accru" and English "an increased investment effort").

6.2.4. Tense: The tense systems of the languages under consideration are fairly similar, so it is not surprising that in most cases this category has been adequately translated. Still, there are a few examples of direct transfer of SL tenses, as of the English preterite where Danish requires the perfect:

som Thucydid engang sagde - 206.2 < as Thucydides once said.

6.2.5. In some cases Danish verbs which require an indirect as well as a direct object have been construed without the dative, following the SL pattern:

...hvilket ville påtvinge en bestemt adfærd - 137.2 < qui imposerait des comportements ...

6.2.6. In English, two main clauses are often combined by means of and to indicate a conditional relationship: Push the button, and the door will open. Although this construction is found in older Danish texts, notably in Biblical language, there is hardly any doubt that its increased employment in modern Danish is due to English6 and, as in the following example, to French influence:

...This construction is very frequent in the language of advertising, as noted by Erik HANSEN (1973: 53-54), which is hardly surprising, as Danish advertising is to a large extent modelled on English, and particularly, American advertising, and as advertisements are one of the main channels for the importation of loans from English, cf. (1973: 18-20).
Bestem politikken i fællesskab, og De får midlerne ... -
147.1 < Décidez des politiques en commun, et vous aurez ...
les moyens ...

6.2.7. Prepositions: There are several cases of unorthodox Danish
prepositional phrases. However, many of these are not due to di-
rect SL influence, but probably to the translation situation as
such: being preoccupied with problems of terminology and syntax,
the translator slips up, and writes, e.g.:

Det andet aspekt i (for "af") dette problem - 205.2
or
et antal, der var proportionalt til (for "med") antallet ...
106.2

An example like the following seems due to a combination of fac-
tors but particularly to the obligatory use in EEC Danish of the
preposition "af" in the sense of "prepared by" (about reports, etc.):

...vi har hørt om de forslag, der blev vedtaget ... sidste år
fra betænkningen af et særdeles velanskrevet medlem af Fæl-
lesskabet ... 205.1

The only example of the meaning of a Danish preposition being in-
fluenced by SL is in the case of "over":

... det arbejde, Kommissionen vil udføre over de kommende fi-
re år ... 220.2 < über die nächsten vier Jahre

These are the most important points of grammatical influence on
Danish in my material. The scope and depth of the influence which
has been demonstrated may not seem impressive. It should be borne
in mind, however, that the grammar is the most firmly established
part of a language, and that change is normally very slow. Ag
against this background I would rather emphasize the fact that
influence is exerted than wonder at its limited scope.

7. Cf. SØRENSEN (1973: §123 and 146), the last of which demon-
strates cases of direct English influence on Danish via trans-
lations. SØRENSEN has no exact parallel to the sense of over
illustrated here, but one that comes close:
vi er det bedste hold over 42 kampe (1973: 91).
Neither Nudansk Ordbog (1982) nor Ordbog over det danske Sprog
registers this usage, though again there is a near-parallel in
the latter dictionary, over 12.1:
Arbejdet... har... været forfult over et kvart århundrede
where the Danish preposition gennem would have been a more na-
tural choice; cf.
also
"den udvikling vi har set over en længere periode"
(Danish TV, 11/11-82, registered by Jens Rasmussen.
7. Idiom
Generally speaking, mistakes at this level are due to insufficient change in the course of the translation process of the SL morphemic strings. Often a better result could have been obtained if the translator had moved from one word-class to another (cf. JURGENSEN 1967):

...ikke for at smigre, men fordi det er sandheden - 218.1
<...la vérité

(where "fordi det er sandt" is the idiomatic phrase).

Images and metaphors are often transferred verbatim, even if there are Danish near-equivalents. This is not necessarily a bad thing, and indeed it is a process which has been going on in Europe since classical times. But it does make for further modification of TL:

en dialog mellem døve - 206.2 < a dialogue of the deaf
...holdt det [c: Europa] over døbefonten - 131.2 < qui l'ont porté sur les fonds baptismaux (Da: holdt over dåben).

What is reprehensible, however, is the transfer of clumsy or often near-meaningless constructions, usually rich in abstracts, and the creation of unidiomatic, SL-inspired collocations:

...styrke Europas cementering - 210.2 < renforce le ciment de l'Europe.

erobre de friheder, der står i forhold til vor tid - 217.1 < aideraient à la conquête des libertés à la mesure de notre temps.

...for at omdanne disse gode hensigter henimod lighed - 121.1 < pour transformer ces bonnes intentions vers l'égalité.

...angribes af et par lette pile - 126.1 < se laisser entamer par certaines flèches faciles

and last, but not least, a proposed amendment, the original of which I have not been able to locate:

...opfordrer regeringerne til at overveje særlige indgrib vedrørende...udvikling af facilitet (sic) for børn også med lang åbningstid - 109.1

Examples such as "bemærkelsesværdige ideer" - 203.2 < "bemerkenswerte Ideen", and "ugunstige bemærkninger" - 205.1 < "unfa-vourable remarks" are slightly different, in that the Danish collocations are unusual, but hardly unacceptable. Regarded in isolation, such examples are negligible. But as there are very many examples of this type, it is hardly going too far to suggest that in the long run the collocational norms of Danish may be affected by the steady importation, in translated texts, of such combinations.
There is a general tendency towards nominal style, even in speeches, and abstractions abound, as illustrated above. Here is one more example:

...visheden om udtømmelsen af vore egne ressourcer - 139.2 < la certitude de l'épuisement des ressources propres.

The most exasperating feature of bad EEC language, however, is the combination of grandiloquence with paucity of information content. The French original of the following is clearer than the translation; but there is no more actual content in it:

På et mere generelt plan beklager jeg også, som jeg sagde i går, at den samlede tilnærmelse til denne betænkning efter min opfattelse har været utilstrækkelig i forhold til et af de vigtigste problemer, som ikke kun vi, men alle generationer i vore lande, er stillet over for. Problemet med kvindens stilling i vort samfund er et problem, der til stadighed vil være af væsentlig betydning, og jeg beklager, at man kun har taget små briller på og ikke har anvendt en stor projektør til at beskæftige sig med spørgsmålet om kvindens stilling i Fællesskabet. - 118.2.

Not surprisingly, the most prominent stylistic vice is that of pleonasm:

Forslagene i denne beslutning gennemføres i praksis - 116.1, cf. les propositions ...soient réellement mises en oeuvre.

et vækstpotentiel for fremtiden - 176, cf. ein Wachstumpotential für die Zukunft.

8. Vocabulary

The contribution to the vocabulary of Danish from the EEC institutions can be roughly divided into six categories, which are not mutually exclusive, and of which 5 and 6 are probably parole rather than langue phenomena:

8.1. The name of EEC institutions, which presumably have entered the Danish language to stay, such as Euratom, De europæiske Fællesskaber, Den europæiske Udviklingsfond, etc. Several of these seem to hover on the brink between common and proper noun, as in the following examples, where the noun is capitalized and yet construed with a demonstrative pronoun:

...alle kvinder i dette Parlament - 125.2
...alle Forsamlings ønsker - 115.2

8.2. Acronyms most of these also the names of institutions, such as EF (or EØF), GATT, COREPER, STABEX, etc. Several of these are French or sometimes English acronyms, taken over by Danish without change:
CEPT < Conférence européenne des Administrations des Postes et des Télécommunications

GATT < General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

8.3. More or less established Danish words or phrases which have acquired a new or more closely defined meaning:
Fællesskaberne, Kommissionen, akt, aktion, charter, dokumentation, egne indtægter, flyttetilskud, etc.

8.4. Loanwords and especially loan translations, the latter often rather like the German, which resembles Danish in allowing heavy compounds:

enhedsmarkedsstadium, fælleskabsretlig, globalkontingenter (cf. Globalkontingente), præferencemarginer (cf. Præferenzmargen), regningsenheder (cf. Rechnungseinheiten), etc.

8.5. Jargon words and clichés, often established words in new combinations or with new meanings (or no very clear meaning). Many of them are atrocious, but on the other hand they are hardly more than marginal phenomena, in that - as yet - they have not penetrated into the standard language: "aspekt", "dimension", "exceptionel", all three of high frequency, "struktural status", "på kort og mellemlang sigt", "det er normalt, at" < "c'est normal que", "civile strukturer" ("struktur" is a favourite, too, especially in the plural), "kollega" and "ven" in the sense of "fellow politician", etc.

8.6. Mistranslations proper, of which as stated above there are not many, and which I only consider interesting if they seem likely to lead to permanent modification of the vocabulary of Danish. Hence an example such as

...min nordiske ven-149.1 < my friend from Northern Ireland

is a mere curiosity, although there is more than one example of this particular mistranslation (or misprint?). But examples like

...den samlede tilnærmelse til denne betænkning - 118.2 < l'approche globale de ce rapport

and

...af relevans for de to parter (=begge) - 134.2 < intéressant les deux parties

to which there are also parallels, might conceivably be indications of real linguistic change, although most Danes would still regard them as incorrect.

9. Conclusion
It has not been my intention to cover the whole area of EEC Danish, which of course would require more documentation and a much fuller treatment. I have merely wanted to show how Danish is de-
veloping through its contact with the other EEC languages - and I do mean that Danish "langue" is changing, as many of the words and constructions found in my material are also beginning to appear in Danish newspapers, far from Bruxelles and Luxembourg.

I also thing that my material, limited as it is, does support my contention that languages in contact influence each other in such a way that translation which may have been difficult or impossi-ble at the outset becomes increasingly easy with time.

This in itself is no bad thing, and there is no doubt that the simultaneous treatment within the EEC of the same subjects in se-veral languages makes for an easier and more rapid exchange of ideas between the nations involved. However, I also believe that the cliché-factories of the EEC, and indeed of other large inter-national bureaucracies, pose a threat to the languages they so frequently misuse.

The kind of clotted, abstract non-prose instanced in the above certainly seems to be spreading from the lips and typewriters of bureaucrats and politicians, seriously threatening the linguistic environment as a whole with pollution.
But that is another story.

Primary texts (for other works consulted, see bibliography)
De europæiske Fællesskabers Tidende, nr. 1-266 (9.13. Febru-ry 1981), plus the corresponding English, French and German versions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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